



Annual Review 2021

21 Dec 2021

The year 2021 is drawing to a close – the second year under the shadow of the worldwide Covid19 pandemic. For the National Fund of the Republic of Austria, established at the National Council, the General Settlement Fund for Victims of National Socialism and the Fund for the Restoration of the Jewish Cemeteries in Austria it was a year marked by the completion of major projects, but also by new challenges. We would like to thank all our partners in Austria and abroad for their excellent cooperation.



20 Years of the Washington Agreement and the General Settlement Fund

January 2021 brought with it the 20th anniversary of the Washington Agreement, which formed the basis for the General Settlement Fund for Victims of National Socialism. This anniversary was marked by a virtual book presentation held on 19 January: Spanning 562 pages, the Final Report of the Claims Committee documents the activities of the independent, internationally-composed body that decided on 20,702 applications for compensation of assets and was subsequently dissolved in 2017. Around 25,000 victims of National Socialism or their heirs received compensation payments totaling around 215 million US dollars.

On 29 June 2021, the Main Committee of the National Council unanimously acknowledged the Final Report of the Arbitration Panel for *In Rem* Restitution, bringing about the dissolution of the Arbitration Panel, which was established in 2001 at the General Settlement Fund to decide on applications for *in rem* restitution of public property. In the Grand Ballroom (Große Redoutensaal) of the Hofburg, the President of the National Council, Wolfgang Sobotka, presented the Chairman of the Arbitration Panel, University Professor Josef Aicher, and the Arbitration Panel Member, University Professor August Reinisch, with the Austrian Cross of Honor for Science and Art, First Class, for their 20 years of honorary service.



New Austrian exhibition at Auschwitz-Birkenau

On 4 October 2021, the new, historically revised national exhibition “Far Removed – Austria and Auschwitz” was opened, thus completing a long-standing project of the National Fund. The National Fund commissioned the curatorial and scientific team comprising Birgit Johler, Albert Lichtblau, Christoph Mai, Christane Rothländer, Barbara Staudinger and Hannes Sulzenbacher to curate the new exhibition and the architect Martin Kohlbauer to design it.

The President of the National Council, Wolfgang Sobotka, and the Director of the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, Piotr M. A. Cywiński, hosted the opening ceremony at the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum. The ceremony was attended by Federal President Alexander Van der Bellen, Second National Council President Doris Bures, President of the Federal Council Peter Ragg, Foreign Minister Alexander Schallenberg, Federal Minister for the EU and Constitution at the Federal Chancellery Karoline Edtstadler, Minister of Health Wolfgang Mückstein and State Secretary for the Arts and Culture Andrea Mayer. The commemorative ceremony was broadcast live on ORF II and on the parliamentary website where it is available on demand in the media library.

Parallel to the opening of the new exhibition, the new exhibition website www.auschwitz.at went online. Among other things, it contains in-depth content on the topics covered by the exhibition, educational materials with modules from erinnern.at, databases on the prisoners and perpetrators, and biographies. The National Fund provides technical and editorial support for the exhibition website.

In the future, the National Fund will be responsible overseeing the operation of the new exhibition and administering the previous one, and for answering enquiries about the exhibition and questions surrounding the broad subject area of Austria and Auschwitz.

Visitors to Auschwitz have the opportunity to record their impressions and thoughts about the exhibition, the memorial site or the historical Auschwitz-Birkenau camp in a digital guestbook. These messages, which fade away after a short time in Auschwitz, are digitally transmitted to Austria where they are displayed in various public places and on the website www.auschwitz.at. In this way, new places of direct connection with the Auschwitz-Birkenau memorial are constantly being created in Austria. The first place in Austria to publish these reflections is the Salzburg Museum.



Entrance to Block 17 with the new Austria exhibition at Auschwitz.
Photo: Parlamentsdirektion/Ulrike Wieser

Opening of the Shoah Wall of Names Memorial in Vienna

On 9 November 2021, the Shoah Wall of Names Memorial was inaugurated in Vienna. A solemn ceremony was held in Ostarrichipark and attended by numerous guests from Austria and abroad, including Federal Chancellor Alexander Schallenberg, President of the Jewish Community Vienna Oskar Deutsch and Federal Minister for the EU and Constitution at the Federal Chancellery Karoline Edtstadler and Austrian-born Holocaust survivor and initiator of the memorial, Kurt Yakov Tutter.

The more than 64,000 names engraved on 160 stone tablets commemorate and honor the lives of the Jewish children, women and men from Austria who were murdered in the Holocaust. A separate plaque is dedicated to all others who were persecuted by the Nazi regime. The Shoah Wall of Names is a place of remembrance and learning, and a visible sign of historical responsibility.

