



INTERNATIONAL
**HOLOCAUST
REMEMBRANCE**
ALLIANCE

Recognizing and Countering Holocaust Distortion

**RECOMMENDATIONS FOR
POLICY AND DECISION MAKERS**

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No one has the right to deny or downplay the worst crime in human history – the Holocaust. The purpose of the Global Task Force on Holocaust Distortion is to counter the dangerous lies and twisted facts about the Holocaust. We must learn from our past. We owe that to every victim and every survivor. We know where hatred and hate speech can lead if too many people shrug their shoulders and look away. It is up to us all to defend democracy.”

Heiko Maas, 2020



Memory has its own language, its own texture, its own secret melody, its own archeology, and its own limitations; it too can be wounded, stolen, and shamed; but it is up to us to rescue it and save it from becoming cheap, banal, and sterile. To remember means to lend an ethical dimension to all endeavors and aspirations.

Elie Wiesel, 2003

Contributions

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Foreword



Over 75 years after the end of the Second World War, the field of Holocaust education, remembrance and research is now at a critical juncture. As a generation of Holocaust survivors sadly passes, we have an even greater duty to safeguard the record, to ensure that the truth of the Holocaust is fortified for future generations. We have a responsibility to counter its distortion.

Holocaust distortion erodes our understanding of historical truth. It is a persistent problem that benefits from a general lack of awareness, a problem that neither stops at national borders, nor is found only in countries directly affected by the Holocaust. It does require us all to counter it, as it undermines the values on which our multilateral order was built after the Second World War.

With this in mind, the German Presidency of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) established a Global Task Force Against Holocaust Distortion. From its inception, the Global Task Force recognized that cooperation, both among governments and with experts, civil society and international organizations, is crucial to address this phenomenon. To further this goal, the Global Task Force drew upon the international and cooperative spirit of the IHRA.

The Recommendations are a product of the fruitful exchanges that have come out of this forum. They focus on defining Holocaust distortion, recommending practices for identifying and monitoring distortion and strengthening institutions, and addressing the issue of distortion on social media. I would like to thank all experts and delegates involved for their passion, dedication and expertise, which made this project possible. Our cooperation with UNESCO, with whom this volume is published in partnership, is a further marker of this spirit.

Countless institutions throughout the IHRA's Member Countries and beyond already work tirelessly to maintain an accurate history of the Holocaust and counter denying and distortive tendencies in their communities. It is with this same tireless commitment that governments, policy- and decision-makers must now approach the problem of Holocaust distortion, engaging all of society in the process. With the commitments outlined in the 2020 IHRA Ministerial Declaration, IHRA members accepted their responsibility as governments to work together to counter Holocaust distortion, underlining the damage it does to fundamental democratic principles. The Recommendations on Recognizing and Countering Distortion provide a useful contribution toward furthering this effort. May these Recommendations find ample distribution and use.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Heiko Maas', written in a cursive style.

Heiko Maas
Federal Minister for Foreign Affairs
Germany

Foreword

In many ways, attempts to distort the reality of the Holocaust began at the same time that Nazi Germany and its collaborators carried out the genocide of the Jews of Europe and North Africa.

After 1945, Holocaust distortion, as such, was not a subject of much discussion. Rather, at least in recent decades, the related phenomenon of Holocaust denial has warranted considerable attention. The dangers of outright denial of the Holocaust prompted policymakers, scholars, and educators to develop a series of responses that have included legislative efforts, enhanced educational outreach, and supporting and sustaining museums and memorials that inform and keep alive the memory of the Holocaust and related atrocities. These efforts led to a number of significant developments, but challenges remain.

Although denial is still a significant problem, Holocaust distortion has become in many ways a more pernicious threat. After all, Holocaust distortion does not necessarily suggest that the Holocaust did not occur. At the simplest level, distortion misrepresents the Holocaust and its relevance. Yet, distortion is much more complex than this. As outlined in these guidelines, it can appear in a variety of ways, including some that might seem innocent at first glance. Distortion is also a shared international challenge, in that it crosses cultural and national borders. This development is all the more acute due to the rise of post-truth politics and the proliferation of online hate.

