

Foundation



Remembrance
Responsibility
Future



EVZ Dossier

Responsibility and Care:
The EVZ Foundation's Commitment
to Survivors of NS Injustice

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1. For the Survivors of National Socialism: The Mission of the EVZ Foundation

The EVZ Foundation has been funding projects to support survivors of National Socialist persecution since 2001. It is committed to living memory and the critical examination of National Socialism, and to the equal dignity and rights of all people. The commitment to survivors, especially in Central and Eastern Europe, Israel and Germany, is the focus of our activities. Since 2013, 40% of the funding (around EUR 3 million annually) has been used to support survivors of National Socialism and their descendants, in addition to donations and estates. The EVZ Foundation has financed a total of **EUR 51.6 million for 1,179 projects** benefiting survivors in 12 countries.

Over the past 20 years, the Foundation has regularly modified its funding strategy in order to respond flexibly to the needs of the survivors, to socio-political situations and current challenges. The goals – updated and specified in the [Agenda for the future](#) since 2021 – have been the guiding principles for action: The EVZ Foundation's funding goals are designed to ensure that survivors of National Socialist persecution can age in a psychologically, physically and socially stable manner in dignity. The Foundation wants to protect them from loneliness and honor their biographies and life achievements. It also supports the structural and capacity-building of civil society organizations that are dedicated to the care, assistance, and support of survivors in a committed, sensitive and contemporary manner.

The dossier highlights the Foundation's commitment to survivors of National Socialism over a period of more than two decades – from 2001 to 2022. These were decades full of insights and learning experiences from the biographies of survivors and their descendants: about the dimension of NS forced labor and the German war of extermination, about the health and social structures in the funding regions, about the "Holocaust by bullets" (executions of Jewish men and women and Roma in the occupied territories), the persecution of now "forgotten" groups of victims and the different perspectives on the history of World War II in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe.

Commitment has repeatedly been marked by political upheavals – which are currently intensifying on an unprecedented scale. Examples include the ongoing Middle East conflict, which threatens the safety of Shoah survivors in Israel; the increasing restrictions on civil society action in Russia (cf. Fischer, Sabine/Siegert, Jens, 2021) and Belarus (Chulitskaya, Tatsiana, 2021); the suppression of the democratic awakening in Belarus and, last but not least, the Covid-19 pandemic, which has continued since 2020. The war in eastern Ukraine, fomented though undeclared by Russia in 2014, was extended to the whole of Ukraine on February 24, 2022: tens of thousands of people were killed, houses destroyed, swaths of land devastated and more than seven million people displaced out of the country (update of September 13, 22 cf. [UNHCR](#)). Survivors of National Socialism were once again caught up in the horrors of a war and (re)traumatized.

In light of all these challenges, our project partners – non-profit associations, social welfare centers, volunteer associations – have stood by the elderly survivors of National Socialist persecution with courage, creativity, and energy. Many of the survivors of National Socialism themselves are also still committed to their fellow human beings and to creating a better world.

2. Survivors of National Socialist Persecution – People with Life-shaping Experiences

2.1. Forced and Slave Laborers

More than 26 million men, women, and children from almost all European countries were forced to work for Nationalist Socialist Germany between 1939 and 1945. They were exploited in armaments factories, on construction sites, in agriculture or in crafts and private households in the German Reich and the German-occupied territories. Their slave and forced labor ensured the living standards of the Germans during the war and was an essential cornerstone of the German war economy. They were tortured, humiliated, mistreated, and deprived of their human dignity. Since the slave labor that concentration camp prisoners were

forced to perform was also a form of systematic extermination, most of them did not live to see the end of the war (cf. Spoerer 2005; Wagner 2010: 180 et seq. and Niethammer 2007:13 et seq.).

2.2. Individual Benefits to Survivors (2002 to 2006)

Only some of these people were still alive in 2000, willing, and able to apply to the EVZ Foundation for a humanitarian payment. The EVZ Foundation had reached a total of 1.665 million survivors of slave and forced labor under the National Socialist regime in 98 countries by 2006 and paid out close to EUR 4.4 billion to them. The number of applications for individual forced labor benefits was significantly higher at 2.316 million. But survivors of other groups of victims, such as the more than 4.6 million prisoners of war and Italian military internees, who were also used for forced labor, were not eligible for individual payments.



© BULTIN/Administrators
Professor Felix Kolmer in 2010

For me and for the victims' associations, the major achievement of the EVZ Foundation is that forced laborers finally received public recognition and attention in Germany and in their home countries.

Felix Kolmer (1922–2022), Physicist, concentration camp survivor and Executive Vice-president of the International Auschwitz Committee

2.3. Project-based Commitment to Survivors

Project funding for the support of survivors was provided without the proof required for the individual payments. In particular, those who had received a payment, i.e. former concentration camp prisoners and forced laborers, were invited to participate. Many of the former “Eastern workers” from the successor states of the Soviet Union acknowledged their fate of persecution for the first time in the early 1990s, as they had been stigmatized and discriminated against as traitors to the homeland for decades.

The EVZ Foundation also opened its project funding to other survivors who were not entitled to payments: In addition to the survivors of the concentration camps and ghettos, Jewish men and women or Roma who survived the Holocaust in hiding or due to evacuation in the Soviet hinterland, former Soviet prisoners of war or survivors of the Siege of Leningrad were also able to participate in the projects. Over the years, we have included other “forgotten groups of victims” in the projects, such as the survivors of the Wehrmacht retaliation in Eastern Europe (survivors of the “burned villages”) or the children stolen for forced Germanization (cf. Heinemann, Isabel 2022). All these people had experienced cruel persecution at a young age, and they had a variety of life experiences after liberation: they rebuilt their war-ravaged countries, completed apprenticeships, practiced professions and founded families.

2.4. After the Payments: How have Survivors Fared Since?

In addition to the usual age-related restrictions and illnesses, many survivors also suffer from the physical and psychological consequences of imprisonment, hunger, forced labor and torture. Their social network is shrinking and social or cultural activities are not possible or only possible with support. Others live alone and need help to cope with their daily lives in old age. Many have only begun to talk about their experiences in old age, others remain silent to this day. Traumatic memories continue to have an effect into their old age and often present relatives and caregivers with major challenges in dealing with them (ZWST 2014). In Central and Eastern Europe in particular, the survivors

of National Socialist persecution often lacked and still lack the means for medication and services. Many people end their lives in great poverty.

