



Background and Facts

FORCED LABOR 1939 - 1945 MEMORY AND HISTORY

A digital archive for education and research

A cooperation between the Foundation "Remembrance, Responsibility and Future", Freie Universität Berlin and the German Historical Museum

Background for and facts about the online archive "Forced labor 1939-1945"

Forced labor under National Socialism

Between 1939 and 1945, more than 12 million people were deported to Germany as slave or forced laborers. They worked in concentration camps, for companies, in agriculture, in private households, for churches and public authorities. The *Generalbevollmächtigter der Arbeitseinsatz* (plenipotentiary-general for labour mobilisation), Fritz Saukel, was sentenced to death at the Nuremberg War Crimes Tribunal and executed in 1946.

Partly in response to these events, Article 4 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights proclaimed on 10 December 1948 bans slavery and the slave trade in all their forms. Following international negotiations and broad-based public debate in Germany, the Foundation "Remembrance, Responsibility and Future" was established in 2000. Between 2001 and 2006, the Foundation made payments totalling EUR 4.4 billion to more than 1.66 million forced laborers.

What does the archive contain?

In 393 audio interviews and 190 video interviews in 25 languages, eyewitnesses tell the story of their lives (2000 hours; around 35,000 pages).

The interviewees (341 men and 249 women) speak in their native languages about their experiences. They tell us about their lives as young people before the war, about how they were persecuted and how they dealt with this experience after 1945.

The accounts related by former forced laborers from Central and Eastern Europe are a central feature of the archive. The greater part of the interviews were conducted in Ukraine (82), Poland (82) and Russia (70). Approximately one third of the interviewees were Jewish or non-Jewish slave laborers in concentration camps; 48 Roma also report on their experiences of persecution. At the time of the interviews, the interviewees were between the ages of 65 and 98.

All of the interviews have been archived, digitised and transcribed; 150 of them have already been translated into German. The interview collection is supplemented by short biographies and around 5,500 photographs.

The aim of the archive

The online archive "Forced Labor 1939-1945" is part of a long-term commitment to commemorating the more than 12 million people who were forced to work for National Socialist Germany. The archive aims to make the experiences of former forced laborers available to international researchers and to prepare the materials for use in educational work.



Project results and further tasks

January 2009: digital archive – online platform

January 2009: multimedia work station in the permanent exhibition at the German Historical Museum

Autumn 2009: DVD for classroom use with short film biographies, introductory films on the history of forced labor and individual life histories

2010-2011: further thematic development of the interviews (assignment of keywords)

How to use the digital archive

Academics, researchers, educators, journalists and other interested persons can apply for access to the portal.

Users must first register and agree to the conditions of use. This is necessary as the materials may only be used for educational and research purposes; the individual rights of the interviewees and the copyright of the interviewers must be respected. Online registration is possible. After the information supplied has been checked, the user is given a password. This procedure can take one or two workdays depending on the number of enquiries.

Please note: To date, the materials have been prepared primarily to meet the needs of researchers, educators and other experts. The materials are still being developed for use by the general public and pupils. The public will be informed as soon as the materials are ready for general use.

How the interviews came to be made

The interviews were conducted in 2005/2006 by 32 academic teams from 26 countries to mark the 60th anniversary of the end of World War II. The project was coordinated by *Institut für Geschichte und Biographie* (institute for history and geography) at the Fernuniversität Hagen (distance university) under the leadership of Professor Alexander von Plato. A description of the project and the first scientific evaluation is contained in:

Hitlers Sklaven, Lebensgeschichtliche Analysen zur Zwangsarbeit im internationalen Vergleich (Hitler's slaves, biographical analyses of forced labor: an international comparison), Alexander von Plato, Almut Leh, Christoph Thonfeld (Editors), Vienna 2008, 500 pages

Funding

To date, the Foundation "Remembrance, Responsibility and Future" has made EUR 2.5 million available for compiling, archiving and digitising the materials, for creating an online platform and setting up the multimedia work station.

Partners

"Forced Labor 1939-1945" is a cooperative project of the Foundation "Remembrance, Responsibility and Future", the Freie Universität Berlin and the German Historical Museum.

Special features of the archive

It is the largest international collection of interviews with former slave and forced laborers. In the interviews the victims talk about their whole lives, not only about how they were persecuted. This was the first major biographical survey involving forced laborers from Poland, the former Czechoslovakia and the former Soviet Union (known as *Ostarbeiter* – workers from the east). In contrast to other collections, all the interviews have been transcribed and are available online.

URL www.zwangsarbeit-archiv.de