It is notoriously difficult to ascertain the motives behind Holocaust distortion. Does distortion appear due to cynical or hateful reasons, or out of ignorance of the facts

or sensitivities of the Holocaust? Regardless of the motive, excusing or making allowances for distortion erodes our understanding and respect for the Holocaust, and it is an insult to the memories of Holocaust victims and survivors.

This document represents a major step in shaping international responses to the challenge of Holocaust distortion. Like the work of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA), these guidelines and the Global Task Force Against Holocaust Distortion are the products of dialogue and cooperation between a diverse and international group of subject matter experts, IHRA partner organizations, and policymakers. The Task Force would not have been possible without the support of the Federal Republic of Germany and its Presidency of the IHRA. The wider fields of Holocaust education, remembrance, and research owe a considerable debt of gratitude to Germany for its indefatigable support of the continued search for solutions to sustain honest engagement with the Holocaust as an historical subject that continues to resonate in the present day. Finally, these guidelines are the result of work that began generations ago, when the first Holocaust survivors shared their personal experiences with the world. It is our duty to uphold the memory of the victims and survivors. It is for them that we must continue to push back against all attempts to destroy, forget, or distort the past.

Robert Williams, PhD (USA)

Juliane Wetzel, PhD (DE)

Current and Forthcoming Chairs

IHRA Committee on Antisemitism and Holocaust Denial



All IHRA Member Countries have committed themselves to “Lead efforts to promote education, remembrance and research on the Holocaust and the genocide of the Roma to counter the influence of historical distortion, hate speech and incitement to violence and hatred.”

Article 8 of the 2020 IHRA Ministerial Declaration

About the IHRA

The events of the Holocaust scarred humanity and today our world continues to confront their legacy. The International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) identifies the most pressing post-Holocaust issues across the globe, casting a spotlight upon them for the benefit of experts and policymakers, and promoting practicable actions to address them.

The IHRA solicits input from a range of disciplines and geographical regions and ensures that its recommendations are backed by research, informed by good practice and communicated effectively.

As part of its strategy, the IHRA experts and political representatives focus their efforts on countering Holocaust distortion and safeguarding the historical record. This is made possible through the development of engaged networks, through the sharing of good practices and by making those practices visible and accessible to decision-makers. In this way, the IHRA ensures sensitive remembrance of history with a view to informing the policymaking of today.

Each country's relationship with its past is distinct. Nevertheless, many countries face common challenges to efforts to advance Holocaust education, research and remembrance. The IHRA provides a critical forum for its Member Countries to communicate about their specific national experiences and to work together with their counterparts to develop international good practices that are also sensitive to national contexts.

Within the IHRA, more than 300 experts and policymakers from over 40 countries come together to discuss and advance Holocaust-related issues of contemporary political importance. Delegates to the IHRA include many of the world's leading experts on the Holocaust. Heading each of the IHRA's national delegations is a senior governmental representative, often from ministries of foreign affairs, ministries of education, or ministries of culture. This cooperation has resulted in a wide range of materials, including practice recommendations, [educational materials](#), [working definitions and a charter](#), and [research publications](#).

Introduction

- 1** Why Should We Counter Holocaust Distortion?
- 2** What is Holocaust Distortion?
- 3** Responding to Holocaust Distortion
- 4** What Can Policymakers Do?

1

Why Should We Counter Holocaust Distortion?

Holocaust distortion is a critical threat to Holocaust memory and to fostering a world without genocide.

References to the Holocaust that mischaracterize and distort its history and relevance are an insult to the memories and experiences of victims and survivors. Holocaust distortion erodes our understanding of this history and nourish conspiracy theories, dangerous forms of nationalism, Holocaust denial, and antisemitism.

Through their pledge to uphold the tenets of the Stockholm Declaration, IHRA Member Countries have been at the forefront of developing and supporting research, educational, and commemorative engagement with the subject of the Holocaust. Through these efforts, the IHRA has become increasingly concerned over the ways by which misuse of the Holocaust and its legacy undermine history and threatens social, political, and cultural coexistence.

