

# Annual Report 2017

## Looking to the future

### Actively remembering

The ITS is becoming more well-known. Above all, more researchers, the younger family members of people persecuted by the Nazis and interested members of general public are sending inquiries to us. At the same time, however, we can clearly see that the number of inquiries from survivors of the Holocaust and other Nazi crimes is dropping. Following a wave of inquiries triggered by pension and compensation claims for groups of victims that had previously been excluded, this decline is now especially apparent.



This means that we have new target groups and new responsibilities. We want to actively approach people and spark their interest, especially the generations without any personal connection to Nazi history, especially in a Europe marked by rising migration and intolerance.

For this reason, we focused primarily on two issues in 2017: new services and new ways of approaching the public. The ITS presented some memorials with copies of its collections from the respective concentration camps. Our documents will now reach many more people. We also launched the international #StolenMemory campaign. This will enable us to return more of the personal mementoes of former concentration camp prisoners to their families. I am particularly delighted with the success of this campaign. Volunteers are helping us with our search. The media coverage has sparked great interest in our unique collections and the remembrance work of the ITS.

Ten years ago the ITS overhauled its archive, which had been closed to the public for nearly 25 years, and finally opened it to researchers and visitors. The anniversary of this opening motivated me to take a closer look at our new goals and strategies: improving the safe storage of our collections and public access to them, and becoming more networked, more visible and more focused on service. We have taken big steps in this direction, developed a clear profile, worked towards openness and convenience for users and paved the way for projects.

I expect a great deal from the expansion of online archive, which is pressing ahead at full speed. With the documents from the concentration camps, a large and complex core collection is about to go online.

The ITS moved its original documents in 2017 to a professional temporary archive – a feat of strength for everyone involved. For the first time, this entire collection of Memory of the World documents is in one place: the most extensive international archive on victims of the Nazis, with 30 million documents, and the Central Name Index.

I am pleased that we are taking various approaches to bringing this important source of knowledge for society and remembrance into the future. We do not yet know what questions the next generations will have. But what's important is that they ask them. This is what we are preparing ourselves for."

Floriane Hohenberg

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# 1. #StolenMemory: The new campaign

The ITS launched the #StolenMemory project to return around 3,000 personal items from concentration camp prisoners to their families.

Exhibitions of large-format posters with photos of personal belongings are to draw international attention to the campaign

Pocket watches and wristwatches, rings, wallets, family photos and everyday items like combs, powder compacts and razors – these are the last things that people persecuted by the Nazis had with them when they were arrested and deported to concentration camps. Nearly 3,000 of these personal effects, as they are known, are still held in the ITS archive. Returning these objects and honoring the memory of the victims of the Nazis has become an urgent priority for the ITS.

At the end of 2015, the ITS published photos of these mementoes and the names of the concentration camp prisoners in its new online archive. It quickly became apparent that social media, digital archives and expired data protection requirements regarding personal data in archives made more search channels available than before. Volunteers from different countries helped track down family members, and the number of returned items rose significantly. This success prompted the ITS to launch an intensive search campaign. Research carried out in municipal offices, in various archives and in cooperation with branches of the Red Cross made it possible to find around 90 families and return the stolen possessions to them in 2017.

The next important step in the campaign was the creation of the #StolenMemory poster exhibition, which was developed by the ITS in 2017 with the support of the gewerkdesign agency in Berlin. The purpose of the exhibition is to draw attention to this project, help the ITS find relatives and encourage volunteers to assist in the search for families. The campaign motifs are also being published via social media to reach an even wider audience.

The ITS first displayed the #StolenMemory exhibition as part of the UNESCO events for Holocaust Memorial Day 2018 in Paris. Large-format posters with people's names and photos of the objects were displayed on a fence around the UNESCO building for four weeks. The exhibition will now travel to other countries to be displayed in public spaces. The motifs and languages will be adapted to each country. The ultimate goal is to return these stolen memories to the families of former concentration camp prisoners from around 30 countries.



Ausstellungen von großformatigen Plakaten mit Fotos von persönlichen Gegenständen sollen international die Aufmerksamkeit auf die Kampagne lenken

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***„Thanks to this pocket watch, my uncle has become part of our family discussions, nostalgia, emotion and grief for all of us. He was always very important to me, even though I never knew him – but on my mother's account, who cried for her brother all her life.“***

Marcelle Boulhol, niece of Antoine Brun who died at the age of 36 in the Bremen-Schützenhof satellite camp of Neuengamme as a result of forced labor and inhuman living conditions.

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## Return of personal belongings



It is something that Miroslaw Woźniewicz had not expected: 73 years after his father, Stanisław Woźniewicz, was arrested and later deported to Neuengamme, his father's personal belongings were returned to him. He carefully picked up the comb, a tie, a wallet and papers. "I was very surprised to get a phone call from the ITS. I have the feeling my father steered this from heaven," says Woźniewicz, who was visited by an ITS employee and a Polish TV station when the objects were returned. "I am very happy about the fact that all Poland is learning about my father, because he was a very special person." He suspects that the Germans arrested his father for being a Polish patriot. After returning home, he rarely talked about the war. This makes the objects that the family unexpectedly received from this time all the more important. "They should have a special place," Woźniewicz says. "His personal belongings are of immense value to my family." (Personal belongings of Stanislaw Wozniewicz, Photo: ITS)



Nicole van Winkoop-Schleicher and Monique Buitenhuis-Schleicher never knew their grandfather, Johan Pieter Mackenbach. They were therefore all the more surprised when they were asked on Facebook whether they were his descendants. They then saw photos of their grandfather's personal belongings in the online archive of the ITS: a signet ring, a wedding ring, a pocket watch and a ballpoint pen. "It was important to us to pick up the objects in person," Buitenhuis-Schleicher explains. Furthermore, up until then they had only known that their grandfather was in the resistance, but not when or where the Germans had arrested him. According to the documents, he was imprisoned in the Amersfoort transit camp in 1944, deported to Neuengamme in 1945 and then forced to work in the Wöbbelin satellite camp. The Dutchman survived the liberation by only a few days: he died on May 15, 1945. "There are no words to describe what it means to us to receive his personal belongings and see the documents," says Nicole van Winkoop-Schleicher, who, like her sister, had hardly any information about her grandfather. (The sisters Nicole van Winkoop-Schleicher and Monique Buitenhuis-Schleicher. Photo: ITS)



When the Nazis arrested Wanda Różycka-Bilnik's father in 1943, she was four years old – and she would never see him again. Now almost 80, she still remembers how she and her sister cried and screamed. "If the Gestapo had known we were hiding a wounded partisan at the time, they'd have set the whole house on fire." Czesław Bilnik was a member of the Polish Home Army who was deported to the Gross-Rosen and Neuengamme concentration camps and died just before the liberation in the tragic bombing of the Cap Arcona in the Bay of Lübeck. His daughter was finally able to retrieve his pocket watch from the ITS. She brought with her two letters her father had written before he died. "My mother watched over these letters like relics," she says. "After National Socialism, we were persecuted by the Communists. We were dispossessed. Nothing else remained of my father." The silver pocket watch is all the more meaningful to Różycka-Bilnik: "I'm never going to part with it again. I might even take it with me to my grave." (Wanda Różycka-Bilnik retrieve her father's pocket watch from the ITS in July 2017. Photo: ITS)



As a railroad worker and member of the resistance, Gustave Oeyen had passed on information about German troop movements until he was betrayed and deported by the Nazis to Neuengamme – two weeks prior to the birth of his first child. "Every day my mother showed the baby, my sister, a photograph of our father so that she would recognize him when he came home," recalls Jean-Marie Oeyen, who was born later. After a surprising call from the ITS, he reclaimed his father's wedding ring and wristwatch to bring them to his sister – a moving moment: "I never thought this would be so emotional for me." When his father was found in 1945, he weighed just 85 pounds, but after many weeks in a hospital, returned to his wife and daughter. He died in 1974 of the long-term consequences of imprisonment and abuse. His son remembers that he was brave and tolerant: "My mother never wanted to meet our German friends. I understood that. But my father never felt hatred towards Germans. To this day, he's a shining example of tolerance." (Gustave Oeyen with his wife and his daughter - August 1945. Photo: Private)



78 years after the Stutthof concentration camp opened near Gdansk, the ITS was able to return the personal belongings of former prisoner Zygmunt Boboli to his granddaughter. Working together with the Stutthof Memorial, the ITS was able to track down the woman;

a Polish TV station followed the research. After just a few days in Stutthof, Zygmunt Boboli was transferred in 1944 to Neuengamme, and from there to the Watenstedt satellite camp, where he had to work in grenade production. He also survived the Ravensbrück concentration camp. "Trembling and emaciated, he returned home to his family on the shoulders of a colleague," reports his granddaughter Ewa Sioda. "He was very ill and needed years to recover. He never wanted to talk about wartime." Ewa Sioda views the pocket watch, which has now been returned to the family, as tangible proof of the time. "My grandfather had it with him until the end – a memory that we will pass on through the generations." (Zygmunt Boboli's family. Photo: ITS)



Originally Titia Vuyk was only researching her grandfather's path of persecution. But then the ITS told her that his engagement ring, pocket watch and a fountain pen were preserved in the archive. The ring is inscribed with a date: October 12, 1930. "My grandparents got married two years later," Titia Vuyk says. The inscription also includes the name Anske. "That was my grandfather's nickname for his wife, and later my mother was given that name." Anske can still remember the watch. "We used to go hiking on Sundays and collect different kinds of grass and plants, which we took home to dry," she explains. "I can still remember exactly how my father used to pull the watch out of his pocket." He was a friendly and downright poetic person who played the violin and wrote poems. After he circulated an anti-war petition, the Nazis arrested him in 1942. He died in 1945, shortly after the liberation, as a result of hard physical labor and the conditions of imprisonment in various concentration camps. The family plans to consider carefully how best to keep these possessions in the future. "This is a historical day for us, and a very emotional one." (The three siblings Anske (84), Marieke (80) and Jan (76) Bosdriesz sit side by side, contemplatively looking through their father's few possessions. Photo: ITS)

## „Part of a family's memory“

Anna Meier-Osiński, Head of the Tracing Department, has worked at the ITS since 2015. She explains how and why the ITS is actively seeking to return personal items from the concentration camps – and how valuable these keepsakes are to the families who receive them.

