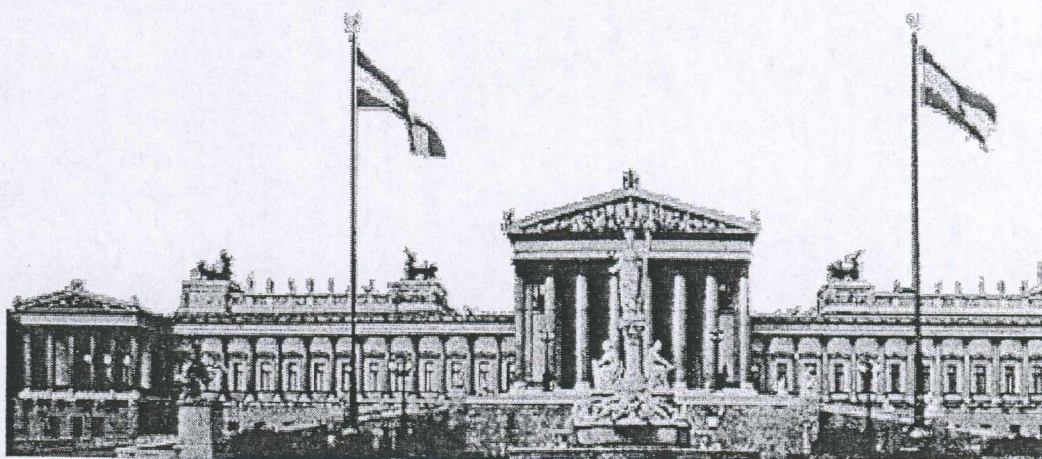




The National Fund of the Republic of Au for the victims of National Socialism



- TASKS
- LAWS
- LINKS
- CONTACT
- HOME
- GERMAN





The National Fund of the Republic of Austria

for the victims of National Socialism

[TASKS](#)[LAWS](#)[LINKS](#)[CONTACT](#)[HOME](#)[GERMAN](#)

Our work in the Past, Present and Future

**"To help in the quickest, most flexible and
unbureaucratic manner possible".**

**This has been the National Fund's motto to date and
will stay our motto
as long as it is possible.**

The Fund was first established on the 1st of June 1995, when the second house of parliament (the Nationalrat) adopted the Federal Law on the National Fund of the Republic of Austria for Victims of National Socialism. Not least due to ex-Chancellor Dr. Franz Vranitzky who declared during parliamentary sessions that Austrians were not only victims of National Socialism but were also active collaborators of Hitler's regime. On April 27, 1995, during the 50th anniversary of the Second Republic the idea began to take root. The report of the Constitutional Committee read: "The immeasurable agony that millions of people had to suffer should never be forgotten, nor the fact that Austrians took part in these crimes".

Quoting Dr. Heinz Fischer, President of the national assembly: *"The establishment of the National Fund should represent the recognition of our moral joint responsibility and the wrong inflicted on humanity in Austria by Nazism, and recognise that special help should be given to the victims, recognising the fact however, that the suffering can in no way be "repaired"*.

In order to make payments as unbureaucratic and flexible as possible, it was necessary to strike the implementation of opportunities for legal claims to those payments. Such a law would require circumstances and facts which then would have to be proven in an administrative court of law which would backlog all the claims, and create the very same bureaucratic system the founders of the Fund did not want.





The National Fund of the Republic of Austria

for the victims of National Socialism



TASKS

LAWS

LINKS

CONTACT

HOME

GERMAN

1. The Fund makes payments to people who were victims of Nazism for the following reasons:

- a) Political opinion, religion, race, nationality, sexual orientation, physical or mental handicap or reproach of so-called asociality; or
- b) other victims of typical Nazi-injustice; or
- c) persons who were forced to leave the country in order to escape persecution.

2. These persons have to comply with further pre-requisites:

- a) They had to be of Austrian nationality as of march 13th, 1938 and to have had domicile in Austria; or
- b) continuous domicile in Austria for about 10 years before march 13th, 1938 or born as a child of such persons in Austria;
- c) loss of Austrian nationality and at least ten-year-domicile before march 13th, 1938 because the country was left on account of the imminent invasion of the German Wehrmacht; or
- d) persons who were born before May 9th, 1945 in a concentration camp or under comparable circumstances i.e. ghetto, internment camp or under similar circumstances.

The National Fund is made up of three bodies. The first consists of the Kuratorium which holds 21 members, presided by Dr. Heinz Fischer the president of the National Assembly. Additional members include the 2nd and 3rd National Assembly presidents, the Chancellor, the vice-chancellor, the Foreign Minister, members of Parliament and other well respected individuals of the public, cultural and scientific spheres and representatives of the affected victims.

The second body is made up of 5 members run by Dr. Heinz Fischer, who presides over the deciding committee. The third part consists of the Secretary General's Office headed by Mag.

Hannah M. Lessing. It has 8 full-time employees, and 5 work/study-students.