Here too, on our doorstep, in Germany there are victims of National Socialism who suffer material hardship, as we see, for example, in the case of the Russian contingent refugees or in the area of Sinti/Roma. There, some of the victims of National Socialist persecution depend on social benefits and receive only basic welfare. That is real hardship.

Interview with Jost Rebentisch, Managing Director of the Bundesverband Information und Beratung für NS-Verfolgte (Federal Association for Information & Counseling for Survivors of National Socialist Persecution) in: EVZ Foundation, 2015, pp. 66–67 (see also [Information of the ZWST](#)).

In our work, however, it is important for us to view these people not only as “victims,” but as personalities with a wealth of skills, knowledge, and resources. Numerous survivors of National Socialism are still committed to their fellow human beings in their old age. They manage associations, publish memoirs, and campaign for better social benefits. (cf. Erdmann-Kutnevic, 2010, p. 65). They support each other in self-help groups and visiting services, organize cultural and sports events, and pass on their wealth of experience to subsequent generations – be it in cooking courses or in historical eyewitness theaters.

From the outset, the EVZ Foundation therefore also supported exchanges with young people. The overall goal, however, was to improve the physical and mental health of the survivors and to alleviate their loneliness. But this could not be achieved with money alone. The EVZ Foundation needed dedicated people to implement their good ideas on site – we looked for them – and found them.



Anastasija Gulej at the award ceremony of the Order of Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany in July 2020 in Kyiv © Deutsche Botschaft Kyiv

But what can I do? Shall I drown my sorrows in alcohol? Shall I lie down and do nothing more? You have to go on living. That is the resistance. That is my task now: to live on.

The survivor Anastasija Gulej in: Waltraud Schwab (2022)

3. The EVZ Project Partners – Joint Commitment to Survivors

3.1. Different Conditions, One Goal: Project Sponsors in the Focus Countries

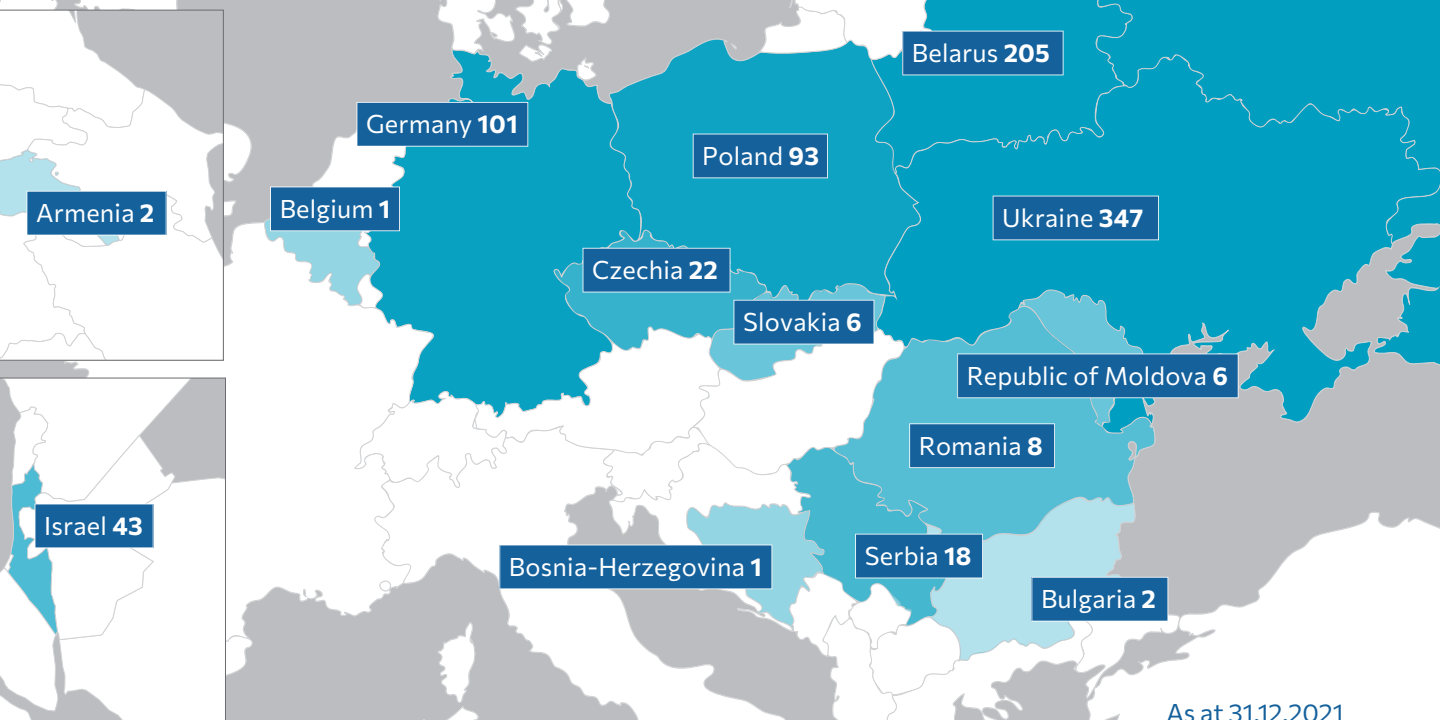
When looking at the organizations that have been funded, it is necessary to consider the different political and historical prerequisites for civil society commitment by and for survivors of National Socialist persecution in the funding regions:

In **Germany**, the country of the perpetrators, international Jewish organizations – such as the Joint Distribution Committee ([JDC](#)) – initially supported the survivors of the Shoah who had been liberated from the concentration camps after the end of the war. Survivors

then refounded the Central Welfare Board of Jews in Germany ([ZWST](#)) in 1951 to continue this important work. Also since the 1950s, Christian initiatives such as Action Reconciliation Service for Peace ([ASF](#)) have been committed to reconciliation with the victims of National Socialism. In the GDR, the Association of Persecutees of the Nazi Regime/Federation of Antifascists ([VVN-BdA](#)), founded as early as 1947, enjoyed a high level of recognition and state funding. Since the 1980s, communal partnerships have been established in the Federal Republic of Germany, which invited former NS forced laborers or Shoah survivors to encounters and historical eyewitness interviews at the place of their persecution (Kräutler, Anja: 2004). At the end of the 1980s, representatives of associations of people persecuted by the National Socialist regime, Pax Christi and Action Reconciliation Service for Peace established

