

Southeast Europe Molectust filozofski fakultet u Rijeci











## POWER OF PERSONAL STORIES IN CONFRONTING OBLIVION

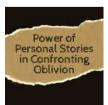
## RECOMMENDATIONS



# 1. THE PROJECT "POWER OF PERSONAL STORIES"

The project "Power of Personal Stories in Confronting Oblivion" aims to strenghten practices of remembrance of the Holocaust and other genocides and mass crimes committed during WWII. As the year 2025 marks the 80th anniversary of the liberation of several concentration and extermination camps, as well as the end of World War II and the end of Nazi-Fascism, it is particularly important to emphasize the ongoing necessity of remembering and confronting the past, while combating all forms of denial, distortion and trivialization of the Holocaust and the other genocides that took place during WWII. With the creation of new educational materials and methods based on personal stories, the project aims to combat Holocaust denial and distortion, and highlight the importance of resistance.

"Power of Personal Stories in Confronting Oblivion" involves organizations and institutions from Croatia, Germany, Italy, Romania, Slovenia, and Spain, and is funded by the European Union through the CERV programme.





# 2. QUESTIONNAIRE: TOWARDS THE RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations presented in this publication were developed starting from a questionnaire shared among relevant actors in the countries of the partner organizations.

The questionnaire included the following sections and questions:

### • Section 1: Current challenges

1) Considering your country, which factors do you think contribute the most to the spreading of denial and distortion of the Holocaust and other WWII genocides and mass crimes?

2) Which challenges do you think are shared on the European level, in recognizing the facts about the Holocaust and other WWII genocides? What can be further done to establish these facts?

### • Section 2: Concrete actions

3) Which concrete actions should policymakers take in order to counter denial and distortions of the Holocaust and other WWII genocides in your country?

### 2. QUESTIONNAIRE

4) Which concrete actions should policymakers take in regards of cultural heritage protection, as a tool to counter denial and distortions of the Holocaust and other WWII genocides in your country?

### • Section 3: Education

5) Which educational tools do you think are useful for countering denial and distortion of the Holocaust and other WWII genocides?

6) What is the role of museums and memorials in countering denial and distortions of the Holocaust and other WWII genocides in your country?

7) What is the role of academia in countering denial and distortions of the Holocaust and other WWII genocides in your country?

8) What is the role of civil society initiatives and organizations in countering denial and distortions of the Holocaust and other WWII genocides in your country?

## 3. RECOMMENDATIONS

### Introduction

Despite being the most thoroughly documented genocide in history—supported by an extensive collection of diaries, memoirs, historical records, and official documents —the Holocaust (1933–1945), and other genocides and mass crimes committed during WWII, continues to be denied and distorted by individuals and organizations worldwide. While Holocaust denial—the outright rejection of historical facts—is often easier to identify and counter, Holocaust distortion takes more subtle forms, making it significantly harder to detect and combat. Effectively addressing this issue requires both historical knowledge of the Holocaust and World War II, as well as an awareness of the various manifestations of Holocaust distortion.

Denial and distortion, along with antisemitism, tend to resurface and intensify during times of global crisis. This was evident during the COVID-19 pandemic and remains apparent today amid ongoing conflicts and political instability. The widespread use of social media has further amplified these phenomena, making misinformation and manipulation more pervasive and difficult to counter, particularly for individuals lacking the necessary skills and knowledge to recognize them.

7

Alarmingly, Holocaust denial and distortion are sometimes perpetuated by policymakers and decision-makers—whether deliberately or due to a lack of historical understanding. Given their influence and broad reach, their words and actions can have profound and dangerous consequences. This is why these recommendations are specifically directed at policymakers and decision-makers individuals with the authority to enact laws, shape public discourse, and implement concrete measures to combat Holocaust denial and distortion, both nationally and internationally.