Quoting Dr. Heinz Fischer, President of the National Assembly: "*In short, it is clear to me that the suffering and injustice that National Socialism guaranteed in our land cannot be satisfied by money. The National Fund should thus, represent a gesture, for people who were expelled from Austria, or who suffered in Austria to show that we are still thinking of them; that they have not been forgotten and that there is a will to rebuild their ties to their former country. On its fiftieth anniversary the Second Republic stretches a hand out to those who were ejected from their home, from which idyllic gesture a material payment will be completed.*

For me it is always moving to see with what emotion and solidarity people react when they return to visit the land from which they were forsaken. Fifty years hence Austria has become a developed and respected democracy at the heart of Europe. This country wishes, that with the establishment of the National Fund, people that are today spread out across the earth will feel that they once again belong to us."

The hundreds of positive responses the Fund has received are convincing evidence that the National Fund has been successful in its aims and purposes. An example of a letter written states that: "Aside from the financial side, I would like to thank you for expressing your compassion. It feels like a healing balm on old wounds. I have loved my hometown, the Alps and also the people, now I don't have to be ashamed of this love anymore."

To date an estimated total of 27,000 individuals have been paid out by the Fund and incorporated into its databanks. We are well aware however, that behind these dry statistics lies the fate of as many lives. The youngest living victim of Nazism in our computers is 55 years old. The oldest was a 105 year old man living in Sweden. The individuals who are presently registered in our databanks are spread out across 30 different countries.

A set of three dark rectangular buttons with light-colored text and small arrows. The first button is labeled 'BACK' with a left-pointing arrow. The second button is labeled 'UP' with an upward-pointing arrow. The third button is labeled 'FORWARD' with a right-pointing arrow.

BACK

UP

FORWARD



The National Fund of the Republic of Austria for the victims of National Socialism

[TASKS](#)[LAWS](#)[LINKS](#)[CONTACT](#)[HOME](#)[GERMANY](#)

Our offices which lie close to Parliament give people who are still in Austria, or visiting Vienna from abroad the opportunity to visit with us, and fill out the application with help from our staff who are able to provide them with relevant information. For people further away we also try to fulfill as many requests as possible. If someone for example, is unable to fill in the questionnaire we send representatives or individual volunteers from various organisations to their homes.

The individual stands at the forefront for us: the person who has suffered, the person who was driven from his home, the person who was unable, by any means, to continue his lifestyle as he or his parents had planned it for him. The person who escaped the hell of the concentration camps, the person who lost all his loved ones, and those who defined their very existence by living in this inferno. Those who had to leave their homeland, their roots, their city, and everything dear to them in order to travel to a destination where everything was unknown, and where they had to start their whole life over again.

It is these people we are trying to reach, through our letters, through personal meetings and visits to our office in Vienna, through information evenings set up by the Secretary General in many countries in which survivors live today. Since November 1995 approximately 8,000 people have already visited us in Vienna.

We have often encountered people who under the pressure of a thousand repressed thoughts, talk with us and cry. Some of them for the first time in 50 years. We see people who never wanted to deal directly with the authorities, but after visiting our office in Vienna, tell friends and family "that its a place you can go to, there are women (our office is comprised mainly of women) who understand, who care about your troubles and desires."

The National Fund pays out a symbolic amount to certain individuals who were persecuted in Austria during World War II. The amount is not calculated according to a persons circumstances, and it is not by any means supposed to compensate individuals who have had to suffer personal losses, and have been forcibly uprooted from their country of origin, and their homes. Such injuries are irreparable whether through economic substitutes or otherwise.

Furthermore, the payment is not a form of reparations. It is merely a symbolic gesture on the part of The Austrian Republic, in recognition of its active role in persecuting a great number of its citizens, and in memory of the terrible tribulations they have had to suffer.





The National Fund of the Republic of Austria

for the victims of National Socialism

[TASKS](#)[LAWS](#)[LINKS](#)[CONTACT](#)[HOME](#)[GERMAN](#)

According to the new laws, a person may not apply unless the applicant has Power of Attorney over a particular person. Otherwise an individual can only make an application **on a personal basis**. An award may only be passed on to the heirs therefore, if the applicant has sent in all the relevant documents duly signed and completed, he or she has been accepted, and has passed away before the money has been sent. Unfortunately we are not in a position to consider applications made on behalf of individuals that have already passed away.

The laws were changed due to the backlogging of a lot of our applications. This was inevitable as our staff was originally unable to keep up with the large amounts of applications flooding the office. Our staff therefore initiated a system of priorities described above. It was inevitable however that some individuals passed away before we could reach them. A common criticism therefore, was that the Fund was waiting for people to pass away so that it would not have to make out any payments. We thus amended the laws so that in instances where we had all the documentation, and where we failed to reach the victim, the money would be released to the heirs.

Over the past few months the Holocaust and the aftermath of World War II have been discussed in many European countries, the processes of which have raised numerous questions.

As a result of the course of discussions over the tragic events of the past, the Austrian Republic is endeavouring to deal with the injustices incurred during the Nazi-era in the most objective manner possible. Thus, the following measures have been taken. The National Fund has initiated an Information service on this topic (please revert to "Information").