Over the course of the past decade, Holocaust distortion has grown in intensity. It manifests in multiple ways that have a negative influence on efforts to confront hate, and threatens the long-term sustainability of the relevance of the Holocaust as a subject of common reflection. It is therefore essential that IHRA Member Countries raise awareness of distortion and advance better ways to identify and respond to it.

Policymakers and government officials within the IHRA community are essential partners in this endeavor. Understanding Holocaust distortion in all of its concrete, nebulous, and subtle forms can inform and strengthen policymaking on multiple fronts, from the cultural and educational to the legal. Yet this is not just a responsibility for governments and policymakers. There is a pressing need for media, social media, civil society partners as well as law enforcement at the local, national, and international levels to increase their awareness and strengthen their responses to this growing problem.

These guidelines and recommendations reflect the IHRA mission to promote Holocaust education, remembrance and research. In order to fulfill this mission, IHRA Member Countries promote international efforts to combat Holocaust denial and antisemitism.

The IHRA presents these recommendations as a first step toward responding to and strengthening awareness of Holocaust distortion.

2

What Is Holocaust Distortion?

Holocaust denial seeks to erase the history of the Holocaust in order to legitimize Nazism and antisemitism. Holocaust distortion is more difficult to understand and identify.

Holocaust distortion acknowledges aspects of the Holocaust as factual. It nevertheless excuses, minimizes, or misrepresents the Holocaust in a variety of ways and through various media.

In its 2013 Working Definition of Holocaust Denial and Distortion, the IHRA initially identified the following forms of Holocaust distortion:

Intentional efforts to excuse or minimize the impact of the Holocaust or its principal elements, including collaborators and allies of Nazi Germany.

For example, to assert that the Holocaust is not relevant to a nation's history because it was perpetrated by Nazi Germany could be a form of distortion because such an argument a) ignores the roles played by local collaborators or members of the Axis in the crimes of the Holocaust and b) suggests that the legacies of the Holocaust did not influence postwar international norms and institutions.

Gross minimization of the number of victims of the Holocaust in contradiction to reliable sources.

One form of Holocaust distortion is the assertion that the number of victims was several million less than the accepted figure of approximately 6 million Jews murdered by the Nazis and their accomplices. Note: Scholarly estimates have ranged from 5.3-6.2 million victims, with 5.7 million as an accepted figure by most experts in the field.

Attempts to blame the Jews for causing their own genocide.

Forms of blaming the victim include claiming that Jewish reactions to the rise of Nazism or that participation of individual Jews in communist movements justified Nazi persecution of Jews. Such forms of distortion are historically inaccurate, lessen the burden of guilt on perpetrators, and suggest that the Holocaust was somehow justifiable.

Statements that cast the Holocaust as a positive historical event... [suggesting that it] did not go far enough in accomplishing its goal of “the Final Solution of the Jewish Question.”

For example, the assertion that the Nazis were justified in their drive to exterminate the Jewish people is not just a historically spurious claim; it is also a bald-faced form of antisemitism that seeks to justify continued atrocities against Jews.

Attempts to blur the responsibility for Nazi Germany’s establishment of concentration and death camps by blaming other nations or ethnic groups.

This form of distortion shifts sole blame for the Holocaust onto local collaborators while ignoring Nazi Germany’s responsibility for the genocide.

Since the adoption of IHRA’s Working Definition of Holocaust Denial and Distortion, additional forms have arisen, including (but not limited to) the following:

Accusing Jews of “using” the Holocaust for some manner of gain.

Claims that the Jewish people “use” the Holocaust for the purposes of financial gain or to justify the establishment of the state of Israel are antisemitic conspiracies, and suggest that the Jewish people have used this history in order to secure particular or nebulous ends.

Use of the term “Holocaust” to reference events or concepts that are not related in any meaningful way to the genocide of European and North African Jewry by Nazi Germany and its accomplices between 1941 and 1945.

Because of the paradigmatic status of the Holocaust as a genocide and its symbolic status as an ultimate evil, it has become somewhat common to identify troublesome comparisons between the Holocaust and unrelated contemporary events, individuals, and other genocides or mass atrocities. Irresponsible comparisons can distort understanding of contemporary phenomena and of the Holocaust. In short, drawing inappropriate comparisons degrades understanding of the implications and significance of the Holocaust.