Overview of the number of projects for survivors of NS injustice funded by country to date

- International projects (bilateral, trilateral): 27
- Operational projects – Accompaniment, development, networking: 53



As at 31.12.2021

a counseling center, from which the Bundesverband Information & Beratung für NS-Verfolgte e.V. (Federal Association for Information & Counseling for Survivors of National Socialist Persecution) (NS-Beratung.de) emerged in 1992. The association informs and supports survivors of National Socialist persecution in matters of reparation and has been organizing social projects for survivors for about 15 years. Psychosocial support for Shoah survivors is well organized in Germany thanks to the commitment of the Jewish communities and the ZWST, which had to adapt to a new clientele due to the immigration of Jewish contingent refugees in the 1990s. The Central Council of German Sinti and Roma is active on behalf of survivors of the genocide against Sinti and Roma. Targeted civic commitment to other survivors is more sporadic – e.g. in the Hamburg association “Psychosoziale Arbeit mit Verfolgten” (Psychosocial Work with Persecuted Persons) (psychosoz-arbeit.org).

I had great respect for meeting these people. In the back of my mind was the thought of what a bizarre situation it actually is that I as a German visit former forced laborers, and how they probably feel about it. When I went alone, I realized that I was simply meeting people as people, my nationality, or their fate were not central. (...)

(Eva Kell, volunteer of Action Reconciliation Service for Peace at Živá paměť in Ostrava, Czech Republic: in EVZ Foundation 2016, p. 69).

In **Israel**, the Shoah survivors have been widely recognized by society since the 1980s. It is the state's goal to enable them to live in dignity (cf. Wiener, Stuart, 2022). Since 1987, the psychosocial services offered by the [AMCHA](#) have provided support, social participation and psychological and voluntary assistance to survivors, who are often severely traumatized. Survivors such as the therapist Giselle Cychowicz are also still involved with AMCHA in their old age.

Giselle Cychowicz wants to be a witness until the end and to make this possible for her fellow sufferers. “The world should learn about this and patients should feel that the world is interested in them.”

(cf. Adler, Sabine, 2017).

The [Foundation for the Welfare of Holocaust Victims](#) organizes care services and arranges volunteers throughout Israel, while [Aviv for Holocaust Survivors](#) provides access to compensation payments through legal consultations. Many of the survivors who have immigrated from post-Soviet countries since the 1990s are particularly dependent on this support, since the compensation payments of the Federal Republic of Germany each take into account certain groups of people in each case ([Benefits of the Federal Ministry of Finance](#)).

In the Central Eastern European countries of **Poland and the Czech Republic**, survivors of National Socialist persecution, including the fighters of the Polish underground army, are recognized by the state and enjoy a high standing in society. In the Czech Republic, the organization [Živá paměť](#) represents the interests of the survivors throughout the country, organizing encounters, home visits by volunteers, concerts and commemorative events. In Poland, the [Foundation for Polish-German Reconciliation](#) plays a similar role. It has already cooperated with the EVZ Foundation in making payments to former forced laborers, and has since steadily expanded its commitment to the remembrance and support of the survivors. Associations and social organizations in the regions work for the interests of the survivors.

In **Belarus, Russia, and Ukraine**, Jewish communities re-emerged after the end of the Soviet Union in the 1990s. With international help, they founded cultural associations and welfare centers whose professional social work and care services for Shoah survivors are considered exemplary in Eastern Europe.

The formerly underage NS forced laborers in Eastern Europe also established their own associations from 1988 onwards, which stood up for the interests of their members. They cooperated closely with the state foundations “Verständigung und Aussöhnung” (Understanding and Reconciliation), which were founded in the 1990s, and later with their successor organizations, e.g. the Ukrainian Foundation Mutual Understanding and Tolerance. However, the survivors’ associations – in contrast to the associations of veterans of the “Great Patriotic War” – could count on state support only sporadically before commemoration days or elections. The survivors of National Socialist persecution were rarely known to other organizations, the only exception being the international human rights organization Memorial, which was also active on behalf of former “Eastern workers” (see also Irina Scherbakowa, 2019). Over the years, many of the above-mentioned organizations have become important partners of the EVZ Foundation in its commitment to the survivors. However, these relations first had to be established, trust had to grow, and cooperation had to be developed.

3.2 Structure and Development: the First Funding Decade (2001 to 2010)

Initially, in 2001, the EVZ Foundation funded strong organizations from Germany and Israel, which looked back on many years of experience in supporting survivors of National Socialism and were able to implement projects quickly. These were, for example, the organization AMCHA in Israel or reconciliation initiatives such as the Maximilian-Kolbe-Werk. Additional projects were identified that provided psychosocial and medical support for victims of National Socialism from 2002 onward.

National reconciliation foundations in Central and Eastern Europe, which had good access to survivors, realized stays at a health resort or pharmacies for survivors. From the early days, however, the EVZ Foundation also wanted to provide funding to smaller associations from Germany, Israel, and Central and Eastern Europe: the pioneers were the regional “Association of former minor NS prisoners” in Dnipropetrovsk (now Dnipro) in Ukraine and the branch “Dolja” of the Bela-

rusian prisoners’ association. Town twinning or other international partnerships – for example, the Partnerverein Wolgograd Köln (Partner association Volgograd Cologne) – organized visiting services and encounters. Welfare organizations such as the Russian Red Cross in Pskov and the Ukrainian Samaritan Federation in Kharkiv offered the survivors encounters, advice, and home care in their social wards.