Recognizing that these challenges cannot be effectively addressed in isolation whether at an individual or national level—this document is the result of an interdisciplinary and international effort. It incorporates insights from experts across multiple countries, reflecting a collective commitment to confronting Holocaust distortion. The partners firmly believe that these recommendations will help strengthen efforts to counter Holocaust denial and distortion, not only within national contexts but also at the European and international levels.

8

### • EDUCATION

1) Establish and fund educational programmes for young people, teachers and educators, aimed at recognizing and countering Holocaust distortion and hate speech

Holocaust distortion is closely tied to historical revisionism and nationalist narratives, which thrive in contexts with limited access to historical literacy. Policymakers should invest in educational workshops and public awareness campaigns that equip citizens, especially youth, with the skills to critically assess historical misinformation, conspiracy theories, and hate speech. These programs should incorporate European, national, and local history, survivors' testimonies, and digital tools to engage the public effectively. Civil society organizations, academic institutions, and media professionals should be involved to ensure broad outreach and impact.

## 2) Strengthen Holocaust education through local and micro-historical perspectives

Holocaust denial and distortion persist partly due to gaps in education and the framing of WWII history. To counteract this, policymakers should integrate local and micro-history approaches into school curricula, allowing students to explore how the Holocaust and other WWII crimes unfolded in their own communities. This should include visits to authentic historical sites, use of archival materials, and the integration of survivors' testimonies. Investment in teacher training programs is essential to equip educators with the skills and resources to teach these topics effectively.

### • MEMORIALIZATION

### 3) Restore and Protect Memorial Sites

The destruction and neglect of memorial sites and antifascist monuments contribute to Holocaust distortion by erasing historical memory. Policymakers should implement initiatives to restore, preserve, and protect all WWII-related memorial sites and ensure they serve as active educational spaces. Additionally, policymakers should ensure that memorial sites are accessible to the public with clear historical narratives, and that guidelines are established to ensure that these historical sites are accurately contextualized. 4) Strengthen institutional support and funding for bodies dealing with Holocaust remembrance, research, archiving, and cultural heritage preservation

Policymakers should advocate for the establishment of a national research institute or museum dedicated to the Holocaust and other WWII genocides, in the countries where such institutions are not present yet. This will ensure sustained funding for research, academic fellowships, and public education campaigns. These measures should be developed without political interference and with the goal of fostering historical accountability.

Additionally, adequate financial support is needed for already existing institutions engaged in historical research, preservation, and education, such as museums and archives that safeguard Holocaust-related materials, research institutions dealing with Holocaust remembrance, cultural programs that commemorate victims and highlight their heritage, and digitization projects that improve accessibility to historical documents and testimonies.

### • LEGISLATION

### 5) Counter Holocaust denial and distortion in public and digital spaces

Hate speech, denial, and distortion are increasingly propagated through social media and other online platforms. Policymakers should introduce and enforce measures that prevent the dissemination of harmful content while protecting freedom of expression. This includes implementing fact-checking initiatives, and supporting digital literacy campaigns that equip citizens with the tools to critically assess online content.

### 6) Empower respectful and tolerant political discourses

Political discourses have a significant influence on public attitudes toward history. To foster a responsible approach, politicians and public figures should further engage in respectful discourse that is based on historical facts. This includes the adoption of ethical guidelines for political speech, proactive condemnation of Holocaust distortion, and policies that prevent the instrumentalization of history for political gain.

### 7) Introduce and enforce stronger legislation against hate speech and Holocaust denial

Legal frameworks should be strengthened to combat Holocaust denial, distortion, and related forms of hate speech. This includes passing stricter laws that penalize public denial or trivialization of genocide, ensuring proper enforcement, and training law enforcement and judicial authorities on handling such cases effectively. These legal measures should be balanced with educational approaches.

### • COOPERATION

### 8) Support and safeguard independent and credible media

Free and credible media outlets are essential in countering misinformation. Policymakers should invest in public interest journalism, ensure the safety of journalists reporting on these issues, and support media literacy programs that help citizens to differentiate between reliable and distorted narratives.

