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IHRA Guidelines for Identifying Relevant Documentation for Holocaust Research, Education and Remembrance:

Ukrainian Context

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UKRAINIAN CONTEXT

In Ukraine, sources on the history of the Holocaust are stored in archives of various jurisdictions (central, regional and sectoral state archives, local government bodies, religious organizations, mass media, educational institutions, public organizations), in libraries and museums, in private collections, etc. Some of them are currently in the process of being formed, for example, through the realization of oral history projects.

As a result of Russian aggression against Ukraine, such source collections are under particular threat: numerous archives and museums have been destroyed or looted, and the fate of many private collections is unknown. This makes it all the more urgent to locate them, ensure their preservation, digitize them and make them publicly available.

During the Second World War, as well as before and after it, the experiences of Ukraine's Jewish population were also closely linked to Soviet mass violence. In the Ukrainian context, this primarily concerns the events of the Holodomor of 1932–1933, the Great Terror of 1937–1938, and repressive measures in the western regions of Ukraine in 1939–1941. Similarly, after the end of the Second World War, the policy of the Soviet regime involved the persecution of various ethnic, social and religious groups, including antisemitic campaigns during the late Stalinist period, population transfers as a result of post-war border changes, mass deportations, imprisonment in Gulag camps, etc. Many sources on the history of the Holocaust also appeared as a result of the so-called second wave of persecution of collaborators in the 1960s–1980s, as well as the activities of official and informal memorial initiatives in the Soviet Union and independent Ukraine. It is worth noting that Jewish experiences during this period are relatively well documented, owing to their closer social ties with non-Jewish communities through shared education, employment, military service, and political and social activities.

In the context of the history of the Holocaust, it is important to note other cases of National Socialist violence in occupied Ukraine that affected various categories of victims, such as:

- At least 24,000 people were victims of the genocide of the Roma.
- More than 8,000 patients in psychiatric hospitals and homes for the disabled were killed in various ways.
- More than 5 million Red Army soldiers were taken prisoner by the Germans. 60% of them did not survive to see the end of the war. About a million Soviet prisoners of war died or were killed in camps on the territory of occupied Ukraine.
- There are currently no estimates of the number of victims among real or alleged members of the resistance who were executed, imprisoned in concentration camps and other places of forced detention in occupied Ukraine and beyond. Several hundred settlements were destroyed during punitive operations, and tens of thousands of their inhabitants were killed.
- More than 2 million forced labourers were deported from occupied Ukraine. A third of them did not return home after the war, including those who were executed, died from poor conditions, illness, accidents or Allied bombing.

To one degree or another, people of Jewish origin were among the victims of these cases of National Socialist violence. It is extremely difficult to make a separate count of victims among the Jewish population in occupied Ukraine for several reasons. Firstly, in Soviet accounting and reporting practices during and after the war, the ethnicity of victims was systematically 'dissolved' into generalized categories such as 'peaceful Soviet citizens' and 'prisoners of war,' particularly in the materials of the Extraordinary State Commission. This deliberately prevented the identification of Jews as a target group for genocide. Secondly, access to archives was restricted for a long time by secrecy regulations (special storage facilities, censorship by the Main Directorate for Literature and Publishing), and access was only significantly eased in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

As in the case of the Holocaust, a significant portion of those who managed to survive, such as former Soviet prisoners of war or forced laborers, remained under the scrutiny of the Soviet secret services long after the end of the war and suffered from social stigmatization. Similarly, the process of properly honoring their memory began after the collapse of the Soviet Union and continues to this day.

An additional obstacle to the formation of collections was the post-war suppression of attempts to comprehend the Holocaust independently: the closure of Jewish institutions, the banning and refusal to publish the Black Book[1], the destruction of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee and the execution of 13 of its leaders on 12 August 1952 (the 'Night of the Executed Poets'), as well as the 'Doctors' Case' of 1952–1953 — all this created an atmosphere of intimidation and halted research and public memory. Finally, the reconstruction of the identity of victims and family lines was affected by a "break in memory": the mass emigration of Jews from the USSR in the late Soviet and early post-Soviet periods led to the loss of local oral testimonies, family archives, and contacts with witnesses on the ground.

Therefore, today, documents about the Holocaust and genocide of Roma in Ukraine are rarely preserved as complete collections. They are scattered among fonds created for various purposes, and their association with a specific group of victims is often not indicated in the titles or descriptions. Ethnic identity, circumstances of persecution, or membership of a particular community become apparent only when analysing the context — names, linguistic features, locations of events, and third-party testimonies. This requires an interdisciplinary approach to searching for and interpreting sources and makes it important to consider even 'unrelated' document collections as potentially relevant to the history of the Holocaust and the genocide of the Roma.

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