State-sponsored manipulation of Holocaust history in order to sow political discord within or outside a nation’s borders.

State-sponsored pronouncements against other countries’ actions during the course of the Holocaust were common to Cold War propaganda, and they have continued through the present day. Such pronouncements instill defensive responses and threaten honest engagement with this history.

Trivializing or honoring the historical legacies of persons or organizations that were complicit in the crimes of the Holocaust.

Attempts by states and/or local municipalities to generate particular forms of national identities are often accompanied by efforts to rehabilitate the reputations of persons, organizations, or ideologies associated with Holocaust-era crimes. Such actions not only distort history, they can also be seen as acts that glorify collaboration with the Nazis or as an effort to legitimize Nazi ideology.

The use of imagery and language associated with the Holocaust for political, ideological, or commercial purposes unrelated to this history in online and offline forums.

Increasingly, language and images associated with Nazism are used in a variety of contexts, particularly online, in an attempt to cast negative aspersions or to attract public attention. By overusing the word “Holocaust” or associated terms it leads to the point that they lose significance and meaning.

Holocaust distortion can be influenced by a country's experiences during and after World War II: Was it a perpetrator state? Was it occupied by the Nazis or a member of the Axis Alliance? Was it neutral, or one of the Allies? What were its experiences during the Cold War and what are its present political conditions?

In some countries, the history of the Holocaust can be manipulated to suit narrow ideological and political ends. History museums may even engage unwittingly in acts of distortion as purveyors of a national narrative. For example, some institutions may draw an equivalence between Nazi crimes and those crimes of the Stalinist regime in ways that de-emphasize the Holocaust. Sometimes, these efforts promote narratives of national suffering or the reputations of national heroes, some of whom might have been participant in the persecution of Jews.

Holocaust distortion may also arise out of a desire to obscure the roles played by religious institutions, political parties, educational institutions, and prominent figures in the arts and sciences in Holocaust-era crimes.

Holocaust distortion may also result from comparing atrocity crimes without careful contextualization. While a comparative approach may be fruitful, unreflective equations of the Holocaust with other atrocity crimes may hide certain aspects of the history; further its political instrumentalization; or imply links between genocides that diminish or trivialize the Holocaust.¹

Finally, some Holocaust distortion results from lack of awareness. Declines in historical knowledge or a lack of opportunity to engage deeply with the subject can lead to ignorance, misrepresentations, a lack of sensitivity, and uninformed remarks and/or comparisons to the Holocaust.

Regardless of the motivations, all forms of Holocaust distortion risk inviting or building legitimacy for more dangerous forms of hate: Distortion can undermine the historical and contemporary importance of this unprecedented tragedy and its lessons for today.

¹ See materials of the IHRA Committee on the Holocaust, Genocide, and Crimes Against Humanity: <https://holocaustremembrance.com/holocaust-genocide-and-crimes-against-humanity>

3

Responding to Holocaust Distortion

IHRA Member Countries pledge to adhere to the tenets of the Stockholm Declaration of 2000. They affirm the need to “uphold the terrible truth of the Holocaust” and ensure that their citizens “can understand the causes of the Holocaust and reflect upon its consequences.”

Countering Holocaust distortion is essential to this goal and the IHRA has dedicated itself to identifying resources and mechanisms that can aid in minimizing its influence. Some examples of such resources can be found in the appendix to this publication.

Recent IHRA documents on distortion include:

IHRA Working Definition of Holocaust Denial and Distortion (2013):
<https://www.holocaustremembrance.com/resources/working-definitions-charters/working-definition-holocaust-denial-and-distortion>

Committee on Antisemitism and Holocaust Denial Paper on Holocaust Denial and Distortion (2019): <https://www.holocaustremembrance.com/resources/working-definitions-charters/working-definition-holocaust-denial-and-distortion>

IHRA Statement on Rehabilitation (2020):
<https://www.holocaustremembrance.com/statements/ihra-statement-rehabilitation>

IHRA Ministerial Declaration (2020):
<https://www.holocaustremembrance.com/about-us/ihra-2020-ministerial-declaration>

Whether countering Holocaust distortion online, in print or broadcast media, or face-to-face, policymakers and decision makers must be girded with facts: about the Holocaust, about the common arguments of those who actively distort the Holocaust, and about emerging trends. They need enhanced resources and focused materials focusing on identifying and responding to Holocaust distortion, including whether and how to engage with distorters without appearing to legitimize their positions.