### 9) Encourage civil society's role in disseminating historically based facts

Civil society organizations are vital in promoting historical accuracy and combating distortion. Policymakers should provide funding and support for NGOs engaged in Holocaust education, foster partnerships between civil society, educators, and cultural institutions, encourage initiatives that promote unity and understanding among diverse communities

### 10) Promote a shared European historical memory and foster international cooperation

Holocaust distortion is a global issue that requires coordinated responses. Policymakers should engage in cross-border initiatives to share best practices in Holocaust education and countering denial, support international research projects on historical facts, and promote collaboration between educational, cultural, and civil society organizations. Additionally, divided memories of WWII across Europe fuel revisionism, for this reason, policymakers should develop EU-supported programs fostering transnational historical understanding, promote joint educational initiatives and exchanges between countries with differing historical perspectives, and support European remembrance projects that contextualize WWII crimes within a broader framework of human rights and democracy.

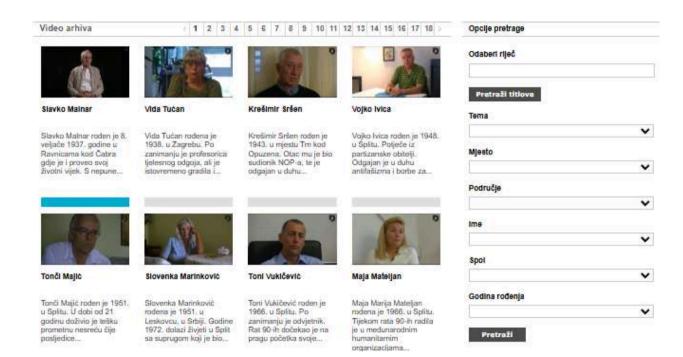
# 4. BEST PRACTICES





### Osobna Sjećanja - Croatian memories

### osobnasjecanja.hr - Croatian memories



Since 2010, Documenta has been working on creating a collection of video-recorded testimonies of relevant time witnesses of the historical events in the 20th century to preserve them from oblivion. The organization believes that, through recording and transferring subjective experiences of people, it is possible to gain deeper insights into seemingly hidden aspects of political turmoil and war conflicts that had happened in these areas. The oral history methodology can support and strengthen personal and social processes of dealing with the past. Thematically, the main focus of the interviews is connected with the main periods covered in Documenta's work: , like the experiences of suffering and resistance during the Second World War, and the period of socialist Yugoslavia covering political violence during that time, and the war in the 1990s, including antiwar

war resistance and activism, soldiers from all sides involved in the war, and civilian victims. The organization proposes the use of oral history as a method to collect individual memories of past traumatic events, from a wide range of perspectives, including those of minorities, victims, and women.

Each interview is conducted, transcribed, elaborated, titled, and indexed, and is available in Croatian and English on the platform "Osobna Sjećanja/Croatian Memories" (<u>osobnasjecanja.hr - Croatian memories</u>). At the moment, Documenta has recorded 474 interviews, and this work is still ongoing.

Documenta uses the interviews mostly in educational activities, research, exhibitions, and campaigns. The interviews cover the life-history of the witnesses, becoming an interesting tool for following individual fates in the 20th century, and better understanding the life stories through different historical, political, and social times.



