

Antisemitism research and the fight against antisemitism: an EHRI position paper

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1 Introduction and context

This position paper presents a strategy on how the European Holocaust Research Infrastructure (EHRI) intends to collaborate with other players active in antisemitism research and the fight against antisemitism. It has been occasioned by a series of productive interactions between EHRI, representatives from EC Research and Innovation, and the EC's Coordinator on combatting antisemitism and fostering Jewish life, Katharina von Schnurbein.

The mission of EHRI is to further trans-national Holocaust research, commemoration and education. It approaches this mission by addressing the field's hallmark challenge which is the wide dispersal of sources and expertise across thousands of institutions in Europe and beyond. EHRI overcomes such fragmentation by connecting sources, institutions and people. The EHRI Portal enables online access to information about Holocaust sources, no matter where they are located. The EHRI Conny Kristel Fellowship gives researchers access to the resources of 20 leading Holocaust archives worldwide. EHRI's extensive programme of networking and training brings people together and fosters the exchange of scientific expertise. Last but not least, EHRI promotes innovative tools that advance the digital transformation of Holocaust research.

EHRI is a consortium of 25 major Holocaust research institutions, archives, museums and libraries located in Europe, Israel and the United States, and is supported by a wider network of organisations and individuals from the broad fields of Holocaust studies and the digital humanities. Its activities are currently implemented in the context of two EU-funded projects. The EHRI-3 project (2020-2024) deepens the integration of Holocaust archives and research that has been undertaken by EHRI since 2010. The EHRI Preparatory Phase (EHRI-PP) project (2019-2022) aims to transform EHRI from a series of projects into a permanent distributed European Research Infrastructure with its own legal identity and long-term funding streams.

It is clear that EHRI shares interfaces with other scientific fields and contributes to a range of social and cultural policy priorities. This is particularly relevant with regards to antisemitism. As antisemitism is an integral part of the Holocaust's history, researching it is critical for everyone's understanding of the Holocaust and its enduring significance.



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To fully contextualise EHRI's approach to antisemitism, sections two and three of this paper locate its place within the wider scientific and policy landscapes and describe our general strategy for outreach and engagement with key scientific and policy stakeholders. Section four then elaborates on the implementation of this general strategy with regards to the topic of antisemitism. It contains a range of concrete proposals on how EHRI can optimally contribute to a wider antisemitism research and policy agenda through its core mission without duplicating activities already undertaken by others.

2 The scholarly research landscape of Holocaust research

EHRI is a thematic trans-national research infrastructure that supports the field of Holocaust research, the study of the systematic state-sponsored murder during World War II of millions of Jews (and people declared to be Jews). By focusing on the infrastructural needs of Holocaust research, EHRI fills a gap in current provisions. While many national centres of excellence that support Holocaust research exist, EHRI is the first and only initiative that provides an integrated trans-national layer across such national provisions. It thereby supports and accelerates the internationalisation of Holocaust research.

Holocaust research is inherently inter-disciplinary, and is approached from, and intersects with, many disciplinary perspectives. Most relevant are a wide variety of fields of historical research; other humanities disciplines including languages and literatures, linguistics, philosophy, religious studies, theology, law, media studies and archaeology; and various social science disciplines such as anthropology, political science, criminology, geography and sociology.

The above enumeration is indicative rather than exhaustive, and its scope reflects the fact that the Holocaust pervaded all aspects of life. **EHRI recognises the contributions that multiple disciplines are making to improve understanding of the Holocaust.** It is an infrastructure for all Holocaust researchers, no matter what their disciplinary background, and **actively encourages increased inter-disciplinary exchange and cross-fertilisation.**

Holocaust research also engages in dialogues with other inter-disciplinary fields concerned with mass violence, the systematic discrimination of victim groups, underlying ideologies, and political, cultural, legal and social responses. This includes research on non-Jewish victims of Nazi crimes, antisemitism research, war and conflict studies, genocide studies, memory studies, refugee and migration studies, and research on transitional justice and human rights. Since its inception EHRI has engaged with, and offered services to, such adjacent inter-disciplinary communities. **EHRI will significantly deepen such engagement.** In particular, it anticipates a gradual widening of its data



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integration efforts by targeting collections that pertain to non-Jewish victim groups of Nazi crimes. It will also widen access to its existing data and services by actively highlighting their relevance for adjacent inter-disciplinary research communities. Finally, EHRI will reach out to such communities to identify areas of common interest, and to facilitate an ongoing exchange of methodologies, expertise and knowledge.