Due to the historical significance of this memorial site, the City of Vienna and the National Fund will assume joint responsibility for the upkeep and day-to-day running of the Shoah Wall of Names Memorial.



The opening of the Shoah Wall of Names Memorial took place in Ostarrichi Park on 9 November 2021. Pictured: a visitor to the ...
Photo: BKA/Andy Wenzel

Jewish cemeteries

In 2021, the work to restore the Jewish cemeteries in Baden, Klosterneuburg and Graz was completed.

On 8 November 2021, the restored Jewish cemetery in Klosterneuburg was handed over to the municipal administration, which has undertaken to maintain the cemetery for the next 20 years.

This year, the Board of Trustees approved project applications for restoration work at the Jewish cemeteries in Linz, Vienna-Währing, Oberstockstall and Waidhofen an der Thaya.

In September 2021, the National Fund published a "Visitors' Guide to the Jewish Cemeteries in Austria". The bilingual publication in German and English was produced together with the Jewish Communities and grassroots initiatives and for the first time includes all known Jewish cemeteries as well as Jewish sections of cemeteries in Austria.

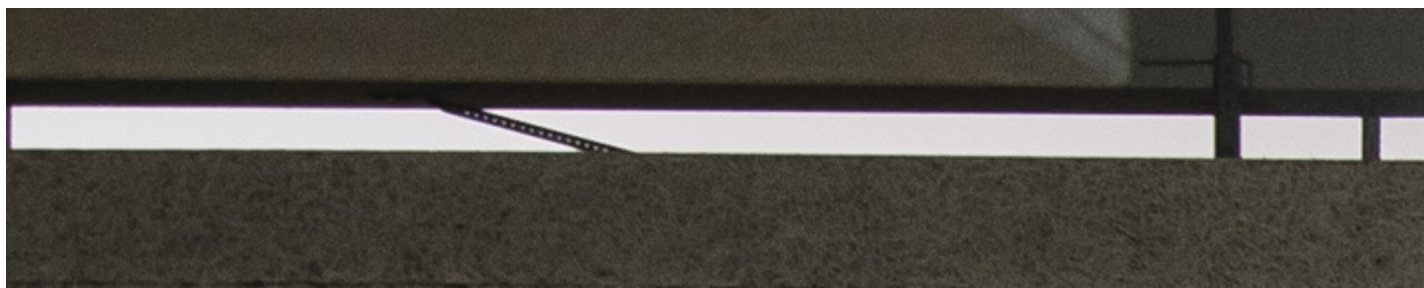


Visitor's Guide to the Jewish Cemeteries in Austria.
Photo: Walter Reichl

Call for entries for the Simon Wiesenthal Prize 2021

In August 2021 the Simon Wiesenthal Prize, endowed annually with €30,000, was announced for the first time to recognize outstanding civic engagement to combat antisemitism and to promote Holocaust education. By 30 September, 284 entries from over 30 countries worldwide had been received via the online application form on the new Simon Wiesenthal Prize website www.wiesenthalpreis.at.

The submissions were reviewed by the Simon Wiesenthal Prize jury, which drew up a shortlist of potential prizewinners, from which the Board of Trustees of the National Fund will select the winners for 2021. Due to the current situation relating to the Covid19 pandemic, the November meeting of the Board of Trustees, and therefore also its decision, had to be postponed. It is now expected that the award winners will be announced in early 2022. We are confident that the award ceremony will be able to take place in spring 2022 in a fitting and dignified setting.



Project funding

The National Fund has an annual budget of 1.5 million euros for project funding. Despite the pandemic, most of the projects could be carried out; some took place virtually, but others did have to be postponed. We give special priority to social and medical programs. At the meeting of the National Fund's Board of Trustees held on 28 June 2021, 83 project funding applications were approved. Another 60 projects were approved by circular resolution in December.

In 2021, preparations were underway to enable project funding applications to be submitted online. This not only encompasses the submission of applications: the entire procedure for processing the applications will be database-supported, from their receipt to their presentation to the Committee and Board of Trustees to publication of the funded projects on the website of the National Fund.

Digitalization of the file holdings

The file holdings of the National Fund and General Settlement Fund are unique: the ca. 890 linear meters of files document persecution and bureaucratically recorded seizures, as well as earlier compensation and restitution measures put in place after 1945. Personal documents from around 40,000 applicants to the National Fund and the General Settlement Fund give a compelling insight into the events and their significance – for those affected and for Austria. With the help of customized digitalization software, over 6.3 million individual sheets are being successively digitalized and processed. Employees of the Fund are working on the digitization, supported by two civilian service workers. The digitization not only serves to secure the holdings, but will also facilitate their use for researchers in the future.