#### Dragica Vajnberger

Dragica Vajnberger was born in Zagreb in 1019 into a Jewish family of artisans. Daughter of Ervin and Margita, her family name was Schlesinger. She graduated from the First Women's Gymnasium in Zagreb in 1037. During her high school years, she joined SKOJ (League of Communist Youth of Yugoslavia). After the establishment of the Independent State of Croatia, because of the danger of the persecutions that Jews were then subjected to the show of the langendent State of Croatia, occupation, and then to Novi Vinodolski. In November 1942, she was taken to the Kraljevica concentration camp, and shortly afterward to the Italian fascist camp Kampor, on the island of Rab. After the capitulation of Italy in 1943, the camp was short down and Dragica Vajnberger joined the Partisans. According to information she later received, her parents were taken to a camp in 1944 and all trace was lost of them. Except for one cousin who also joined the Partisans, none of her close family survived the war. After the wars, she attended the Journalism and Diplomatic College in Belgrade (1946-1954) and until the end of 1954 worked as a secretary for Milovan Dilas. She worked in the state news agency "Tanjug" until 1965, then as an expert associate at the Institute for the Workers' Movement in Belgrade until 1907, and as the head of documentation at the Central Committee of Yugoslavia until 1973. After tertining, in 1973, she returned to Zagreb, where she lived at the 'Lavoslav Schwara'' retirement home. She was one of the initial contributors to the Jewish Biographical Lexicon; using the Jewish Review and other sources, she created a basic database of approximately 1,000 entries. She died in Zagreb on the 2nd of May 2013.

#### Chapters Life in Zaoreb ha

Life in Zagreb before World War II SKOJ [Young Communist League of Yugoslavia] Germans entering Zagreb Persecution of Jews in the NDH [Independent State of Croatial Concentration camp on the island of Rab Italian retreat Escape to the Partisans Arrival in liberated Zagreb Collaboration with Većeslav Holjevac Uncertainty of war Leaving for Belgrade Attitude towards self- management socialism Brotherhood and unity in Yugoslavia Croatian Spring Collaboration with Franjo Tudman Homeland War Acquiring pension

The whole interview



### Mapping the Holocaust in the Independent State of Croatia

https://experience.arcgis.com/experience/06b2a9a6473848ee98a0db541907274b



In addition to its educational endeavors and project collaborations, Center for Holocaust and Genocide research in Southeast Europe is undertaking an ongoing project to map and document Jewish heritage sites across Southeast Europe. This project involves creating an interactive digital map that highlights synagogues, cemeteries, community centers, and other significant landmarks pertinent to Jewish history in the region. By providing detailed information and historical context for each site, the Center aims to raise public awareness, facilitate academic research, and promote the preservation of these culturally and historically significant locations. This comprehensive mapping project serves as a valuable resource for educators, researchers, and the general public, fostering a deeper understanding of the rich Jewish heritage in Southeast Europe.



Max Mannheimer Haus Studienzentrum und Internationales Jugendgästehaus

### The graphic novel "Max Mannheimer ben Jakov"

<u>https://mmsz-gegen-antisemitismus.de/wp-</u> content/uploads/2024/04/MaxMannheimer GraphicNovel digital.pdf

The graphic novel "Max Mannheimer ben Jakov" describes on three pages the most important events of Max Mannheimer and his family during the National Socialist era. It is used in various workshops at the Max Mannheimer Study Center. The graphic novel is designed to meet the viewing and reading habits of the participants and bring them closer to the life story of Max Mannheimer after whom the Max Mannheimer House was named. The graphic novel was drawn by Greta von Richthofen and financed by the Bavarian State Ministry for Family, Labor and Social Affairs and the Max Mannheimer Study Center



### **4. BEST PRACTICES**



### The online documentation center campifascisti.it

### https://www.campifascisti.it/

With the creation of the internet site campifascisti.it the Topografia per la Storia created an online documentation center on internment and imprisonment as practices of repression implemented by the Italian state in the period from the seizure of power by Benito Mussolini (1922) to the end of the Second World War (1945).

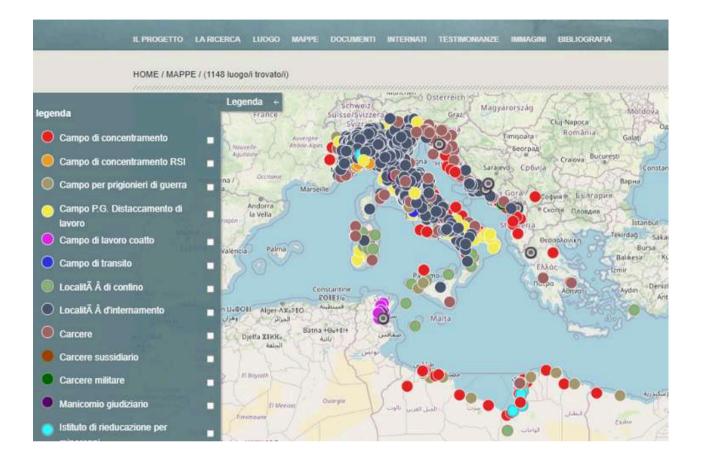
A very vast topic, therefore, which includes both the legislative instruments issued in peacetime for the internal control of opponents and society, and the laws and practices adopted by the Royal Army in the wars waged in Africa and Europe.