By trans-nationally connecting dispersed archives and by enabling new digitally enhanced research, EHRI shares interfaces with fields such as archival and information science, digital heritage studies, computer science and the digital humanities. **EHRI advances the digital transformation of Holocaust research.** It integrates insights from these disciplines into its own work, and it informs their further development by providing a testbed where advanced digital methods can be refined.

Likewise, EHRI shares commonalities with other European research infrastructures that trans-nationally integrate humanities research such as DARIAH-ERIC (digital humanities), CLARIN-ERIC (language resources), and E-RIHS (heritage science). **EHRI already has a track-record of cooperating with these infrastructures, and will expand joint work to develop synergies.** Areas of such strategic interest include: developing and mainstreaming digital methods for humanities research; accessing, processing and analysing multi-lingual cultural content; and preserving and accessing tangible cultural heritage.

3 The policy landscape of Holocaust research

EHRI has always followed a social mission as well as a scholarly one, and has a track-record of public engagement. Holocaust research is of high importance to several pressing contemporary policy areas such as countering Holocaust denial and distortion; combatting antisemitism and racism; protecting human rights; facilitating compensation and restitution; and promoting Holocaust education and commemoration. As we witness a global rise of racism, hate speech, discrimination and xenophobia, and an erosion of democratic norms and values, the imperative to increase knowledge of the Holocaust, and to apply its lessons to contemporary policymaking, is stronger than ever. The current global pandemic crisis has not only intensified these dangerous developments, but has also fuelled a rise in online denial, distortion and disinformation about the Holocaust that, in turn, feeds antisemitism, conspiracy theories and hate crimes.

EHRI has developed strategic engagements with key stakeholders that are active in Holocaust-related policy areas including the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA), the



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Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany (Claims Conference), the European Commission's Coordinator on combatting antisemitism and the Rothschild Foundation.

EHRI recognises its social, political and cultural responsibilities and is committed to advancing Holocaust-related policy agendas through the provision of scientific expertise and infrastructural support. EHRI approaches this work by building partnerships with existing initiatives, thereby optimally adding value and avoiding duplication of effort. This approach ensures that resources are employed effectively and efficiently for maximal public benefit.

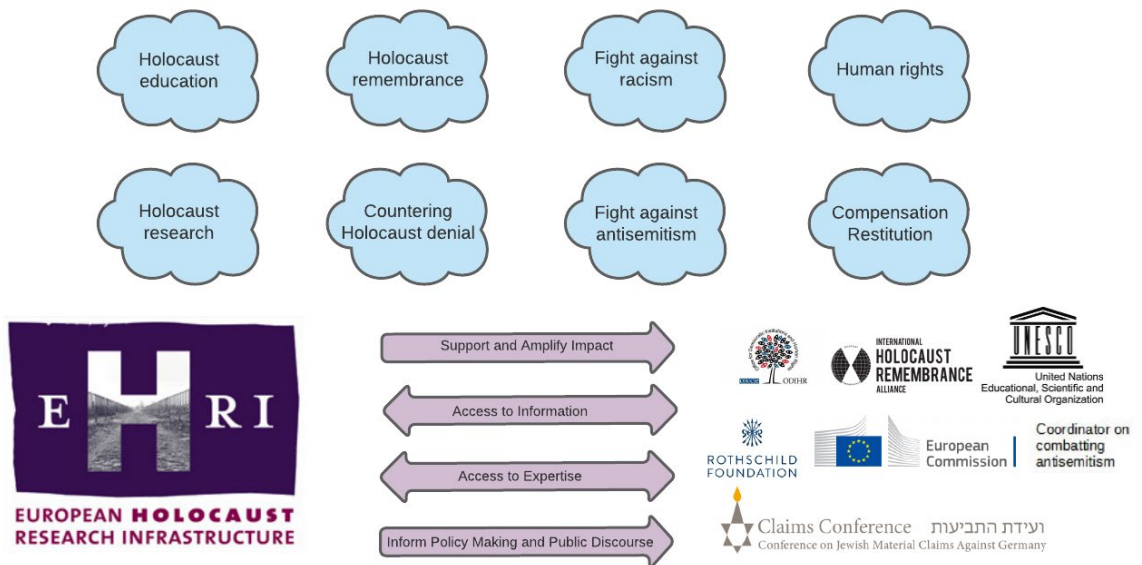
As depicted in the diagram below, EHRI engages with a wide range of policy areas and stakeholders, and contributes along the following principal axes:

- *Access to information.* EHRI provides transnational access to Holocaust documentation both to researchers and to professionals working in Holocaust education, museums, commemoration and related fields. EHRI is committed to the democratisation of knowledge by making properly contextualised and researched Holocaust documentation freely available, thereby critically assisting the fight against Holocaust denial, misinformation and conspiracy theories.
- *Access to expertise and training:* As a growing consortium that incorporates the most important Holocaust research centres and archives, EHRI is well-placed to provide scientific input and expertise into evidence-based policymaking. For instance, EHRI worked closely with IHRA's Steering Committee on Archival Access, which successfully intervened in the development of the European General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) to protect full access to the material record of the Holocaust. Equally relevant are EHRI's efforts to introduce educators to recent methodological innovations in Holocaust research and documentation, so that public Holocaust education can be based on the scientific state-of-the-art.
- *Amplification of the public impact of Holocaust research:* By working with external stakeholders and initiating EHRI specific initiatives, EHRI contributes to the public's understanding of their past and its contemporary relevance. A notable past initiative in this regard is the Resonance Project (<https://www.ehri-project.eu/ehri-and-medialab-resonance-project>), designed to engage younger generations with questions around antisemitic legislation.
- *Dissemination and stakeholder engagement:* EHRI has access to a large network of Holocaust researchers, archivists, other relevant professionals as well as the interested



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public via a variety of dissemination channels. It is thereby ideally suited to disseminate relevant news and information from other stakeholders and initiatives to its network as well as to solicit input and feedback from the community.



4 EHRI's support for antisemitism research and the fight against antisemitism

It is impossible to research, commemorate or convey knowledge about the Holocaust without consideration of the role antisemitism played in the unfolding of the crime. Since its inception, EHRI has offered substantial support and services to researchers investigating antisemitism in the build-up to, duration and aftermath of World War II. Likewise, contributing to the fight against antisemitism has always been part of EHRI's wider social, cultural and political mission. By facilitating research into the historical dimensions of antisemitism, EHRI plays an important role in enhancing understanding how current forms of antisemitism often reflect and harness historic ones.

In the context of the global surge in antisemitic rhetoric, hate crimes and sentiments, EHRI commends the work undertaken by the European Commission's Coordinator on combatting antisemitism and other trans-national initiatives to strengthen policy responses to antisemitism. **EHRI welcomes the call from the EC's Coordinator for increased collaboration. It will enhance**



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support for research on antisemitism in its relationship to the Holocaust and will contribute to relevant policy responses through the provision of scientific support and input.

To achieve this, EHRI will build upon its existing services in the following areas:

Virtual access: The EHRI Portal offers access to scientifically contextualised information about more than 300,000 archival units. A significant portion of the Portal's information base is of direct relevance to antisemitism research and can be accessed via a structured multilingual thesaurus containing 30 terms related to the topic. Furthermore, all three Online Editions of original documents that EHRI has published so far – BeGrenzte Flucht, Early Holocaust Testimonies and Diplomatic Reports – are vital resources for studying antisemitism. The EHRI Document Blog, finally, has a dedicated #antisemitism tag that allows retrieval of posts that discuss methodological issues in the study of pre-war and wartime antisemitism.