*How long has the ITS actively sought the rightful owners of the personal effects of former concentration camp prisoners?*

For a long time the ITS would not initiate a search without being asked. But we think it is extremely important to do everything we can to return these personal possessions to the family members. We therefore conducted test runs in 2016 and searched for traces of the families in institutions and archives. Our success prompted us to keep going. Now, for the first time since the 1960s, we are actively seeking relatives in order to return the personal belongings of concentration camp prisoners. For many years, the former management of the ITS thought that all search channels had been exhausted. Belongings were only returned when survivors or their families contacted the ITS themselves.



Anna Meier-Osiński, head of the tracing department at ITS, is particularly concerned about the return of personal items to families

*The ITS has its own in-house tracing specialists, after all. And thanks to social media, the online archive and other media campaigns, these specialists can find external supporters very quickly...*

Exactly. The ITS employees responsible for this have been very successful with this active search. Television appearances have also raised the profile of the ITS tremendously, as we saw in the Netherlands and Poland, for example. Afterwards we were able to expand our network over the internet and attract many dedicated helpers.

*Which countries do most of the rightful owners come from?*

We have many keepsakes from concentration camp prisoners from Germany and Poland, but also from people from the former Soviet Union and France. Most of the objects come from Neuengamme concentration camp. We have many watches, rings and other jewelry, but also everyday items such as mirrors and powder compacts. There are also briefcases, certificates, identification papers, letters and family photos.

*There must be a lot of clues in the documents.*

Yes, names and places are naturally important clues. And the incentive to return photos is especially great. You can imagine how important photos are to the family members. After all – unlike in our digital age – very few photos were taken back then.

*Is this why the ITS is returning these objects to the families instead of placing them in a museum?*

Personal possessions that we have not yet been able to return are also available for exhibitions. But we mustn't forget: the Nazis stole these items from people. There are names attached them, and the reason we have them is so that we can return them. They are part of a family's memory. The emotional reactions we see confirm this. People are surprised to find out about the existence of such possessions after more than 70 years, and they often feel that fate has smiled on them. They might not have known much about their family history, but they learn about it when the mementoes are returned.

*So you plan to keep going with the active search?*

Yes, definitely. The #StolenMemory campaign is a very important project for us. We are going to expand its radius and look for relatives in more and more countries. Our experiences carrying out research in Poland, Germany and France will help us with this. The many objects we returned in 2017 are a big motivator!

## Search campaign on television

The search for family members in Poland was a special focus of the restitution campaign in 2017. This is because most of the personal items preserved by the ITS belonged to Polish people persecuted by the Nazis. Various trips to Poland, contact with Polish journalists and the active support of volunteers all had an effect here. The ITS was able to use a variety of channels to publicize its search. A topical feature on Polish TV with ITS employee Małgorzata Przybyła was especially effective in attracting public attention. A report on returning the possessions of a former concentration camp prisoner, an interview and live broadcast of the handover and a call for support on Polish breakfast television all made an impact: immediately after the broadcast, the ITS received around 300 responses, eventually getting 600 in total.



ITS employee Małgorzata Przybyła presents the StolenMemory campaign on Polish breakfast television

“Our campaign isn't really a topic for breakfast television, but you can reach a wide audience on a Sunday morning,” Małgorzata Przybyła said. “It was important to raise awareness of the work of the ITS and its collection of personal possessions among ordinary viewers in Poland – and to show that you can contact the ITS in Polish and help with the search.”

Małgorzata Przybyła was very moved while the report was being filmed. She was able to return a document to a man near Poznan which included a photo of his father, as well as his father's trouser suspenders and a mirror. “The man then told me how much value his father had always placed in his appearance, that he was always dressed elegantly,” she explained. During the live broadcast, she returned a watch to the grandchildren of its former owner, whom she had been able to track down. She also showed some of the personal possessions from the archive during the live broadcast. “We chose a wide variety of objects to show the entire spectrum of items,” Małgorzata Przybyła said, “and we pointed out personal features.” For example, she presented the signet ring of a man from whom the ITS also has photos and a vaccination record.

Local historians quickly took up the search for the owner of the signet ring. The many dedicated volunteers were finally able to find traces of him. "It was worthy of a movie, the way everyone pitched in, from the historian to the mayor," the ITS employee recalls. "For me, it is a mission to be allowed to carry out this work. When we return their keepsakes, the people come back to life for a moment in their family's memory."

## 2. Protecting the documents - On the move!

Moving all ITS documents from different locations under a single roof was a mammoth task. In just under six weeks, a specialist company transported 30 million original documents and more than 50 million reference cards to the newly established temporary storage facility. For decades, the documents themselves were the most important working material at the ITS. They provided information about the fates of individuals and the scale of the Nazis' crimes. But now the archive has been almost completely digitized, and ITS employees use computers for their research. The working material has become archival material, and the entire archive has taken on the characteristics of a memorial.



Approximately 244 tons of documents were moved during the archive relocation. Until the new ITS archive is built, they will be stored in an interim storage area.

To preserve this memorial of paper, the temporary storage facility features modern, climate-controlled rooms. Experts from the German Federal Archives supported the ITS by offering advice on choosing and preparing these rooms.

For the first time, all ITS collections have been brought together under one roof – and their incredible scope is impressive. These UNESCO Memory of the World documents are now waiting to be moved back to the historical site on Jahnstrasse, where a new archive building will be constructed. Funding for the new building in the amount of 5.082 million euros was approved by the German Ministry of Finance in 2017.

The move and proper storage of the documents was a key issue in 2017. Preservation measures also played an important role, since decades of working with the irreplaceable originals every day had taken their toll on the collection.

### **Heart of the ITS has been relocated**

The Central Name Index is a good example of the effort it took to move the documents to the temporary storage facility. Prior to being digitized, this was the most important research tool and thus the heart of the ITS. The index cards – from around 29,000 open cartons – were repacked by a specialist company in closed, age-resistant archive boxes before being moved to the alternate storage facility. The team folded every single box, relabeled it and filled it with the contents of the old cartons. In the end, the Central Name Index alone amounted to around 51 tons of paper to be transported by the moving company. The volume of these documents is readily apparent in the temporary storage building: they take up 2,030 meters of shelving.

### **56,000 files from the Child Search Branch restored**

The ITS needed to take urgent action on the files of the Child Search Branch, some of which were seriously worn. The complete restoration of these 56,000 files was made possible by a grant of 100,000 euros from the Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and the Media. This funding came from the Commissioner's special program in 2017 for preserving Germany's written cultural heritage. These files, some of which include photographs, document the fates of thousands of children. After being restored and deacidified, the 428,000 sheets of paper in 1,078 folders were packed in conservation-standard archive boxes by the ITS. This project was chosen on the recommendation of the Advisory Board of the Coordination Center for the Preservation of Written Cultural Heritage (KEK).

### **Maps and site plans repaired and deacidified**

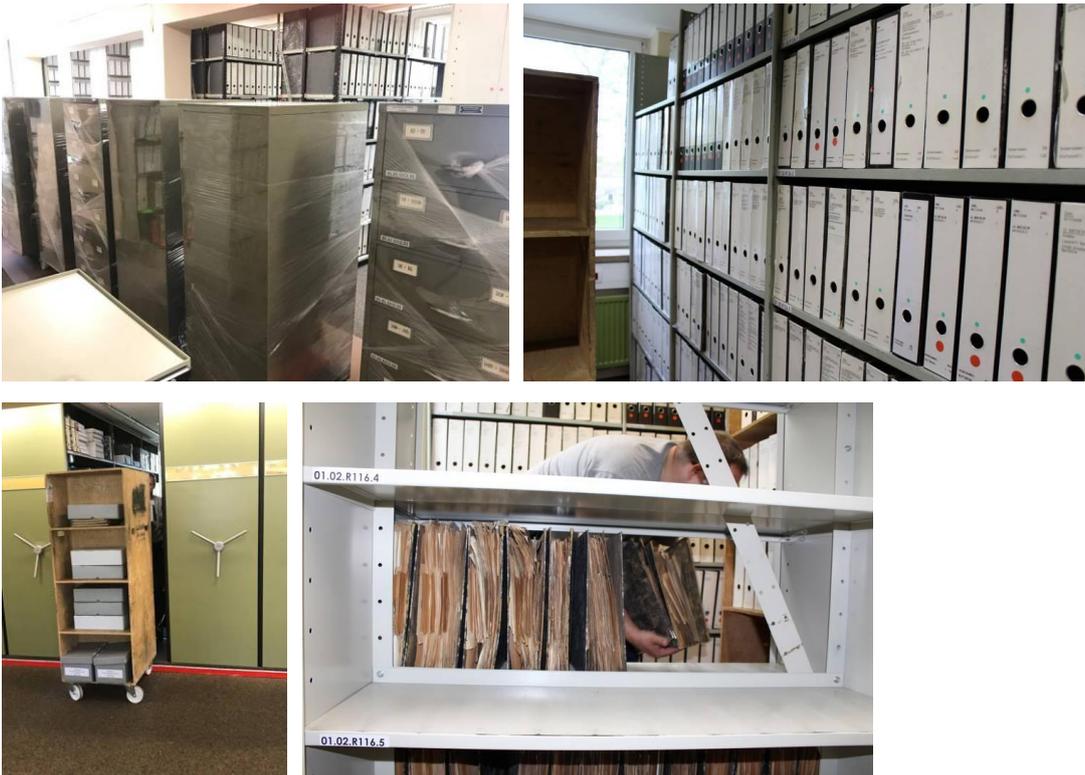
Another severely damaged collection of documents consisted of large-format site plans from concentration camps and maps showing the routes of death marches. The Coordination Center for the Preservation of Written Cultural Heritage chose this project for restoration. The Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and the Media and the Cultural Foundation of the Federal States funded the restoration with a grant

of 20,000 euros. Specialists repaired creases, tears and damage from adhesive tape or lamination, and they deacidified the paper to prevent any further decay. Some of the selected documents came from the SS administration offices of the concentration camps. The maps showing the routes of death marches, however, were drawn up by the ITS immediately after the war to document the fate of the prisoners and the last systematic crimes of the Nazis. Experts estimate that around 250,000 people were murdered on these death marches.