Due to the positive responses we have had, and the good relations the National Fund has with all the individuals

concerned, we have taken on the responsibility of answering questions surrounding this topic. As for example on questions of artwork, pensions, citizenship, or connections to lost family members who may be in our files. In cases where we are not able to help directly, we relay information or queries to the competent authorities.





The National Fund of the Republic of Austria

for the victims of National Socialism



TASKS

LAWS

LINKS

CONTACT

HOME

GERMAN

The "younger-generation victims" and their descendants will expect that further steps will be taken by the Austrian Republic that will prove that its goodwill will not simply remain rhetoric but be transformed into active practice.

On the other hand, the victims who were personally affected are not satisfied with the steps presently being taken. People such as Simon Wiesenthal or Leon Zelman come forward with their sorrow and disillusion, and express their dissatisfaction in that all their suffering and pain has been, and is being reduced to the cold substance of money.

If you have an opinion which you would like to share with us we would be pleased if you could send us an [email](#) !

A journalist in a leading article of the Zürcher-Zeitung wrote that "the key to redemption lies in remembrance". Eli Wiesel mentioned in his opening speech to the Washington Holocaust conference "memory is our fortune, our only fortune – what pays in the end are not collections of art and banknotes, but the remembrance of the victims". Jean Amery stated it in the following way: *"If we do not succeed in keeping the memory of the holocaust alive, the past will rise again and become our new reality"*.

At this point we would like to note that as long as we can still take care of people that have been put through hell, that today live in abject poverty, are ill or alone, either in a far-off land or here among us, and are barely managing to scrape a living, the question of money will obviously not be ignored. We will strive to give these people at the least, a more deserving life in their twilight years.

Beyond that, and in answer to a majority of the victim's wishes and requests, the National Fund wants to install and provide a system of learning in schools in order to teach and remind the

students of all the horrors of that time. That is, to approach our youth and help them perceive these atrocities in order to ensure that nothing like this can ever happen again. To quote a lady that wrote to us: "*Those who do not learn from history are condemned to live through it again*".





The National Fund of the Republic of Austria

for the victims of National Socialism

[TASKS](#)[LAWS](#)[LINKS](#)[CONTACT](#)[HOME](#)[GERMANY](#)

Our main wish is to re-build a connection to these individuals and their homeland. We do recognise that it does not redeem Austria's sordid role during the War, but nevertheless, the people that had to suffer under Nazi persecution must never be forgotten. In this way we hope to do justice to the remaining survivors, and pay tribute to the individuals that we are no longer able to reach.

" We do however recognise the fact that this Fund has been very late in being established and that many applicants are very old. We therefore endeavoured to handle priority cases as quickly as possible and set up a system of priority through age, serious health problems or dire social need." - The Secretary General, Mag. Lessing.

In addition, the General Secretary has tried through trips to various countries, to initiate more interest and applications for the Fund. So far these countries have included Israel, the USA, Australia, France and the UK. The reactions have generally been positive, with statements such as: "Your presentation has given me hope in that there are still people in this world who have not forgotten. Hope also for the next generations, that something like that will never again happen".

Part of the reason for the General Secretary's speeches abroad are to try to change peoples mixed feelings about their home country. During a lecture at the New York Public Library in New York the Secretary General overheard the following conversation:

- "- Are you going to the Lecture at the Auditorium?
- Yes. Are you Austrian too?
- Yes, unfortunately!!!"

The engagement and dedication of the staff who make up the National Fund remains undeterred. The same holds true of the Committee and the Kuratorium who have decided on a change of policy regarding the laws on heirs. Due to miscommunication and the inevitable frustration that ensued, the laws of the Fund on heirs have been amended.





The National Fund of the Republic of Austria

for the victims of National Socialism

[TASKS](#)[LAWS](#)[LINKS](#)[CONTACT](#)[HOME](#)[GERMAN](#)

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As a result of the course of discussions over the tragic events of the past, the Austrian Republic is endeavouring to deal with the injustices incurred during the Nazi-era in the most objective manner possible. Thus, the following measures have been taken.

1. A Historical Commission has been established by the Austrian Republic to investigate the complex problem of expropriation during the Nazi-regime as well as restitution (e.g. of business or private losses) made by the Austrian Republic after 1945.
2. The Austrian Republic was first in giving up its so called, 'extra' gold reserves to the International Relief Fund for the Persecuted (International Persecutee Relief Fund). The National Fund has been granted the responsibility of distributing the money from the sale of these gold reserves, the sum of which makes up over 102 Million Austrian Schillings.
3. A Federal Law has been passed for the restitution of artworks and collections that were expropriated by the Nazi-regime that are presently being held in all the Republic's federal museums.

In addition, the National Fund of the Republic of Austria for victims of Nazism is intensifying its efforts in informing people on the above matters.

We will do our best to answer any questions you might have on these matters. When necessary, we will pass your inquiry on to the relevant institutions, while providing you with information

as matters stand.