Leisure activities in Belarus.
© Kyril Prepliaska

By the end of the first funding decade, the funding volume of the EVZ Foundation for projects in favor of survivors of National Socialism had increased from EUR 1 million to over EUR 3 million annually. The EVZ Foundation had established sustainable relationships with project partners: Jewish welfare organizations professionalized the network with their many years of experience in caring for and accompanying Holocaust survivors. The national reconciliation foundations (or their successor organizations) in Belarus, Poland, Russia, the Czech Republic, and Ukraine were committed to “their” former NS forced laborers. However, in view of the growing needs of the elderly and the underfunded social security systems (especially in the successor states of the Soviet Union), the EVZ Foundation asked itself the following questions:

1. How can we motivate and support civil society organizations – especially in Eastern Europe – to become more active on behalf of survivors and provide low-threshold support?
2. How can we help to ensure that the elderly, who have already been cared for in projects, continue to age with dignity?
3. How can we better access the survivors of the genocide against the Roma?
4. Given the immense needs, how can the limited funding be used effectively and sustainably?

3.3 Setting the Course and New Target Groups: The Years 2011 to 2019

The EVZ Foundation addressed these questions and challenges with regionally different funding strategies and tailored services for target groups that are difficult to approach.

The good cooperation with project sponsors from Israel, Poland, the Czech Republic, and Germany has been maintained. They were able to offer the people they support a reliable perspective. They were able to retain staff and volunteers and adapt their services from project to project to meet their needs. The EVZ Foundation gradually identified further projects with similarly impact-oriented formats. These formats also increasingly directed their assistance to child survivors who had survived National Socialist persecution as children (cf. ZWST, 2014). The “Treffpunkte für Überlebende” (Meeting Points for Survivors) organized by the ZWST and AMCHA were also models for a new program in Eastern Europe:

In **Belarus, Russia, and Ukraine**, the EVZ Foundation identified cooperation partners who coordinated the “Dialog Forum” program in their countries and motivated new stakeholders to commit themselves to the former concentration camp prisoners and “Eastern Workers.” With this strategic decision, the EVZ Foundation handed over more responsibility to program sponsors in Kiev, Minsk, and Moscow in order to support more effectively and comprehensively on site. The program sponsors funded low-threshold projects on site, for the first time also in small towns and rural regions. They



Great conversations while drinking a cup of tea are helpful against loneliness © Russian Red Cross Society Pskov

advised the applicants in the national languages and campaigned locally for the interests of the survivors. With further training, they strengthened associations, welfare and volunteer organizations in their country and set up new cooperations. This created nationwide and well-functioning relief networks for the survivors. In close coordination with the colleagues of the respective program sponsors, the Foundation's team gradually developed its funding offer, always oriented towards changing needs and the framework conditions of the respective countries.

The EVZ Foundation provided DM 24 million to the International Organization for Migration (IOM) for **emergency relief projects for the survivors of the genocide against the Roma** between 2001 and 2005 (IOM, 2005). Direct funding for Roma self-organizations, on the other hand, was only achieved in isolated cases. Since 2012, the Foundation has therefore been specifically looking for organizations that support Roma, born before May 1945. These often live in great poverty and without support from state relief structures. Thirteen projects provided material assistance and advice to alleviate their hardship. With the “Latcho Dives” (“Hello” in Romani) program, it was possible to address the Roma self-organizations in a more targeted manner and to strengthen their commitment, to help the survivors directly and to give them access to state services. Between 2016 and 2021, the EVZ Foundation provided approximately EUR 3.24 million for social

projects in Central, Eastern and Southeastern Europe (see also Thematic Dossier “Support for Roma and Sinti and their Self-Organizations & Combating Anti-gypsyism”).

(...) „Latcho Dives“ facilitates the survivors’ twilight years and raises awareness for their situation. It also reinforces the commitment of the local and regional communities. It is therefore desirable that this format be continued by the EVZ Foundation because only with local knowledge can the survivors be reached. Nevertheless, it should be noted that humanitarian assistance cannot replace individual compensation that recognizes the suffering of persecution.

(cf. UKA Report 2021, p. 111).

3.3.1 Renewed Suffering and Humanitarian Tasks: Russia’s Hybrid War Against Ukraine (2014 to 2021)

The elderly survivors in Ukraine were again confronted with war, flight, and violence in 2014. The annexation of the Crimean Peninsula by Russian forces, which was contrary to international law, shook the democratic upheaval of the Ukrainians in March 2014. In the eastern regions of Ukraine, pro-Russian militias backed by Russia proclaimed the so-called “People’s Republics” of Donetsk and Luhansk. Millions of people sought refuge in other areas of the country. Although the regional conflict fueled by Russia was contained by the Minsk agreements in September 2014 and February 2015, the agreed ceasefire agreements were repeatedly violated (cf. OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine).

Many of the survivors in the conflict zone and the separatist areas had no chance to escape. Some of their houses were damaged, others had no access to drinking water, electricity, and heating material. Prices for food and medicine increased dramatically. Many lived in

poverty, fear, and hopelessness. Among the survivors, the war awakened remembrance of the persecution experienced and led to new traumas.

The EVZ project partners reacted quickly, flexibly and courageously to the “humanitarian catastrophe” (Andrij Waskowicz, Head of Caritas Ukraine, in the German Bundestag on June 10, 2015). The Board of Trustees granted additional EUR 465,000 for ten emergency relief projects. Under sometimes high risks for their health, the helpers drove into the war region, distributed food, blankets, and hygiene articles or repaired destroyed homes and water pipes of the survivors. Volunteers took care of refugees who sought refuge in neighboring areas. Employees of four ongoing projects in the separatist areas provided their clients with emergency relief until January 2016, when they had to stop their work, as well as a project in Crimea. The office of an association in Stanica Luhanska was shelled by artillery, all documents and furnishings were destroyed. The commitment to the survivors affected by the war also marked the following years. The EVZ Foundation developed the program “My Porutsch! – We’re Here!”

The sight of the elderly (in the separatist areas) provokes strong emotions. They look terrible, they are emaciated, but their mental confusion is even more frightening. They do not understand what is happening, where they are and in what time they live. Some of them believe that the Great Patriotic War is still going on.

Galina Polyakova, (2015), Director of the NGO “Turbota pro Litnih v Ukraini” stated after her visit to separatist areas: (cf. EVZ Foundation, 2015, p. 61.

At the beginning of our lives there was suffering and now we are experiencing it again.

Project beneficiary from eastern Ukraine, 2015.