## **Administrative files: Digitize and archive**

The ITS has started preparing its own administrative files to be added to its archival collection. In order to be made public, the files must be more than 25 years old and not subject to data protection regulations. At the moment, these historical administrative documents exist only on paper; they are sorted by file period and not archivally described. Interviews are being conducted with long-standing ITS employees to preserve their knowledge of these administrative and management files. The next step will be to determine which documents are historically interesting and should be preserved in the archive. ITS employees are currently developing a concept for archiving the documents and adding keywords to the collection to make it easier to search. The next step will be to scan the documents and include them in the general inventory. The documents will then have to be prepared for long-term archiving and conservation-standard storage. Documents from the Allies, for example, are in a larger format and would crease easily in standard boxes. Special boxes are needed for these.

## **Some impressions of the ITS archive move**







## Interview Hans-Peter Saal

Hans-Peter Saal, Logistics Project Manager at Grohmann Logistik GmbH in Berlin, explains how his company tackled the huge task of moving the ITS archive to its alternate storage facility.

*You move companies, laboratories, warehouses and much more. Was moving the ITS archive to a temporary storage facility a regular job for you?*

No, relocating an archive is not a typical transportation service. It is definitely a special responsibility.

*Why?*

It was important to preserve the existing archival arrangement so that all documents could continue to be used. Every archival arrangement is based on the given structure of the written material. This is also what makes the ITS archive special as a tracing service and point of contact for the survivors of Nazi persecution and their relatives.



Hans-Peter Saal, Logistics Project Manager at Grohmann Logistik GmbH

*This means that when you packed and transported the documents, you not only had to make sure the documents themselves were unharmed, you also had to preserve their structure?*

Right. This arrangement is part of the history of the ITS and it has to be preserved when the documents are stored in the alternate archive. The success – or rather, the quality – of an archive relocation depends on whether the undamaged documents can be stored in their original arrangement.

*And this is such a big archive: 30 million original documents and more than 50 million reference cards!*

Yes, with smaller collections, human perception and memory can be used to make some corrections – but even with just several thousand documents, this is no longer possible...

*A tricky task – how did you do it?*

We drew up a detailed logistics plan which was carried out exclusively by qualified archive relocation specialists. We also precisely tailored the transportation technology to this task.

*Can you describe exactly what you did?*

To preserve the existing arrangement, we put together 529 individual lots to be moved, which reflected the thematic and content-related structure of the archive. This was the basis of a finding system for the alternate storage facility which does not depend on the local memory of the archive employees. The internal logical composition of each lot – made up of one or several hundred folders or archive boxes – was preserved during the move. Archival groups that had previously been stored separately but belonged together based on their content were joined again.

*You had quite a lot to do...*

Indeed. The physical achievements of the specialists and the logistical dimensions of this move were tremendous. Every single day, we moved around 70 cupboards weighing a total of about 13.3 tons. Then there were around 10 tons of material from archive boxes, folders and cassettes. There are around 244 tons of documents in the alternate storage facility, where their dimensions are now clearly visible. If they were placed side by side, regardless of their storage type, they would take up a length of around 16,000 meters.

*The result is quite a sight to see in the temporary storage facility.*

Yes, the dimensions of the move can be seen for the first time in the alternate storage building, where all of the archival material that was previously held in different places is now stored a single space. Now that the relocation is done, the ITS has an alternate storage facility available to it which is in a better state than before in terms of climate control and security. This compact, easily accessible setup is ideal for preparing the collection for the return move when the new archive building is completed at the historical Jahnstrasse site.

### 3. Bringing the archive to the people

For decades, the ITS archive grew without any classic archival arrangement. It was a tool used to search for the names of victims of the Nazis, to document their paths of persecution and to find traces of the millions of people who had been murdered.

It is still a challenge for the ITS to make its archive comprehensible to external users and accessible to researchers. One exceptional project in 2017 involved preparing what is known as Collection 1.1 for publication online. With 40 sub-collections from nearly all concentration camps and ghettos, it is a core part of the ITS archive. It comprises around 10 million images which will be made available online.

Five ITS employees took two approaches to describing this very heterogeneous collection. Their first approach was based on its content. They added information, mainly concerning the more than 100 different sources from which the original documents had come. This will enable users to correctly cite the information, for example, or retrieve additional information. The team also made structural preparations for publishing the collection online by arranging sub-collections, putting together series of documents and eliminating redundancies.

The ITS is benefiting here from its cooperation with the Yad Vashem memorial, which has experience in this area. Yad Vashem has provided technical support as well as the online platform it developed for similar purposes. Collection 1.1 is scheduled to be published online in the second half of 2018.

The ITS also took another step in 2017 to facilitate access to its archival collection: it gave the concentration camp memorials digital copies of the documents relating to each camp. The memorials can incorporate these documents into their own databases and use the accompanying metadata to research people persecuted by the Nazis. Most of these documents – such as prisoner registration cards – pertain to individual prisoners, but some relate to the organization of the camp. The ITS is thus helping to fill gaps in information. Additionally, since these memorials receive so many visitors, the ITS will be able to help even more people explore Nazi history and the suffering of those persecuted. The memorials signed an agreement with the ITS to guarantee privacy and property rights and ensure the authenticity of the documents.

The ITS carried out other projects, too, in an effort to expand and facilitate access to its archive in 2017 – in a variety of ways:



I. to r.: ITS Director Floriane Hohenberg, Rikola-Gunnar Lüttgenau, Deputy Director of the Buchenwald and Mittelbau-Dora Memorials Foundation, Jens-Christian Wagner, Director of the Lower Saxony Memorials Foundation on the occasion of the data presentation

## **Automating parts of the indexing process**

Searching for names and indexing its collections accordingly was especially important to the ITS. This is essential to many researchers as well. But today's users are also interested in other search criteria for finding information in the relevant documents. Improved indexing helps the employees in the Tracing department, too, because it allows them to carry out research more quickly. In this way, the ITS can improve its service and reduce waiting times.

For faster indexing, the ITS is testing automated text recognition systems from three providers on several of its collections. Modern programs have major benefits, particularly when it comes to very diverse collections: they can identify not only letters but also graphical patterns. This means they can sort collections by document type and enable the archive employees to find specific letters, prisoner cards or lists of names and to form new collections or sub-series. They can even find all of the letters from a specific sender, because letterheads can be distinguished as well. This results in convenient new filtering options for publishing the collections. The medical files of DPs, for example, include documents such as X-rays which are subject to data protection and not of interest to the public. The ITS could exclude this closed group of documents from publication – something that would be almost impossible to do without using software for a collection with nearly one million documents.

## **Explaining documents with the e-Guide**

While the documents in the archive were once used almost exclusively by ITS employees, today there are a variety of user groups. Students, historians and relatives of the victims of Nazi persecution have to grapple with a wide range of documents. They all want to find out quickly and easily who created the document, what it was used for and what the abbreviations mean.

To share the expertise of the ITS employees with the public, an e-Guide is being developed which will be available on the website of the ITS. Christiane Weber, the historian responsible for the project, conducted research in various institutions and talked with external experts to supplement the information in the ITS archive and make it as complete as possible.

The e-Guide will describe the most common documents, cards and questionnaires preserved in the ITS archive and will explain when they were created. In the first phase, information on 30 types of documents relating to concentration camp prisoners will be published. Later on, descriptions of the around 35 most common documents relating to displaced persons and forced laborers will be added.

The documents will be explained in simple language, and a second version of the e-Guide will be available in English. A search function will make it easy to use. Users will be able to interact with the online documents by clicking on them for more information. Quotes from survivors and additional documents from the ITS archive will explain the historical background. The e-Guide is due to be completed in stages from the second quarter of 2018 and will be an important addition to the subsequent online publication of Collection 1.1. The e-Guide can also gradually expand to include explanations of other documents.

## **Releasing data for digital projects**

In order to open up new channels of information, the ITS was also active in the field of digital social sciences in 2017. At the Culture Hackathon in Berlin, participants were able to access the card file of the Reichsvereinigung der Juden (Reich Association of Jews), complete with its metadata. These 32,000 cards provide an insight into the lives of Jews in Nazi Berlin. Two of the Hackathon teams – made up of programmers, web designers and augmented reality experts – developed projects based on this information. The cards known as "student cards" were the basis of the prize-winning project "Marbles of Remembrance / Murmeln der Erinnerung," which consists of a city tour with a chatbot to find the traces of Jewish pupils in Berlin. Users can enter names from "Stolpersteine" blocks and view the associated card, or GPS can be used to notify users when they pass a former Jewish school or a home where a Jewish family lived before being deported. On two city tours, users can also get to know two Jewish children, who introduce themselves and their families via a chat app and show photos and other documents from the ITS database. For the

second project, “Visualizing Jewish Life,” a programmer primarily used the metadata from the card file. On an online city map, users can see where Jewish families lived in Berlin. Statistical information is also available, such as the professions and age groups of the Jewish residents.