However, the online documentation center is not built on the basis of historical events, but on the <u>places</u>.

By places of internment and imprisonment we mean places of confinement, prisons, concentration camps, municipalities of internment and anything else that may emerge from historical research as a context in which these repressive practices were implemented aimed at political opponents, specific social categories, religious, civil and military groups of foreign states involved in wars or military occupations.

The different places identified in this way are documented through several types of sources (original documentation, scientific literature, direct testimonies, photographs, videos, etc.), published as the research progresses on this website.

Given the vastness and complexity of the topic, the amount of documentation that can potentially be consulted and the initial phase of the work, the contents currently published on this site are only the first small stone of the project.



Campifascisti.it is a work in progress. This is the first important warning we address to visitors to the site.

We are building this online documentation center using the site as if it were a notepad, or a virtual collecting place, where we can accumulate the material that we find from time to time by consulting an archive, collecting a testimony, reading a book or visiting a place.

The different cards dedicated to each <u>place</u> can therefore contain a lot or little documentation depending on the type of research carried out so far. We do not proceed by individual places, but in a transversal way.

### **3. BEST PRACTICES**



### The exhibition "SAMUDARIPEN – The Roma Holocaust"

https://www.samudaripen.intercultural.ro/

The Intercultural Institute of Timișoara organized the exhibition "SAMUDARIPEN – The Roma Holocaust" as part of the Capital of Culture 2023 program. Hosted at West University of Timișoara, the exhibition featured eight panels focusing on the persecution of the Roma community during WWII and the communist era, both at national and European levels. It was developed by experts Bogdan Chiriac, Adrian Nicolae Furtună, and Luminița Cioabă, alongside the IIT team.

The exhibition aimed to educate and raise awareness among high school and university students about Roma history, culture, discrimination, and persecution. Approximately 200 visitors, primarily students and teachers from Timişoara, engaged with the exhibition between November 14-29, 2023. Activities included discussions and interactive sessions designed to foster empathy and understanding of sensitive historical events.

The exhibition adhered to guidelines from the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) and the Council of Europe's recommendations on Holocaust remembrance. Its educational framework emphasized personal relevance to students' daily lives, constructivist learning, human dimensions, individual life stories, and multiperspectivity, highlighting diverse experiences including victims, survivors, perpetrators, bystanders, and rescuers. The initiative underscored the importance of portraying historical figures with dignity, humanizing both victims and perpetrators as individuals not as a part of a group, and encouraged visitors to critically consider personal agency, historical context, and the relevance of local history.

### ROMII ȘI HOLOCAUSTUL: PRIVIRE GENERALĂ

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OR codes were included on the exhibition panels, directing students to diverse resources about the Roma Holocaust. Additionally, the panels were made available online, allowing teachers to revisit the content in class after the exhibition visit and ensuring accessibility for educators across Romania. The digital exhibition is accessible here, and we recommend translating it using your automatic translation browser's feature.