3.4 Double Watershed Moments and New Strategy: Foundation Action in Times of Pandemic and War – the Years 2020 to 2022

The Covid-19 pandemic presented the EVZ Foundation and its project partners with unprecedented challenges in all funding countries. While by 2020 it was a core concern of numerous projects to offer social gatherings and recreation activities to the elderly survivors, they were now seated in their homes as part of a high-risk group. Now the relationships built up over many years proved their worth. The helpers accompanied the suddenly isolated elderly people with regular calls, provided psychological support and, if necessary, organized transports to the hospital. They delivered masks, disinfectants, and purchases to the front door and informed about protective measures. It was common for people to be able to reach them around the clock. The program sponsors in Belarus and Russia solicited donations for emergency relief, organized online training courses and networking meetings, and made educational films available online for survivors and relatives. Digital formats were increasingly used for international professional exchange.

The EVZ Foundation provided funding for emergency relief in Ukraine and Russia, which was quickly implemented thanks to the nationwide, well-developed relief networks. In this way, the project partners have succeeded in flexibly adapting their services to constantly changing situations, maintaining contact with the survivors and alleviating their social isolation.

We understood that we are doing tremendous, socially significant work. The elderly need us. That is what we have learned during the pandemic.

(unpublished proof of use to the EVZ Foundation from 2022).

This second year of the Covid-19 epidemic has also been very challenging for our clients and therapists at AMCHA. We continuously had to readjust our activities and adapt them to the restrictions and regulations of the health authorities. This has meant telephone and video meetings, home visits, and sometimes a hybrid mix of several forms. In this way, it has been possible to maintain and ensure constant contact with the vast majority of patients and social club members. An added dimension were the new services of crisis intervention and short-term therapy for people who needed emotional help because of the epidemic. An additional stress factor was a security crisis involving rocket fire and fighting a year ago, which led to a reactivation of trauma.

Dr. Martin Auerbach, Psychotherapist and Clinical Director, AMCHA – National Israeli Center for Psychosocial Support of Survivors of the Holocaust and the Second Generation (EVZ Foundation, Activity Report 2021, p.7).

For the third funding decade in 2021, the EVZ Foundation developed and adopted its strategy, still under pandemic conditions. In digital round-table discussions with partners and experts, with the help of needs analyses and focus groups, the Foundation reviewed its previous work. The fields of activity have been restructured and the [Agenda for the future](#) has been developed, which gives employees and external assistants orientation in

the current decade. We have reviewed, developed and adapted the topics, objectives, methodologies, and formats for the “Support for survivors of National Socialist persecution” cluster. In this context, we explicitly placed the strengthening of the descendants of those persecuted in the programmatic agenda of the Foundation for the first time. However, the commitment to the survivors of National Socialist persecution remains the main focus in the mission statement of the EVZ Foundation.

On the night of February 24, 2022, Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine again profoundly changed the lives of the survivors and the project partners. Again, elderly, often no longer mobile survivors of National Socialist persecution had to fear for their lives. Some managed to escape to the west of the country or to neighboring countries. The Jewish communities helped to evacuate survivors. In Germany, the relief network for survivors of National Socialist persecution in Ukraine, [Hilfsnetzwerk für NS-Verfolgte in der Ukraine](#) the set-up of which was supported by the EVZ Foundation, collects donations that go directly to the former NS forced laborers via volunteers in the country.



Therapy and counseling offerings at the Frankfurt meeting points of the Central Welfare Board of Jews in Germany (ZWST) for Shoah survivors
© Rafael Herlich

Our civil society partners adapted their ongoing projects to the war situation or applied for new emergency relief projects. These projects helped the survivors and their relatives with the essentials: food, medicines, and hygiene products, evacuated them from the war region and often risked their health and lives. This emergency relief was often vital, not only for the Roma self-organizations. Due to the good working relations with the partners in the embattled Ukraine, the EVZ Foundation helped the local people and provide more than EUR 1.57 million for 42 emergency relief projects within seven months.

4 “We’re still alive!” – Raising Awareness for Survivors

Since February 2022, given the severe exceptional situation, the EVZ Foundation has been raising public awareness for the plight of survivors and the wide range of support offered by projects, especially in Ukraine. The colleagues in our funding area and the communications team published these in the media, advised project partners in public relations and provided [Ukraine-Updates](#) for applicants, refugees, foundations, and donors on the website or the Social Media channels of the EVZ Foundation. It is also a fundamental concern to pay tribute to the biographies and messages of the survivors.

Since 2010, it has been a strategic goal of the Foundation to actively acknowledge the life experiences of those persecuted by the National Socialist regime and to draw attention to their social situation. Here are just a few examples of this commitment: Photographer Birgit Meixner portrayed Roma survivors from the Ukraine for the exhibition “Bedrängte Existenz” (Distressed Existence). The traveling exhibition was shown in many cities in Germany and Ukraine between 2012 and 2015.

Director Tanja Cummings accompanies Shoah survivors from Munich who regularly meet in a Munich café in the 2020 film “[Das Zelig](#)”. [Devoted to Life](#) is an exhibition of photos by Helena Schätzle, dedicated to Shoah survivors from Israel and their descendants. From 2013 to 2016, EVZ project partners in Belarus, Russia, and

Ukraine presented the traveling exhibition “... wie das Atmen frischer Luft”, (... like breathing fresh air), for which Lesya Kharchenko interviewed survivors from Eastern Europe with their different stories of persecution.

Responsibility and Care in Various Formats

Over the past 20 years, the EVZ Foundation has commissioned various studies in order to further develop and evaluate its programs. In 2012, for example, the results of the research project “Social Participation and Responsibility Among the Elderly in Eastern Europe” of the Institute of Gerontology at Heidelberg University were presented at conferences in Kiev, Minsk, and Moscow. Researchers from Belarus, Germany, Russia, and Ukraine accompanied and regularly interviewed over 300 participants in the “Dialog Forum” program for two years and surveyed them regularly. The researchers confirmed their assumption that inter-generational contacts and social participation have a positive effect on the life satisfaction of survivors of National Socialist persecution (Schmidt, Eric et al., 2015). At these conferences, the EVZ Foundation promoted responsibility for the well-being of the people who had experienced National Socialist persecution and had rebuilt their country after World War II.