## Interview Barbara Glück – Filling in the missing puzzle pieces

In July 2017, Barbara Glück, Director of the Mauthausen Memorial, received digital excerpts from the ITS archive. In this interview she explains what these documents mean to her and the memorial.

*What kinds of documents are included in this copy given to you by ITS Director Floriane Hohenberg in July?*

The digital copy comprises around 550,000 files connected to the concentration camp Mauthausen. They mostly contain general information, prisoner cards, individual documents and files relating to the War Crimes Investigation.

*How will the memorial use the files?*

The metadata associated with the documents has to be harmonized with our collections using special software. But visitors can already look at a selection of the copied documents, and we are also using them to handle search inquiries.

*How many people will this information from the ITS archive reach in the future?*

We receive around 250,000 visitors each year, and we anticipate growing visitor numbers in our archive when it moves to a more accessible location, which will happen soon. Then there are the around 3,500 visitors to our web archive, and we receive around 1,000 search inquiries each year.

*What does it mean to you to receive these copies?*

We had wanted to receive these files for a long time. We can fill in a lot of gaps with them. For our Memorial Book project, for example, we currently have the names of 85,000 former prisoners, but for certain persons we did not even know whether, when or where the Nazis had murdered them. These documents are also of a higher quality, because the scans are often better. Finally, the ITS documents will speed up our search for individuals.

*So it has been positive overall...*

I am naturally in favor of making this data accessible for the purposes of research and clarifying the fates of individuals. I am pleased that the ITS has changed and is now opening up. This also involves promoting cooperation and networking with the memorials. Our archival work is like a puzzle. Adding missing pieces to illuminate the fates of individuals – this is the mission of every memorial.

## Pragmatic description

The ITS holds one of the world’s largest collections of documents on the history of the Holocaust, the concentration camps, Nazi forced labor and displaced persons. Unlike most other archives, this unique collection is very mixed and is not organized according to a uniform structure. For example, the documents are not arranged together based on their origin, as they usually are in an archive. In order to simplify the daily search for names, the ITS described its original documents, correspondence files and copies of other collections primarily on the basis of the names of people and places. For a long time, archival description in the interests of historical research was not part of the mandate of the ITS.



Barbara Glück, Director of the Mauthausen Memorial, is very pleased to be able to work now with the copies of ITS documents including metadata



Giora Zwilling (front left), head of the Department of Archival Description, and his team

The opening of the archive in 2007 was a turning point. The ITS started to describe its collection in a way that would make it easier for external users to work with it. The ITS had not had any trained archivists before then, so departmental employees put together finding aids under the guidance of an archivist. These finding aids systematically described the collection – but only a very small part of it. After all, there are 30 million documents in total. “Now we’re striking a balance,” says Giora Zwilling, head of the Department of Archival Description. “We’re focusing on describing the archive in a central database – the way it actually is.” Zwilling is one of four historians currently working with an archivist to describe the ITS archive. He was previously head of the digitization preparation department at the Yad Vashem memorial, and in 2017 he focused on preparing for the online publication of the complex Collection 1.1 of the ITS. “I would call our approach optimal and user-focused, but also pragmatic,” he says, characterizing the description procedure. Part of this entails setting priorities for online publication. Even a department that has grown to five employees cannot describe 40 sub-collections with 3,000 smaller archive units on every level down to the finest detail – otherwise the publication would take decades. “But description on the top level, for example, is very important,” Zwilling explains.

For Zwilling, the ITS archive is something special, and it must be handled in a special way. “We are a historical archive and nothing like a classic administrative archive,” he remarks. He says the ITS has to work with this. Even though the older part of the online collection is structured differently than Collection 1.1, which is about to be published online, this is no reason for the ITS not to publish as quickly as possible. “A shared search mask for the old and new sections could be helpful to users,” Zwilling says. The important thing is for as many people as possible to be able to access the archive and use it according to their needs. “We have a moral obligation to make the documents reasonably accessible and transparent,” he declares. “By publishing the collection online, we will reach many, many people. This is our future – and the future of all archives.”

## 4. Providing more services – New service, new structures

The number of inquiries received by the ITS rose again in 2017. This highlights how important this information is even to younger people. These numbers pose a challenge for the service departments, however, because responses cannot be sent as quickly as they would like. “Additionally, sometimes the waiting times are long because we prioritize urgent inquiries,” explains ITS Director Floriane Hohenberg. “Survivors and people who are ill usually receive a response in less than a month.” For everyone else, the ITS has set a new response deadline of a maximum of six months. In 2017, the ITS laid the foundations for achieving this ambitious goal.

“Good service means providing solid, understandable information – but it also means not having to wait an eternity for it,” Hohenberg says. The ITS has therefore analyzed its workflows and restructured some departments, teams and responsibilities. “We’ve optimized and streamlined our processes.” In 2018 the ITS plans to move to a completely digital workflow. A “fast lane” has also been established for people making inquiries. Furthermore, people will receive all documents about their relatives with precise designations to clarify their context, but without analysis. “We are always available to answer questions, of course,” Hohenberg says. “We want to adjust our service so that everyone is satisfied.”

The ITS is also preparing new, well-structured services to provide supporting material for trips to memorials. In 2017 a team from the Research and Education department created and tested standardized work packages that can be adapted to the needs of individual groups of learners. On the one hand, this will enable the ITS to respond effectively to the high level of interest in such materials. On the other hand, the learning packages will provide new impetus when addressing young people. “We can reach younger target groups



To offer a prompt, customized, and competent service: this is one of the five goals of the ITS strategy developed in 2016

very directly by providing information about people persecuted by the Nazis from their own hometown, maybe even people who were the same age,” Hohenberg explains. The ITS wants to provide institutional support to memorials that are also under the aegis of the German Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and the Media.

In order to reach a wider audience and supplement the work of the memorials, the ITS gave its partners digital copies of documents from and about the concentration camps in 2017. The employees at the memorials subsequently made more use of the ITS workshops. “Our workshops for educators were a success,” Hohenberg says, “and our archive pedagogy conference was also very well attended.”

## Personal effects from concentration camp prisoners

Wallets with family photos, engraved wedding rings, letters, documents: The ITS archive still holds around 3,200 personal effects. These are personal belongings that were taken from individuals when they were imprisoned by the Nazis. Most of them come from the Neuengamme and Dachau concentration camps.

The ITS now plans to start searching proactively for the relatives of people persecuted by the Nazis in order to return these items. The number of objects returned more than doubled compared to 2015. In 2016, the ITS was able to return keepsakes to 35 families.

Anna Meier-Osiński, Head of the Tracing Investigations into Nazi Victims Branch, explained: “We check to see whether, in addition to personal effects, the ITS also holds documents with potentially helpful clues about these former victims of persecution. Around 500 people came from Germany. In these cases, we’ve started with an external search in places such as registry offices. We’ve also talked with our partners in Poland, who are now spreading the word about the collection of around 600 Polish personal effects. And we’ve begun searching for family members in Poland as well.”



The personal effects of Josef Andreas Baier, who was imprisoned in Dachau concentration camp

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***„o date I've found four families. Sometimes it takes me several days to conduct the research; in the case of Johannes Berens, it took several months (see pp. 66-67). My most recent search had to do with two young policemen. I found out that the Nazis arrested many policemen in the Netherlands. A great number of them died in the Neuengamme concentration camp and its satellite camps. The discovery of the personal effects has sparked new interest in their fate.“***



Ever since he saw a feature about the ITS Online Archive and its personal effects on Dutch television in 2015, Erik Dijkstra has been helping return items to family members.

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## documentED – Learning packages for trips to memorials

Connecting the history of Nazi persecution to the lives of pupils today – this is the idea behind a new pilot project known as documentED, which the ITS is developing in cooperation with concentration camp memorials and organizers who arrange trips to memorials. In the context of the project, groups of pupils visiting concentration camp memorials are given learning packages from the ITS. These consist of three components: documents from the ITS archive that are especially suited to preparing for and following up on a trip to a memorial, relevant content from the new e-Guide of the ITS, and didactic suggestions and questions for discussion. The key feature is that the ITS will tailor each package to the particular group of pupils. “We can do this thanks to the many individual files we have, which we can filter relatively precisely using our metadata,” says ITS employee Christian Höschler. “This offers tremendous potential for preparing for and following up on such trips.”



documentED is a new ITS service developed and tested in 2017: School groups visiting concentration camp memorials receive prepared learning packages

The relevant criteria include the pupils’ existing knowledge, the defined learning goals, and the time available for advance preparation and follow-up as well as for the visit itself. In order to literally meet the learners where they are, the ITS selects files about very specific people. “We can often supply material with a local connection, which is a truly unique selling point,” Höschler explains. This means the pupils can receive documents (such as prisoner registration cards or questionnaires) about concentration camp prisoners who originally came from their own hometown. They may even know the apartment building or street on which the victims once lived. This proximity generates interest and makes the topic more accessible. “Hearing that millions of people were murdered is terrible, but it is also abstract,” Höschler says. “We reach the pupils by sharing specific individual stories and combining this with learning goals focusing on the more structural history of Nazi persecution.”

The individual stories are important, but they must be the starting point for further insights. “The material leads from the individual to a wider context,” Höschler explains. “Stories about individual persecution lead to questions about the reasons for arrest, the way the concentration camps worked and the structure of the Nazi system of terror.” The ITS wants to standardize the structure of the learning packages. This will make it possible to quickly put together individualized packages.