National Fund first aboard the “Digital Ark”

In September 2021, following the conclusion of an administrative agreement with the Federal Chancellery, the National Fund became the first to take part in the “Digital Ark”. The Digital Ark Austria is a project for the future with which the information on art and cultural property of the Republic of Austria is secured in the central fallback system of the federal government (secure backup computer center) in a mine in St. Johann im Pongau. It ensures the maintenance of the essential IT processes of the Austrian administration in the event of an incident. This will guarantee the safe long-term archiving of the National Fund’s archived data.

Outreach

From 10–14 November 2021, the National Fund was an exhibitor at BUCH WIEN (the Vienna Book Convention) for the third time, which, despite Covid 19 restrictions, attracted more than 41,000 visitors from 32 countries. This year, the National Fund presented its new publication *Überleben in Auschwitz* (“Survival in Auschwitz”), the sixth volume of the book series *Erinnerungen. Lebensgeschichten von Opfern des Nationalsozialismus* (“Lives Remembered. Life Stories of Victims of National Socialism”), published to coincide with the newly opened Austrian exhibition at the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum. The two-volume work contains stories of “Survival in Auschwitz” and provides a compelling insight into everyday life in the camp, death and survival at Auschwitz in 20 autobiographical texts and interviews by and with Austrian Auschwitz survivors. On 13 November 2021, a panel discussion on the topic of “Survival in Auschwitz” took place on the Radio Wien stage. Journalist Alexia Weiss talked about the book and the exhibition with Renate S. Meissner, editor of the book series *Erinnerungen*, and with Hannes Sulzenbacher and Albert Lichtblau from the exhibition’s curatorial and scientific team.

In October 2021, the Fund for the Restoration of the Jewish Cemeteries, together with the Committee for the Preservation of the Klosterneuburg Jewish Cemetery, launched a pilot project with teachers to promote educational work in Jewish cemeteries. The project is supported by the city council and the municipal archives of Klosterneuburg. In this way, Jewish history can be understood as part of regional history and find a place in the collective memory.



Panel discussion at BuchWien 2021: Über-Leben in Auschwitz. On the podium from left to right: Albert Lichtblau, Alexia Weiss, ...

Photo: Nationalfonds/Niklas

Support of Holocaust survivors and their descendants in their acquisition of Austrian citizenship

In 2021, the National Fund continued to support descendants of Nazi victims in proceedings to acquire Austrian citizenship. Since 1 September 2020, it has been possible to acquire Austrian citizenship in a simplified procedure by means of written notification – an offer that has been gladly welcomed. The law is implemented in close cooperation and ongoing communication between the Federal Ministry of the Interior and the Federal Ministry for European and International Affairs, the Jewish Community Vienna and the National Fund, which, in accordance with Section 58c of the Citizenship Act is on hand as an expert to assist the Vienna's Municipal Department 35 (MA35 – Immigration and Citizenship) in the procedure, and to undertake research and answer inquiries. The common goal is to provide the best possible support to the descendants during their proceedings. The Fund's historians have carried out in-depth research and assessments for the responsible authorities. In addition, numerous other interested parties have been advised on questions concerning the procedure. By 1 September 2021, the Viennese provincial government was able to bring more than 6,600 proceedings to a positive conclusion, and almost 4,000 of these persons had also formally received their Austrian citizenship by that date.

After the law had come into effect, cases emerged during its implementation that could not be taken into account on the basis of its current wording. For example, it did not cover cases where the ancestor in question was murdered or deported abroad by organs of the Nazi Party or the authorities of the German Reich or because they had advocated for the democratic Republic of Austria. The reason for this was that the current wording of the law presumes that the ancestor through whom the citizenship is derived had (*quasi* voluntarily) emigrated abroad. Therefore, on the first anniversary of the provision, the hardship cases that had occurred during its implementation were evaluated, with the aim of adapting the law to make it possible to also acquire citizenship by notification in these cases (which had previously not met the requirements). A five-party motion to this effect was submitted to the National Council on 16 December 2021.

Caring for the survivors

To this day, recognizing and supporting survivors remains one of the National Fund's central tasks. The global pandemic is placing a heavy burden on the lives of the elderly – the need for additional payments to subsidize nursing and care has tripled since the beginning of the pandemic. To address this changing need, the Board of Trustees has enabled the disbursement of more than the previously possible three payments to survivors in particular need.

This year, in addition to material support, mental support was once again particularly important. Thanks to the excellent support and cooperation of care organizations in Austria and worldwide, valuable and urgently needed support was made possible. The National Fund and its staff will continue to do its best to be available to Holocaust survivors from Austria worldwide.