What surprised me personally somewhat was the extent of solidarity between the generations and the experienced responsibility of the elderly for the development of the younger generations and society, which was already apparent at the beginning of the projects,

Prof. Dr. phil Eric Schmidt, Institute of Gerontology at Heidelberg University in: EVZ Foundation, 2011, p. 65.

The funding and strengthening of the structures of



Ukrainian dialog projects raised a lot of awareness for their work in 2018, when they planted trees in urban parks nationwide. © Lesya Kharchenko

project sponsors through professional exchange and networking was and is a strategic goal of the EVZ Foundation. During the pandemic, for example, a team of consultants accompanied Ukrainian project partners with webinars and digital networking meetings as well as individual organizational consulting. An important source of inspiration is the Central Welfare Board of Jews in Germany, which regularly trains employees and volunteers in psychosocial work with survivors, child survivors and their descendants at international symposiums.

In the campaign “Ich lebe noch – Überlebende der NS-Verbrechen” (“I’m still alive – survivors of the crimes committed by the National Socialists”) the Foundation organized interviews with historical eyewitnesses in April 2015 and solicited donations for survivors with a traveling exhibition and on digital advertising billboards. Over the past 21 years, the

Foundation has received a total of more than EUR 13 million in donations and estates to support additional humanitarian projects.



Campaign image made in 2015

5 Working with and for Survivors – Which Services Are Helpful Today?

What formats can we use to support survivors so that they feel physically and psychologically stable, safe and well-cared for until the end of their lives? This question has been a constant concern for the Foundation and its partners since the beginning of their involvement. It quickly became evident that the dispensing of medication, the financing of a treatment or a food package brings short-term relief but does not provide long-term improvement of the survivors' quality of life. However, in the face of acute crises – such as the Covid-19 pandemic and the current war in Ukraine – this emergency humanitarian aid is an important means of supporting project participants quickly and effectively.

Some associations have established social centers, day centers and care services for survivors. The Foundation has promoted such personnel-intensive and long-term formats, in particular when project sponsors brought the necessary expertise, contributed own

funds and addressed their services to the priority target group of survivors of forced labor, concentration camps or ghettos. Unfortunately, the initial expectation that such “model projects” could be transferred to state funding has not been fulfilled.

Projects that offered survivors social and cultural opportunities were more low-threshold and widespread. These meeting points enabled mobile survivors to actively shape their daily lives and support each other. Often, the sponsors were able to retain volunteers, in particular active senior citizens, for long-term involvement. In this way, less-mobile survivors of National Socialist persecution experienced social participation and practical support, their loneliness was alleviated and they felt cared for. For a long time, associations of survivors in Eastern Europe perceived the funding from Germany as recognition of their suffering, which helped them to be more strongly perceived in their home region.

What is crucial for civil society in Belarus, Russia, and Ukraine are the advocacy, networking and communication activities initiated by the EVZ Foundation for the “Dialog Forum” projects: The “[International Public Association «Mutual Understanding» \(MOOV\)](#)” in Minsk has established itself nationwide as a contact person and advocate for “its” *uzniki* (prisoners). It is highly respected in civil society and can still continue its valuable work, even though political pressure is increasing after the suppression of the Belarusian democratic movement. In Moscow, the “[Charitable Foundation for Philanthropy Development](#)” organizes digital networking meetings or webinars on biography work and music therapy in the framework of the funded projects. In Ukraine, “[Turbota pro Litnih v Ukraini](#)” (Age Concern Ukraine) has been the point of contact for many of the survivors' associations since 2010 and organizes training courses on dementia or safety in old age, as well as – since the beginning of the war – again emergency relief for the survivors.

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Our meetings are very important to me. But only a few people still attend those meetings. Of the 2,500 “Eastern workers” who returned to Stolin after the war, 478 are still alive. We have placed the most needy in a nursing home. Many of us can only get out of the house with support. I am therefore looking forward to meeting former fellow sufferers here at the conference.

Nina Kelenikovna Tarasevich, 85, Chairwoman of the Association of Minor Forced Laborers in Stolin, Brest Region, in: Foundation EVZ, 2016, p 59).

In retrospect, it is obvious that the most effective and sustainable projects were those in which staff and volunteers first built trust with the survivors and then provided services tailored to their individual needs. Low-threshold activities in the circle of confidants such as drinking tea, trips, or hobby groups are successively supplemented by individual social counseling, referrals to state benefits, volunteer assistance or psychological or medical services – also for caregiving relatives. Home visits by volunteers and meeting places close to home for less-mobile survivors have become increasingly important in recent years. Each organization set its own priorities and expanded its commitment from project to project.

6 Outlook

We will continue our commitment to survivors of National Socialist persecution – in the future mostly very elderly child survivors – in the third funding decade. In most cases, they will no longer be able to function as historical eyewitnesses. We do not know how long we will be able to reach those who are dependent on support through project funding. In Eastern Europe in particular, many survivors live widely scattered and increasingly isolated. Digital platforms for advising relatives or arranging care services are already becoming increasingly important. Confronted with these challenges, the Foundation is increasingly relying on professional and supra-regional project sponsors.

The pandemic has helped us to understand the importance of learning how to use the new technologies. Now we have queues for mobile phone and tablet usage training.

Galina Shkolnik, Memorial St. Petersburg (SVN KAF, 2022)



© Vladimir Aleksandroncz

Project coordinator Yulia Ermolenko helps Sofia Titovna Abramtseva learn how to use her mobile phone: this alleviates loneliness – especially during the pandemic (Project in Belarus)

With the death of the survivors, the scope of this commitment will gradually diminish over the next decade and, in keeping with their legacy, will be continued in other fields of activity of the Foundation.

The Foundation's Agenda for the Future, resolved in 2021, has already identified challenges where we need to increase our commitment in the future. We will effectively support those communities in which not survivors but their descendants live and which are still at risk today:

- We will support Roma communities in Central and Eastern Europe to demand their rights, to stand up against racism and to bring the history of the genocide against the Roma to the attention of the majority societies.
- With and for the Jewish communities, we will strengthen and make more sustainable our commitment against antisemitism, e.g. by funding institutional arrangements to combat antisemitism in our societies.
- We will support descendants to carry the messages of their persecuted parents and grandparents into the future.