In 2017 there was an initial test run with the Max Mannheimer Study Center in Dachau, a partner to the ITS, followed by a workshop for experts. The second test phase is now under way with several other concentration camp memorials. “This service supplements the educational program of the memorials and meets their demands,” Höschler says. The focus is on closer connections to the work of the memorials and mutual support. The service is therefore attractive to both the partners and the users alike. “We have to continually make our cultural heritage visible from other perspectives by offering innovative services,” Höschler says. “This is part of our educational mission.”

## The ITS Yearbook 2017: The effects of Nazi persecution on children and young people

The ITS Yearbook 2017 is dedicated to exploring the fates of children and adolescents who survived Nazi persecution and forced labor. After the end of the Nazi dictatorship, these children and young people were displaced persons (DPs) who initially had to search for surviving family members. They needed new life prospects and, in many cases, a new home. This yearbook offers insights into the lasting effects of the Holocaust, Nazi persecution and forced labor, and it describes the work of Allied aid organizations after 1945. Many of the essays are based on research in this field carried out in the document collections of the ITS. Some of the essays offer suggestions for historical-political educational work on the topic of DPs.

Examining the social and political challenges after the end of World War II has gained new relevance in light of current migration movements and large numbers of unaccompanied, underage refugees. The contributions in the yearbook document the international scholarly conference that was held from May 30 to June 1, 2016, at the Max Mannheimer Study Center in Dachau.



Cover ITS Yearbook 2017

The Yearbook 2017 was published in English and is also available as an e-book. [More info](#)

Yearbook 2017: Freilegungen

Rebuilding Lives – Child Survivors and DP Children in the Aftermath of the Holocaust and Forced Labor

Edited by Henning Borggräfe, Akim Jah, Nina Ritz and Steffen Jost

Göttingen: Wallstein 2017

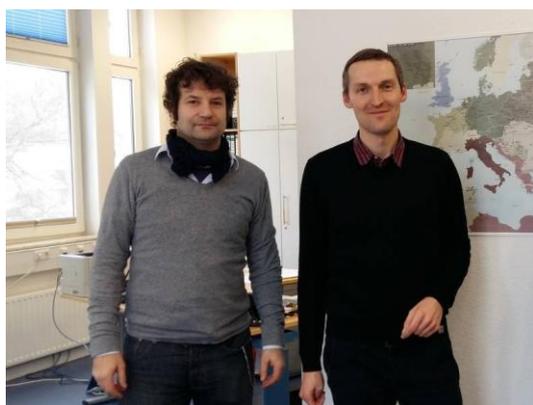
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***„Both the workshop and the current publication highlight that the theme of displaced persons has yet to be explored, both in education work and in research.“***

Nina Ritz, Head of the Max Mannheimer Study Center



## Circus people: different fates



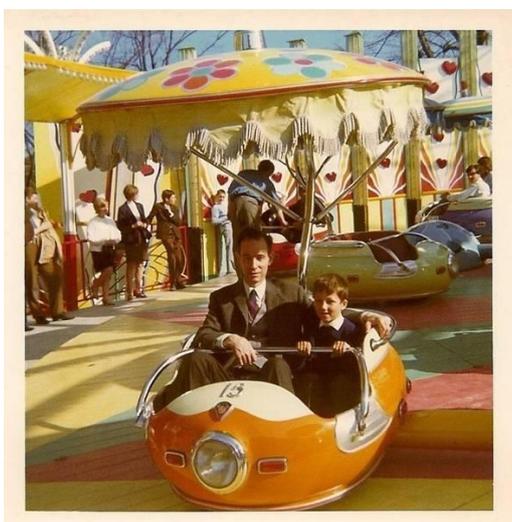
Travelling circus people during the Nazi era are the focus of a European research project which brought project director Malte Gasche (University of Helsinki) to the ITS. “We know so little about travelling circus folk because they have no lobby and there are no written sources,” he explained. The propaganda ministry supported circus performances as a non-political form of entertainment that could be used to showcase strength, but also – by way of wild animal acts – discipline and order. On the other hand, there were many Sinti, Roma and Yenish people in the circus, and there were also Jewish circus owners. Some were suspected of espionage because they crossed national borders. But circuses also offered advantages to some people, as individual biographies show. “Victims of persecution managed to hide in circuses and survive. The fates were very different,” said Gasche, who received tips and valuable contacts at the ITS and wants to exhibit his findings in Bad Arolsen. (Project director Malte Gasche of the Centre for Nordic Studies, University of Helsinki and Henning Borggräfe, ITS Head of Research and Education. Photo: ITS)

## Two tables covered with documents



The documents about Matthew Steinhart's family in the ITS archive covered two tables. Again and again, the American picked up an envelope addressed in his great-grandmother's handwriting – the last letter she sent before her deportation to death. "It makes a difference to see the originals," said the filmmaker, who came to the ITS to shoot footage for his film about the fate of his family during the Nazi period. His grandparents both came from Hessen and had fled to the USA independently of one another in 1939. They met, married and had a child: Steinhart's mother, who had always tried to find out more about her murdered relatives. "I'm glad I can do this research for her," Steinhart said. "It's overwhelming to see all these documents here. These are people from my family, a part of my identity, my roots." He wants to round off the search for his roots by applying for German citizenship – nearly 80 after the Nazis robbed his grandparents of theirs. (Filmmaker Matthew Steinhart looking into the documents. Photo: ITS)

## The only three documents



Nothing about the life of René Manu's father from before or during the Shoah had been left. The Nazis had deported Daniel Manu from Thessaloniki to Auschwitz-Birkenau, and he was the only one from his family to survive. When his son first contacted the ITS in 1998, all he received was an overview of his father's path of persecution and of hospital stays after his liberation. This makes the three copies of documents from his father's concentration camp imprisonment, which he has now been given by the ITS, all the more important: excerpts from the arrivals lists and X-ray diagnosis book of Auschwitz and from the number book from Flossenbürg concentration camp. "These are the only three documents of his entire life prior to his liberation," Manu said. It makes an enormous emotional difference to him to learn about the Shoah from books and films, exhibitions and memorials – or to hold original documents in his hands. "It has a very different intensity. History suddenly moves closer, becomes visible, tangible, direct, intimate, personal." (Daniel Manu with his son René in the 1960s. Photo: Private)

## Finally discovering the reason



When Aart Quak visited the ITS, he already had manuscripts from his father about his concentration camp imprisonment and forced labor. But one question remained: why had the Nazis arrested him? The documents in the archive showed that the house painter had been deported to Buchenwald in 1944 – and there was an additional comment: “Political, Rückfluter [returning flood] campaign.” This meant that he had either refused to carry out forced labor or had fled. Finally, his son knew the reason. “It’s good to see the original documents with my father’s signature,” Quak said. “It’s very emotional.” His father had been taken from the Buchenwald main camp to the Tröglitz satellite camp for forced labor. Later on he had to work in terrible conditions in the caverns of the underground armaments plant near Kahla. In 1945 he escaped and was given food and a place to hide by a widow with a young daughter. The widow gave him her husband’s bicycle, and he made the 700-kilometer journey back to Maassluis. In 1966 he was reunited with the woman who saved him. Quak wants to type out his father’s notes, some of which are difficult to decipher, so this story is preserved for future generations. (Aart Quak looked at the original documents for his father in the ITS archive. Photo: ITS)

## Village by village, day by day



Patrick Vereecke cannot say exactly what drives him. “I just know that I have to do it,” said the Belgian, who is searching for traces of his grandfather. He has studied documents about his persecution at the ITS and has contacted witnesses. The SS deported the resistance fighter from his hometown of Rièzes in Belgium. He never returned. The last trace of him is a postcard from a former fellow prisoner, which was sent to his wife shortly before the end of the war. It said that he had last been seen on April 25, 1945, eleven kilometers north of Wittstock. “I try to reconstruct the death march village by village, day by day,” his grandson said. At that time, the SS had herded 16,000 prisoners together near Wittstock, many of whom were weakened from their ordeal in the concentration camps and died of starvation. The resistance fighter left behind a wife and four children. “I want to preserve his memory,” his grandson said. He is grateful to the ITS. “I’ve realized what an open institution the ITS is today. That’s tremendously important.” Now he plans to visit the sites of his grandfather’s persecution and follow the route of the death march. (Patrick Vereecke with Nathalie Letierce-Liebig. Photo: ITS)

## A birthday visit



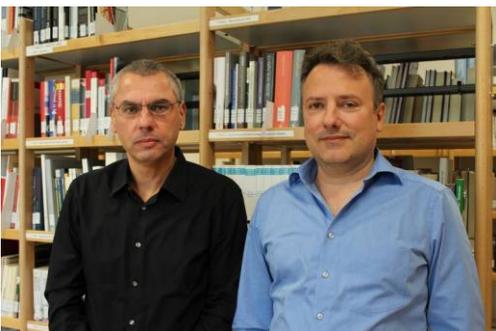
Jozef Maria Van Hees was 31 years old when the Nazis arrested him in Merksplas in Belgium for supporting the resistance. They deported him to Neuengamme concentration camp, where he died a few months later. "I was twelve when my uncle was arrested," said his nephew Robert Van Hees. All of the men in the village had been ordered to stay in their houses as the Feldgendarmes took residents away. I was told to run and warn my uncle, but it was too late. On the way, a neighbor stopped me and told me Jozef and his brother Albert had already been arrested." Jozef never returned. On Robert Van Hees's 85th birthday – April 3, which was also his uncle's birthday – he finally visited the ITS. He and his sons viewed original documents, such as his uncle's death certificate. They had known when and where Jozef Maria died, but after reading in the newspaper about the ITS returning personal effects, they decided to visit the ITS on his birthday as a way of commemorating him. (The Van Hees family, Paul, Robert and Koen Van Hees visited the ITS. Photo: ITS)