Physical access: EHRI currently offers physical access to expertise and holdings available at 20 partner institutions through the EHRI Conny Kristel Fellowship programme. Antisemitism researchers are making good use of this programme, and relevant projects that have been supported so far include "Preaching the Gospel of Hate. Antisemitism, Fascism and the Orthodox Church in Interwar Romania", "Apologetic, or antisemitic? Revisiting the case of the Gruppe 47", "The Anatomy of Antisemitism: Jews and Cadavers in East-Central Europe before the Holocaust", "Anti-Jewish Prejudice, Terror, Crimes. The Prelude of the Romanian Holocaust during the Retreat from Bessarabia and North Bukovina (June-August 1940)", and "The temptation of disobedience: antisemitism and far-right propaganda in high schools of interwar Romania".

Training: the EHRI Online Training Course provides an overview of recent trends in historiography across eight units of study. Two units - "Persecution and Deportation from Western Europe" and "The Germans and the Holocaust" - offer significant sections dealing with the topic of antisemitism.

The above examples illustrate the considerable extent to which EHRI already serves the antisemitism research communities. **EHRI is committed to a continuous expansion of this provision through the following three-point action plan:**

1. *Highlight the pertinence of existing services for antisemitism research:* The take-up of the existing EHRI services among the antisemitism research community can be significantly increased through better sign-posting that highlights their relevance to the topic. To facilitate this, EHRI will explicitly encourage applications dealing with pre-war, wartime and immediate post-war antisemitism in future calls for the EHRI Conny Kristel Fellowships programme.



Moreover, EHRI will develop an easy-to-use guide that concisely indicates how its various services might be best used in the context of antisemitism research.

2. *Expand dissemination network*: EHRI will actively seek to include a higher proportion of the antisemitism research community in its dissemination network. We will contact the main European centres of excellence in antisemitism research and encourage participation in EHRI activities.

3. *Add content relevant for antisemitism research*: Wherever feasible, EHRI will add new content to its services that has relevance to research on antisemitism in the build-up to, duration and aftermath of World War II. This may include integration of relevant collections into the EHRI Portal; publication of new posts on relevant methodological topics in the EHRI Document Blog; addition of scholarly edited collections of relevant documents to the EHRI Editions platform; or provision of training seminars specifically targeted at educators dealing with antisemitism.

These three action points can be implemented in the short to medium term within the context of the EHRI-3 project. In addition, **EHRI will afford antisemitism research a prominent place in its long-term research and innovation strategy that is currently being drafted in the context of the EHRI-PP project.**

To complement these enhanced research services, **EHRI commits to making antisemitism in the context of Holocaust research a specific focus area in its outreach and public impact activities.** In conformance with our general strategy outlined above, we will implement this commitment through enhanced collaborations with existing leading international initiatives in the field. For instance, EHRI already supports the #ProtectTheFacts campaign (<https://www.againstholocaustdistortion.org/>) - a joint initiative of the European Commission, IHRA, the United Nations and UNESCO to fight Holocaust distortion and antisemitism – and we will extend our contribution to this and similar initiatives. In addition, we will launch several social outreach and innovation activities within the framework of EHRI-3, and at least one will specifically focus on the topic of antisemitism.

Finally, **EHRI commits to mobilising its resources, network and expertise to provide scientific input and support to antisemitism-related policymaking whenever required.** To facilitate this, EHRI will seek to establish a regular mechanism for the exchange of information with relevant stakeholders such as the EC’s Coordinator on combatting antisemitism and IHRA. To put such arrangements on a sustainable footing, **EHRI will ensure an appropriate representation of stakeholders engaged in researching and combatting antisemitism in the governance structure**



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of the future permanent EHRI-RI, for instance through representation on its Scientific Advisory Board.



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