On the basis of the Law on the Creation of the EVZ Foundation, we will constantly ask ourselves what the legacy of the survivors can mean for the Foundation's actions in future social challenges:

- Remembering the threat posed by totalitarian systems in the face of decreasing historical memory, give voice and reach to survivors' testimonies in the digital world;
- In international youth exchanges, in view of populist national egotism, let young people collaborate transnationally for our European values;
- In international humanitarian cooperation given hatred, terror or war, support those affected with the same commitment as the survivors would have expected from their fellow human beings in their time.



Historical eyewitness Alexander Demidow together with Anna Krutskowa

7 Thanks

Enabling survivors to age with dignity until death remains the most important goal of the EVZ Foundation. It cannot fulfill this mission without all the organizations that work for its interests and well-being. It therefore sees itself as a strategic partner and supporter of civil society. The Foundation would like to thank its long-standing partners in all target countries and will support them in adapting to new target groups and areas of responsibility.

8 Facts & Figures

How Many Survivors of National Socialist Persecution Are Still Alive?

It is not known how many survivors of National Socialist persecution are still alive worldwide. According to the Israeli Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs and Social Services, around 160,000 Holocaust survivors are still alive in Israel. 48,000 (i.e. 31%) of them survived concentration camps, forced labor, ghettos or in hiding (cf. Wiener, Stuart, 2022). Even though life expectancy is lower in Eastern Europe, it can be assumed that several hundred thousand survivors will still need our support in the coming years. In Germany, we do not have any reliable figures, as these are not collected for understandable reasons.

How Many People Does the EVZ Foundation Reach in the Projects?

The total number of survivors reached, as well as the distribution among persecuted groups, varies from year to year, depending on the number, formats and scope of the projects funded. For example, emergency relief projects or counseling services generally reach more people. Care services and meeting points are designed for significantly smaller target groups, with regular and more sustainable services. Of the more than 36,000 survivors the Foundation reached in more than 100 social projects between 2019 and 2020, 59% were Jewish survivors, 28% were former NS forced laborers, and 4% were survivors of the genocide against the Roma. The group of other victims of National Socialism

amounted to 9% (cf. Zielgruppenmonitoring (Target group monitoring) of the EVZ Foundation 2020, unpublished survey used among the project partners).

The Survivors' Associations

Many of the survivors united in international associations in the post-war years. The survivors of the concentration camps are often organized as camp communities. For reasons of age and health, the association "Child Survivors Deutschland – Überlebende Kinder der Shoah e.V." (Child Survivors Germany – Shoah Child Survivors) was liquidated on December 31, 2021. The "International Union of Former Juvenile Prisoners of Fascist Concentration Camps" was founded in 1988 and there are independent national and regional unions in Belarus, Russia, Ukraine, and other countries. The now elderly chairpersons of the union sometimes meet for national or international conferences. However, as early as 2014 – shortly after the annexation of Crimea and the war in Donbass – the first cracks within the union became apparent when regional Ukrainian unions withdrew from the international and the national Ukrainian union. In many cases, the independent regional unions are doing good work on site. In Ukraine today, they are an important voice of civil society. For example, shortly after the war began in 2022, survivors of the Dnipro Oblast Regional Union addressed the Russian soldiers' mothers with a video message. [Videobotschaft aus Dnipro \(Video message from Dnipro\)](#).

Societal Recognition

Since around the mid-1980s, Holocaust survivors have enjoyed a high social standing in Israel. They enjoy support and are regarded as "heroes" who helped to build the Israeli state. However, survivors from successor states of the former Soviet Union who have immigrated to Israel in the last 30 years have also had to fight for compensation in many cases (cf. Kellermann, 2010). In contrast, forced labor for the National Socialist regime in the Soviet Union bore the stigma of treason against the homeland. In Russia and Belarus, they are still not equated with the veterans of the Great Patriotic War. Only in Ukraine has the social status of NS forced laborers improved significantly (cf. Erdmann-Kutnevic, 2010).

Project Examples

Complex Medical and Psychosocial Home Care for Survivors of National Socialism and Children of the Holocaust in Kraków

Although health care in Poland is guaranteed by the state, this does not apply to the area of home care. This is where the “Pro Vita et Spe” Foundation comes in with its offering for survivors of National Socialist persecution. In addition to domestic support, “Pro Vita et Spe” offers medical and psychosocial support in its medical outpatient clinic in Kraków, which is specifically designed for the treatment of survivors of National Socialist persecution. It therefore assumes benefits that are not or only insufficiently covered by the state healthcare system. Access to specialist diagnosis and treatment without waiting times, as well as psychosocial care, contribute significantly to improving the survivors' health and quality of life.



FAST FACTS:

- Project partner: Pro Vita et Spe Foundation
- Target country: Poland
- Duration: 2021 to 2022
- Funding amount: EUR 120,000

Practical and Material Assistance for 105 Survivors of National Socialism in Dnipro, Home Visits for 40 Non-mobile Survivors

Since 2003, the regional association of victims of National Socialism in the city and region of Dnipro has organized a meeting place with social and cultural offers as well as voluntary assistance for former NS forced laborers. After the Russian attack on Ukraine, the association reacted quickly to the war-related changing needs of the survivors. 105 people are supported with food and prescription drugs, as well as hygiene products as required. 40 less-mobile, elderly people are cared for at home and, if necessary, assisted in the evacuation. Experienced in emergency relief since 2015, the association also implemented a second emergency relief project in spring 2022 to provide individual support to survivors from all over Ukraine.



FAST FACTS:

- Project partner: Ukrajinska spilka vjasniw-shertw nazysmu, Dnepropetrovskye oblastnoe otdelenije (USWShN)
- Duration: 2022 to 2023
- Funding amount: EUR 45,000

Possible Times

The Ukrainian welfare organization Chesed Michail organizes online courses for about 240 Holocaust survivors and 300 other senior citizens in the Ukrainian regions of Zaporizhzhia and Dnipro. These services to promote healthy lifestyles, creativity, and coping with daily life complement the emergency relief and care services provided by the Jewish welfare association, which are in turn financed from third-party funds. With the additional digital offers, the project sponsor aims to alleviate survivors' war-related stress and feelings of insecurity. For this purpose, mobile phones suitable for senior citizens are purchased. About 50 volunteers accompany the elderly and support them with technical questions.