## Survival in banishment



Shoshana Berman survived Hitler and Stalin. Now the 83-year-old Israeli is writing her autobiography – and she visited the ITS for information. "I couldn't remember the exact dates when I was in the DP camps, so this is very helpful," she said. She and parts of her family were deported from Poland and Belarus to Siberia. She was particularly fascinated by a list of Jewish refugees in Siberia. "The names, the ages, the address... everything's correct. I never had any trace of this period before. Only one tiny photograph." The time in Siberia was hard, the living conditions miserable. When the family was finally able to return to Poland in 1946, pogroms forced them to flee again and torn them apart. The ITS archive even has documents about this. "I'm really grateful for that," said Berman. After fleeing, she and her sister were reunited with their aunt and parents, and they reached Israel in 1949. "From then it was keep on living and don't look back," she explained. "But we want to share our experiences with the younger generations." (Shoshana Berman research her life story - she also find hints at ITS. Photo: ITS)

## „No one has ever worked with them before“



Stratos Dordanas (University of Macedonia) and Vaios Kalogrias (University of Mainz) visited the ITS to research Nazi concentration camps in Greece. The camps near Athens and in Thessaloniki and the transit camp in Laria are the focus of a project being carried out through Aristotle University of Thessaloniki and sponsored by the German Federal Foreign Office. The historians found a lot of surprising material in the archive, including court-martial files from the time of the German occupation, which included judgments passed on communist rebels. In the American and British military records, they also encountered information about collaborators who had fled from Greece in 1944 together with the occupiers. "We didn't know these documents existed. No one has ever worked with them before," Stratos Dordanas explained. Although this information is not directly connected to the Greek concentration camps, references to these collections will be published on the website planned for the project. (For Stratos Dordanas and Vaios Kalogrias, research at the ITS archive paid off. Photo: ITS)

## 5. Increasing visibility - Showing who the ITS is

The ITS has used the past months to illuminate its history and redefine its image on this basis. "2017 was an important year in the development of our values, identity and public presentation," says Director Floriane Hohenberg. Today the ITS is open to all interested individuals and connected to partner institutions. It is increasingly becoming a service provider and generator of ideas. This role should be immediately apparent in how the ITS presents itself in the future. The new archive building will play an important part in this. But there are big changes on the horizon in terms of our external image as well. The new internet platform planned for 2018 is just one of many different components in this unified, honed profile. Preparations are already under way.



New ways to appeal to young generations: ITS is on its way to becoming a provider of ideas and services.

The ten-year anniversary of the opening of the archive was an opportunity to draw more attention to the documents and services of the ITS. Ever since the archive opened, education and research have become key tasks of the ITS, and central projects have included the development of the database, which began when the archive opened, and the description of the collection. But Hohenberg stresses that this alone is not enough: "Our target group has changed. We now have generations with no direct connection to Nazi persecution, so the interest of the general public is becoming more important to us." Hohenberg wants to continue the core activities of the ITS while simultaneously motivating younger people to take an interest in the fates of people persecuted by the Nazis. This is especially critical today, since the ITS is playing a larger role in democratic dialog in society: "In Europe there is so much hate and populism in connection with migration – so the ITS has to build a bridge between the past and the future." New services and the release of documents for cultural projects and memorials will help with this.

One of these new bridges will be the permanent exhibition that the ITS is developing to present its own history. From 2019, this will be the first port of call for all visitors. This thematically structured exhibition will explain the operation of the ITS and its relationship with the general public – against the backdrop of the fates of individuals, who are always the focal point. It will also answer the questions that people have when they first contact the ITS: Why is the ITS based in Bad Arolsen? Why was the institution unknown in this way for so long? In the fall of 2018, an international academic conference will be held as a kick-off – exactly 70 years after the newly founded ITS first invited the tracing offices of various European countries to Arolsen. The conference presentations will be published in a book to accompany the exhibition.

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***„The forthcoming exhibition will help portray us as an open institution. And for the first time, we are critically and publicly addressing our own history!“***

ITS Director Floriane Hohenberg

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## First glimpse of the forthcoming ITS permanent exhibition

Isabel Panek, Henning Borggräfe and Christian Höschler – advised by an expert team of experienced curators – are developing the first permanent exhibition on the past and present of the ITS, which will open in 2019. In this interview, they explain the focal points of the exhibition and the challenges they face.

*What topics will the exhibition focus on?*

Borggräfe: First, the wide-ranging search for missing persons and documents, which was initiated by the survivors of Nazi persecution and the Allies – all the way to the foundation of the ITS. Then we will outline the changes in search technologies and tracing, all the way to the inquiries we receive today. Our third focal point is the archive itself. Another focus will be on the relationship between the ITS and the public.

*So you are not just going to display the most important artifacts in your collection?*

Panek: No, and that's what makes this exhibition special.

We're going to illuminate and critically examine the way the ITS works. The exhibition will revolve around the creation of the specific historical ITS archive and the complexity of the workflows, which may initially seem boring to a lot of people. So we have to visualize them well. We're working with the gewerkdesign agency to design stations which combine documents and animations within the three thematic areas.

*What kind of documents and exhibits will be displayed?*

Höschler: We're making facsimiles of documents and photos from the ITS collection and from some other archives. We'll display extensive transport lists as stacks of paper, for example, to show their dimensions. The central exhibit on the back wall of the room will be the historical cartons of the Central Name Index – the key to the archive.

Borggräfe: Even this 15-meter-long wall will only have space for, at most, one sixth of the 30,000 cartons.

Panek: Of course, space will also be dedicated to the fates of some of the 17.5 million people about whom the ITS has information. For example, we are putting together photos and biographical documents – about stories of persecution, but also about people's lives before and after. In this way, visitors will also learn about the consequences of the Nazis' crimes for these people.

*What is the spatial plan for the exhibition?*

Panek: The exhibition room is in an old department store on Schlosstrasse with big windows. We can design window displays to give passers-by a glimpse of the exhibition and entice them to come inside – a nice way of depicting the openness of the ITS today.

Borggräfe: ...and how the ITS is changing – because even though this is a permanent exhibition, it is also provisional until it moves into the new archive building.



Workshop of the ITS exhibition team with Rikola-Gunnar Lüttgenau from the Buchenwald Memorial as curatorial advisor and gewerkdesign as designers. Photo: gewerkdesign

## Alexandr Afanasjew at the ITS

In its press and public relations work, the ITS places value in drawing attention to the personal fates of the victims of Nazi persecution. In 2017, a special encounter took place with a witness. Commemoration and recognition are what brought the former POW and concentration camp prisoner Alexandr Afanasyev to Germany. The 94-year-old visited the ITS with his daughter and granddaughter to see the original documents that bear witness to his persecution. Information from the ITS had enabled him to apply for symbolic recognition as a prisoner of war.

Alexandr Afanasyev consented to have the ITS invite journalists to the encounter. He told his story in detail to them.

“It’s better to remember good things than bad. More joy remains,” said Alexandr Afanasyev, a former Soviet soldier who was taken as a prisoner of war by the Germans in 1941 at the age of nineteen. The first thing he talked about were the people who helped him – the people who slipped him bread after days of hunger, or who treated him with respect in the POW camps. Even after such a long time, his German was impressive. He had learned the language at school, and this may have saved his life in the camps, because translators were always in demand.

In January 1944, a failed attempt to escape from a POW camp in Ukraine landed him first in the Hagen police prison and then, in August 1944, in Buchenwald concentration camp. He suffered terribly performing heavy labor in the dreaded Ellrich-Juliushütte satellite camp. “We were allowed to sleep for only four hours, on the ground, without pillows. We were left standing in the cold for hours at a time. All just to make the work even harder for the inmates.” He fell seriously ill, was admitted to the infirmary at the Mittelbau concentration camp, and in early April he was sent to Bergen-Belsen, where he was liberated. After being taken to the Soviet zone with other Russian prisoners, he finally returned home in November 1946.

Alexandr Afanasyev became a woodcut artist and painter, and he has published around 40 books. His decision to come to Germany after so many years was a spontaneous one. With his daughter’s help, he had started searching in Russian archives for proof of his imprisonment. He needed documents to apply for the symbolic recognition that the German Bundestag had agreed to in 2015. Former Soviet POWs still alive today can receive a one-time payment of 2,500 euros for the torment they suffered under the Nazi dictatorship.

Alexandr Afanasyev’s search for documents in Moscow was fruitless, but then someone told him about the ITS. He sent a request and received copies of all records documenting his persecution, including the important testimony to his detention as a prisoner of war. Deeply moved by the fact that the ITS keeps these documents in its archive, he emphasized the importance of this collection: “These documents are ever more valuable. They are memory.”

Alexandr Afanasyev’s application for compensation was approved. “It’s not the money that matters to me,” he stressed. The recognition was far more important. He wants to use the 2,500 euros to publish his book of drawings about his years in custody.



Russian prisoner of war and concentration camp inmate Alexandr Afanasiev, daughter Elizavetta and granddaughter Polina look at his documents from the Buchenwald concentration camp at ITS.