The first panel of the exhibition. It focuses on presenting the historical context and the routes of the deportations



### The 'Shoah – Let Us Remember' project

https://www.sinagogamaribor.si/en/dediscina-sinagoga/shoah-let-us-remember-project/

https://www.sinagogamaribor.si/en/shoah-let-us-remember-2025/

In 2010, the Center of Jewish Cultural Heritage Synagogue Maribor, in cooperation with the First Gymnasium Maribor, organized the first high-profile programme dedicated to remembering the Holocaust victims on the International Holocaust Remembrance Day. The programme was named 'Shoah - Let Us Remember'. As part of this programme, the exhibition 'Holocaust 1933–1945 (The Courage to Remember)' by the Simon Wiesenthal Centre in Jerusalem was displayed at the First Gymnasium Maribor with the support of the Synagogue Maribor, and a meeting of students with Erika Fürst, a lewish survivor from Prekmurje and one of the most important witnesses of the Holocaust in Slovenia, was also organized. The Synagogue Maribor additionally hosted the scientific meeting 'The Holocaust and Its Consequences in Slovenia', which was one of the first professional meetings in Slovenia entirely dedicated to the topic of the Holocaust and which was transformed the following year into the traditional scientific meeting 'Each Year One Name', and a commemorative event, at which the honorary speaker was the then Prime Minister of the Republic of Slovenia, Borut Pahor. The well-thought-out and content-based programme met with positive responses from both the professional and general public, so in 2011 we managed to attract new partner organizations to participate, from museums and cultural and research centres to historical societies, primary and secondary schools, as well as municipalities from all over Slovenia, and we expanded the programme with additional content. With the support of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Slovenia and the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA), what was originally a local programme quickly grew into a nationwide project, with which we pay tribute to the memory of the victims of the Holocaust and Nazi persecution in Slovenia every year on 27 January.



The Synagogue Maribor is the national coordinator of this project that is largely focused on presenting the personal stories of victims of the Holocaust and Nazi-fascist persecution and which includes all the basic segments of preserving the memory of the Holocaust, i.e. the research, education, and remembrance. With the project 'Shoah - Let Us Remember', we contribute to strengthening education and collective memory and raise awareness about the causes and consequences of the darkest chapters not only of Slovenian, but also of European and world history. The Synagogue Maribor provides all participating and partner organizations with professional assistance and technical support in organizing and implementing activities, organizes and co-organizes various events, prepares documentary exhibitions, which are then offered to all interested organizations for free loan, and generally acts as a connecting link between various stakeholders. Special attention is also paid to schools and teachers, with whom we have developed a wide-ranging partner network and with whom we connect in numerous activities. For teachers, every year as part of the 'Shoah - Let Us Remember' project, we also prepare a virtual working meeting on the topic of challenges in teaching about the Holocaust today, while presenting both new teaching aids and examples of good practices at the same time.

The programme of the events for general public, which were held as part of the 'Shoah – Let Us Remember 2025' project, is available <u>here</u> (in Slovenian).

The programme of the events for schoolchildren and youth, which were held as part of the 'Shoah – Let Us Remember 2025' project, is available at <u>this link</u> (in Slovenian).

### **4. BEST PRACTICES**



### The "RUTA al EXILIO (REX)" project

#### https://rutaalexilio.com/

The Route to Exile (REX) project consists of a two-week itinerary through the easternmost part of the Catalan Pyrenees cross-border area, in which 40 young people from all over Spain get to discover the most emblematic places of memory of the Spanish Republican exile of 1939 and develop an extensive program of multidisciplinary educational activities. Throughout the two weeks, the group has the opportunity to visit places of repression and imprisonment, escape and smuggling routes at the border, museums and memorials, as well as a diverse set of places of memory in situ. The accompanying team develops a broad and rich pedagogical program, which not only includes elements linked to recent history and memory, but also cross-cutting elements that cut across the reality of the 16- and 17-yearolds who make the route. Anti-racism, feminism, environmentalism, vegetarianism, are some of those issues that help to connect the reality of the present with the struggles of the past that the route brings to the attention of young people. The constant contact with nature and the development of coexistence among the participants and accompanying persons are other important distinguishing features of REX. After four successful editions (the fifth will be held in 2025), there is now an organized group of more than a hundred young former participants in the route, who have developed their own association, from which they promote various initiatives to encourage youth in activities related to democratic memory throughout Spain.





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