FAST FACTS:

- Project partner: BO “Zaporoshsky Blagotvoritelnyj Fund “Chesed Michail””
- Target country: Ukraine
- Duration: 2022 to 2023
- Funding amount: EUR 30,000
- Website: [\(12\) Запорізький благодійний фонд “Хесед Міхаель” | Facebook](#)

Generational Dialog Between Holocaust Survivors and Young People in Israel

The Israeli organization AMCHA accompanies and supports survivors of the Shoah in Israel with a wide range of therapeutic, cultural and social services. Around 500 elderly survivors regularly visit the social centers in the Israeli cities of Tel Aviv, Haifa, Rehovot, Ashkelon and Beer Sheva. A network of over 1,000 volunteers built up over the years enables AMCHA to organize social gatherings, recreational activities and educational offers. The elderly drink coffee together, celebrate birthdays, participate in painting and language courses

and share their memories. If necessary, psychotherapeutic help is offered to the traumatized survivors. Trained young volunteers also visit the less-mobile survivors at home or accompany them on walks. They pay attention to them and support them in documenting their life stories.



FAST FACTS:

- Project partner: AMCHA: Israeli Center for Psychosocial Support of Survivors of the Holocaust and the 2nd Generation, Jerusalem
- Target country: 5 out of a total of 15 AMCHA Social centers in Israel
- Duration: 36 months
- Funding amount: EUR 300,000.00

Scope for Care

The Belarusian association “Social Projects” wants to make a lasting contribution to improving the well-being of 80 needy survivors in need of help in the Gomel region. With individual needs assessment, home visits, health-promoting gymnastics and the loan of rehabilitation equipment, people with limited mobility receive support tailored to their needs. To this end, the association works closely with family caregivers and volunteers. For them, “Social Projects” offers patient care training, counseling sessions and psychological support.



FAST FACTS:

- Project partner: Gomelskoye oblastnoe OO “Sozialnye projekty”
- Target country: Belarus
- Duration: 2022 to 2024
- Funding amount: EUR 30,000

Mutually Attentive

The volunteer initiative in the Samara region had already brought together and accompanied 150 volunteers in the previous projects with survivors of the Shoah and the Siege of Leningrad as well as other members of the war generation. In the current project,

they motivate new volunteers who visit the elderly, help them in their daily lives and accompany them on excursions or to the theater. Biographical interviews are intended to contribute to a better understanding of the past.



FAST FACTS:

- Project partner: League of young people – Regional Center for Youth Initiatives in Samara
- Target country: Russia
- Duration: 2021 to 2022
- Funding amount: EUR 9,600

Supporting Survivors in Russia During the Pandemic

With COVID-19 emergency relief, the Charitable Foundation for Philanthropy Development supported a total of 1,609 survivors in various cities and districts of the Russian Federation in 2021. They were given food, pharmacy and drugstore vouchers, psychological assistance, care materials and medical aids. The coordinator of the “Dialog Forum” funding program in Russia has set up an efficient procedure for the transfer of aid to 22 NGOs, which meets the legal requirements of the Russian judicial administration. The emergency relief was distributed between June and October 2021 via the “Dialog Forum” project sponsor, who – in addition to their regular services – supported their target group individually and according to their needs, in some cases also involved other survivors and distributed additional donations.



FAST FACTS:

- Project partner: Charitable Foundation for Philanthropy Development
- Target country: Russia
- Duration: 2021
- Funding amount: EUR 30,000
- Website: [Благотворительный фонд развития филантропии \(cafrussia.ru\)](http://Благотворительный фонд развития филантропии (cafrussia.ru))

Safety and Hope: Psychosocial Support for Survivors of the Genocide Against the Roma in the Łódź Voivodeship

Even today, Roma in Poland – as in the whole of Europe – are confronted with many negative prejudices. Knowledge of the genocide against the Roma is very limited. Survivors of the genocide therefore do not receive sufficient support. The “Safety and Hope” project supports the target group, which is particularly affected by marginalization and poverty, not only through home visits by volunteers and various therapy options, but also in a very practical way: with warm meals, food as well as medicines and medical supplies.



FAST FACTS:

- Project partner: Centrum Doradztwa i Informacji dla Romów w Polsce
- Target country: Poland
- Duration: 2022 to 2024
- Funding amount: EUR 60,000
- Website: romacenter.pl

Nuremberg Alliance for the Improvement of Psychosocial Support and Care of Survivors of National Socialist Persecution

Together with two other alliance partners, the AWO (Workers' Welfare Association) Nuremberg wants to sensitize a broad public to the special needs of survivors of National Socialist persecution. Through collegial counseling and information work in committees, specialists in work for senior citizens are to be reached. In addition, a volunteer circle will be set up and trained. The aim is to improve the survivors' quality of life and care situation.



FAST FACTS:

- Project partner: AWO Arbeiterwohlfahrt Kreisverband Nürnberg e.V.
- Target country: Germany
- Duration: 2022 to 2023
- Funding amount: EUR 71,000
- Website: www.awo-nuernberg.de

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[Zwangsarbeit im NS-Staat - Portal zur Zwangsarbeit im NS-Staat \(bundesarchiv.de\)](https://www.bundesarchiv.de)

[Publikationen | Central Welfare Board of Jews in Germany \(zwst.org\)](https://www.zwst.org)

[Die Zeit wird knapp | Central Welfare Board of Jews in Germany \(zwst.org\)](https://www.zwst.org)

The images shown are from the photo archive of the EVZ Foundation. Some of the people illustrated have passed away already. The EVZ Foundation would like to thank all the people and project partners involved for their dedication!

The cover photo shows former NS forced laborer Ganna Opanasivna (*3.11.1925 † 7.7.2018) together with Karl Leuschner, who was a volunteer in Ukraine in 2018. © Elena Rudenko

If you would like to learn more about the activities of the EVZ Foundation, its commitment to Survivors of National Socialist Persecution and its funded projects, please visit our website or contact us directly: kommunikation@stiftung-evz.de. Our monthly newsletter also keeps you up to date regarding news from the Foundation and our projects.

Would you rather join in the discussion? We would like to encourage you to actively take part in social debates and to highlight issues via our social media channels. Visit us on Twitter, Instagram or Facebook.

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