## 6. Facts and Figures

### General Information

The ITS is funded by:



Die Beauftragte der Bundesregierung  
für Kultur und Medien

Chair of the  
International  
Commission

until June 15, 2017

Dr. Paul Dostert for Luxembourg

until June 6, 2018

Pieter Jan Wolthers for the  
Netherlands

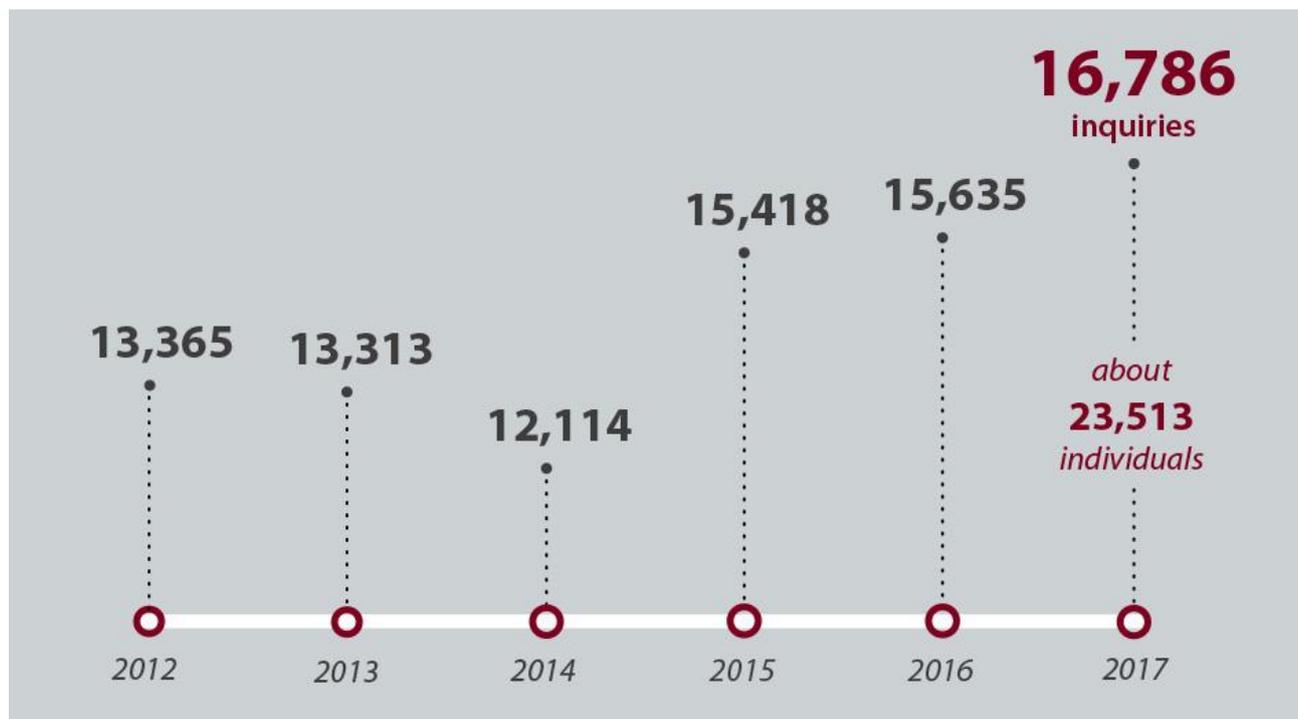
**14,150,000 €**

Budget 2017

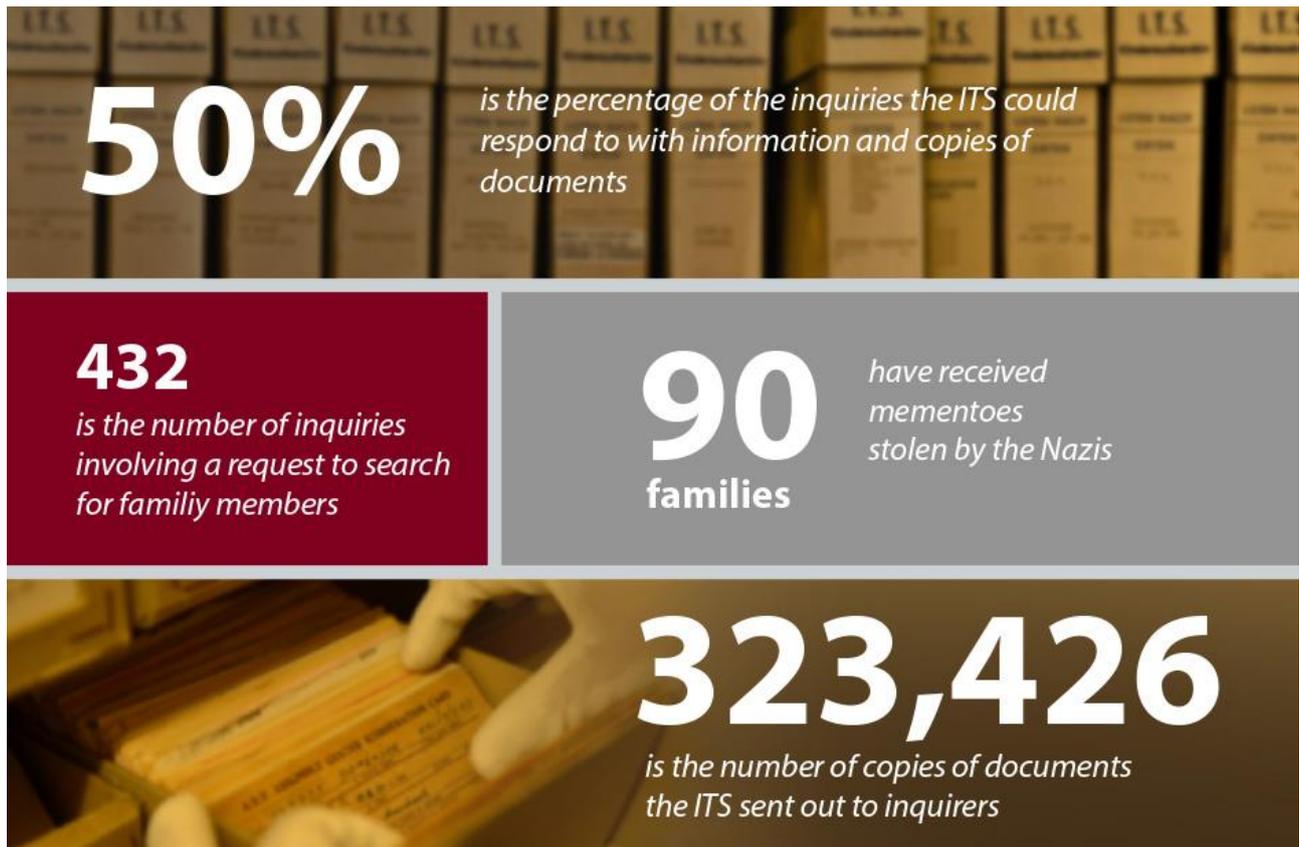
**Director**

Floriane Hohenberg

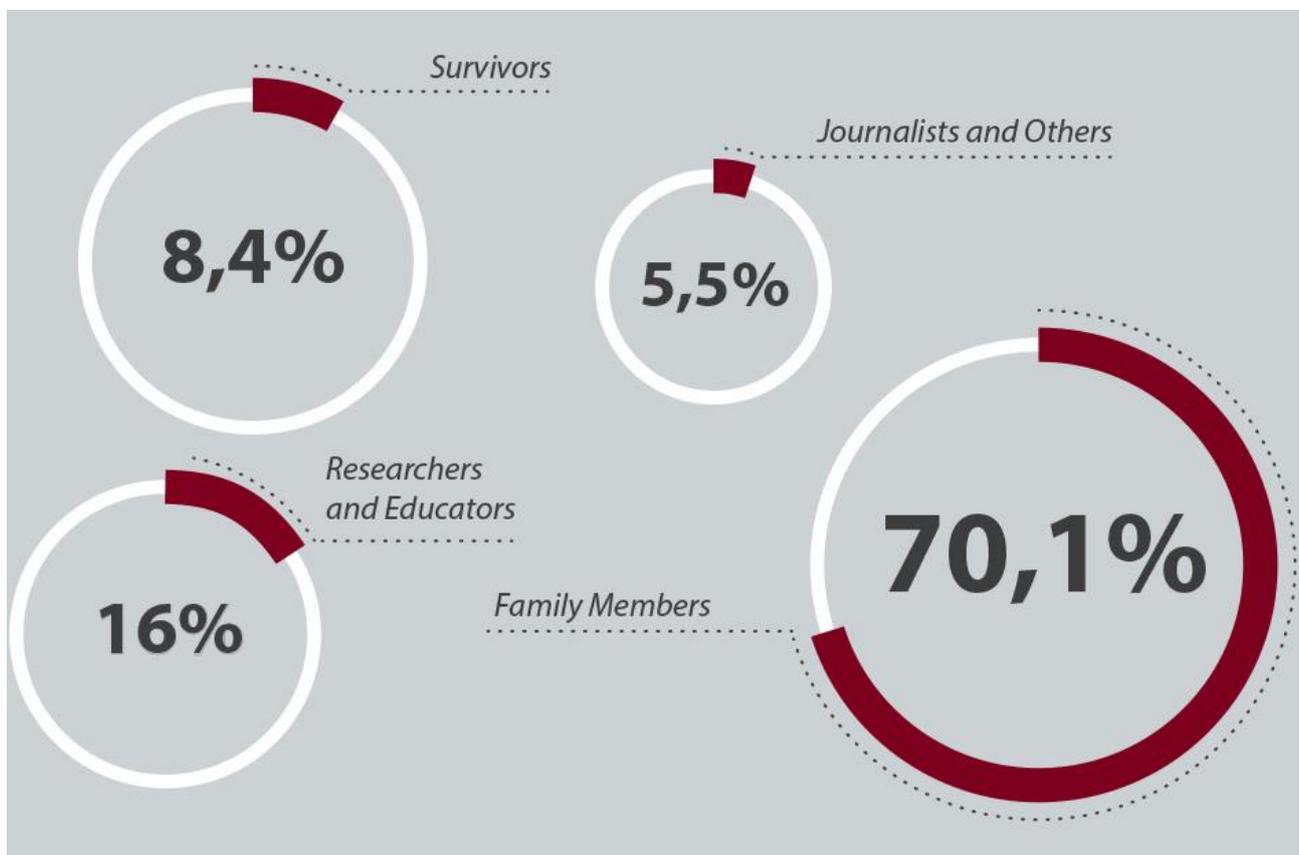
### Numbers of Inquiries since 2012



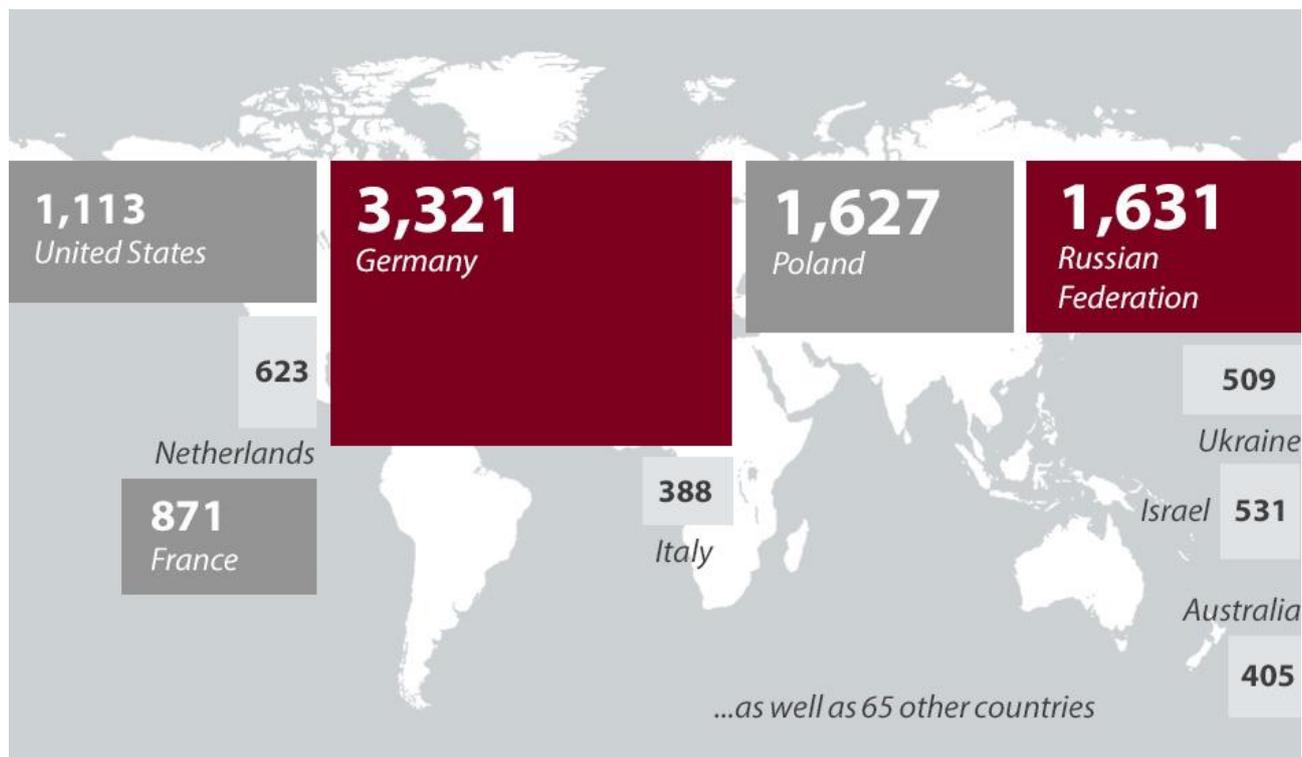
## Figures 2017



How were the answers from the ITS distributed among different inquirer types in 2017?



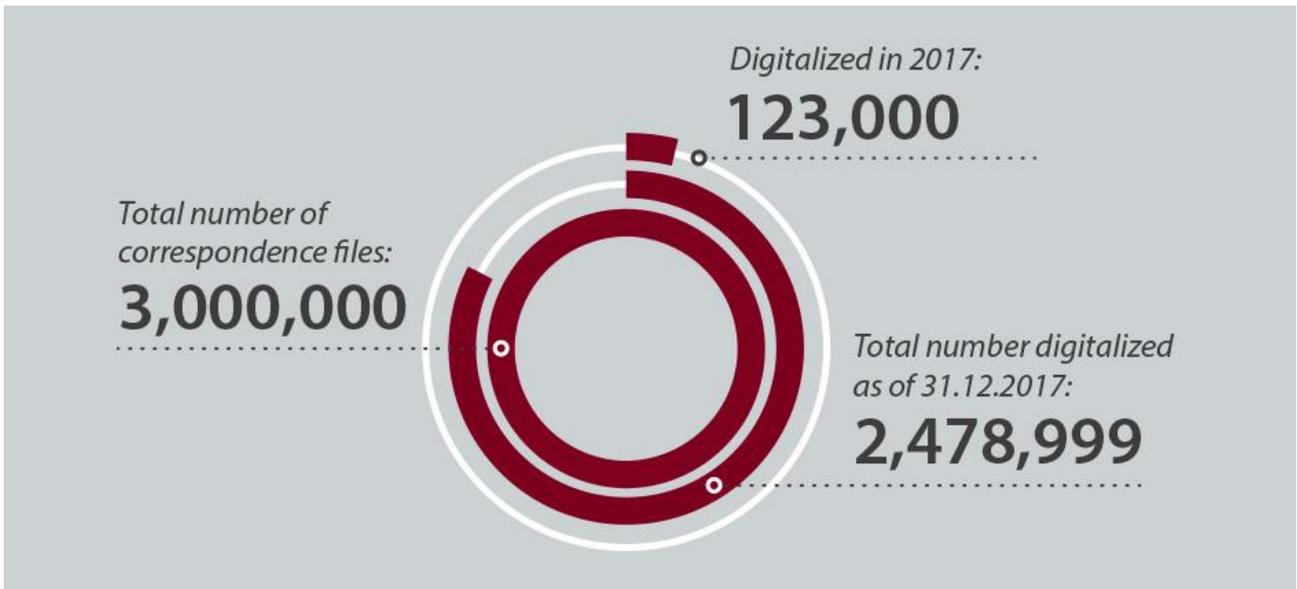
The ITS sent the most information to inquirers in the following ten countries in 2017:



## Visits 2017



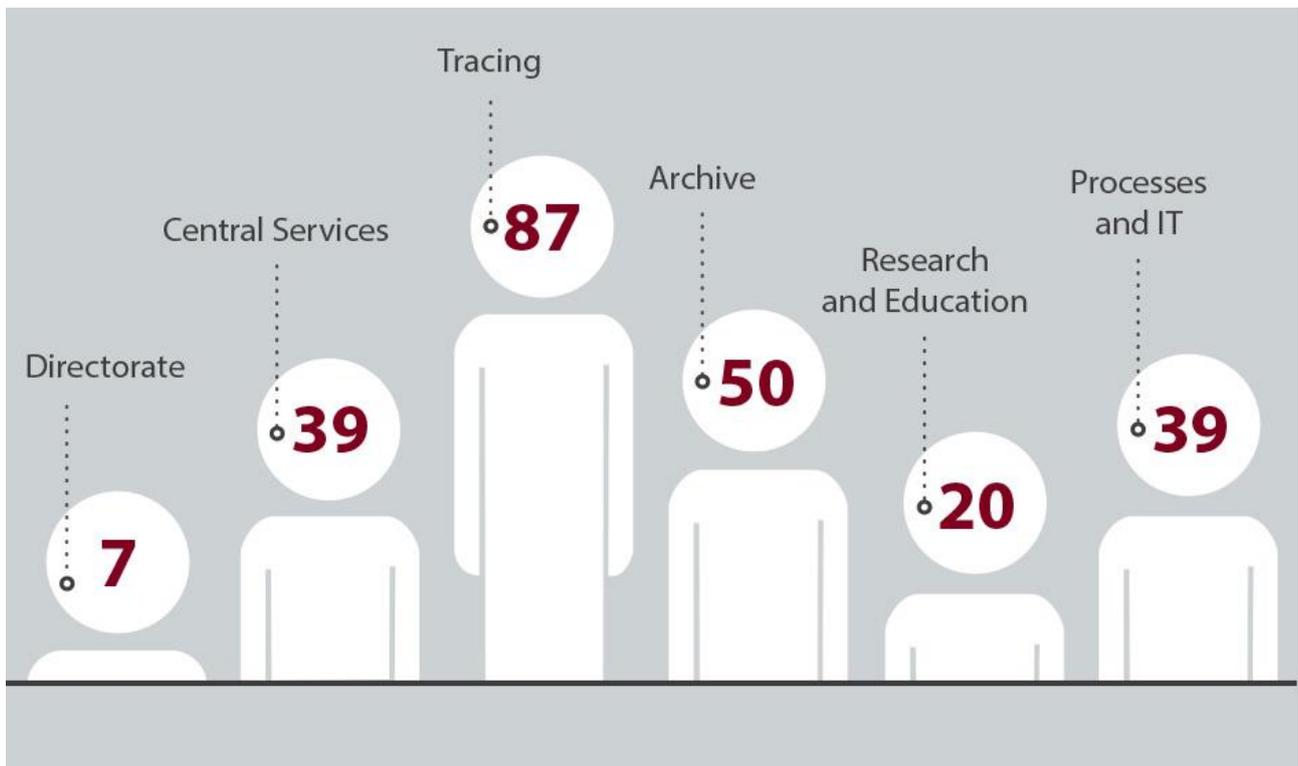
Digitization of the correspondence files



**ITS Archive Facts and Figures**



**ITS Staff Members by Department (Status as of January 1, 2018)**



## International Commission and Partner Institutions

# International Commission

- Belgium**
- France**
- Federal Republic of Germany**
- Greece**
- Israel**
- Italy**
- Luxembourg**
- Netherlands**
- Poland**
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