It will be necessary to work with partners to develop such new approaches. The IHRA will contribute concrete scenarios explaining manifestations of Holocaust distortion, such as the following:

Scenario 1

An individual, organization, or public campaign draws comparisons between a contemporary event and the Holocaust.

Response: The Holocaust was a singular crime of the twentieth century. While it is sometimes used as a point of reference to other phenomena, inappropriate comparisons ultimately dilute understanding about the specificity of the Holocaust. Furthermore, overuse of the term “Holocaust” can erode respect for the seriousness of the crimes it represents. Responding to such statements, either through fact-based counter-narratives or through educational campaigns, is necessary. One could develop such responses in cooperation with civil society partners, scholars, and Holocaust-survivor organizations.

Scenario 2

An individual or organization claims that a focus on the Holocaust diminishes consideration and respect for other genocides or crimes against humanity.

Response: While most experts agree that use of the term “Holocaust” (or “Shoah”) relates specifically to the mass murder of approximately 5.7 million European and North African Jews by the Nazis and their accomplices, there are no serious arguments that scholars, educators, or the broader public must focus their interest only on the Holocaust and not on other atrocities. Indeed, there were a great many other Nazi-led atrocities that accompanied the Holocaust, such as the genocide of the Roma, as well as a host of genocides, mass atrocities, and crimes against humanity that preceded and followed the Holocaust era. It is necessary to maintain the specificity of the Holocaust as the genocide of the Jews in order to ensure that we respect the specific nature of that crime and honor the memory of the victims. So, too, is it necessary to understand the specific features of other genocides and atrocities in order to build and maintain a respectful and honest understanding of those crimes. To address the nuances involved, policymakers should encourage dialogue with local or international scholars of the Holocaust and/or Holocaust-focused institutions, such as an authentic site, a memorial, or a museum.

Scenario 3

National Holocaust curricula or commemoration ceremonies exaggerate or focus exclusively on the actions of rescuers.

Response: While rescuers should be honored, an overemphasis on rescue might suggest that it was the norm during the Holocaust, when it was in fact rare. Moreover, too great a focus on rescue could limit discussions of other aspects of the Holocaust, such as the roles played by perpetrators, collaborators, bystanders, and of course the experiences of victims, inviting particular forms of distortion to emerge. Engagement with Holocaust educators and with institutions that address the subject of the Holocaust in ways that account for a range of cultural, national, and international perspectives can lead to more balanced and nuanced presentations of this complex history.

4

What Can Policymakers Do?

These guidelines seek to support policymakers, other government officials, and civil society in addressing Holocaust distortion in four primary arenas:

- Identifying and tracking the phenomenon;
- Training of policymakers in ministries of culture, education, interior, justice and foreign affairs, as well as police, the judiciary, elected officials and administrators on the national, regional, and communal levels;
- Educational work in institutions whose work touches upon the history and relevance of the Holocaust (i.e., museums, memorials, and authentic sites of persecution);
- And ways to counter the spread of distortion online.

These guidelines consist of four sections, each providing insight and recommendations. The final section lists additional resources.

The recommendations for these four areas have many elements in common: They depend on sustained funding, transparency, and – when relevant – international cooperation. They depend on training of professionals, and development of new methods to track and monitor distortion. They require a broad coalition of experts and share the goal of increasing knowledge about the Holocaust on all levels of society. This requires not just education, but also sustained efforts to provide access to museums, memorials, commemorations, and other cultural touchstones that reinforce Holocaust memory. It also requires more resources and opportunities for Holocaust research at universities and other academic institutions, as well as regular, unconditional governmental engagement with internationally recognized experts on identifying and responding to Holocaust distortion.

These guidelines will assist policymakers in recognizing and curbing distortion of the Holocaust. They will also strengthen related initiatives, such as national strategies against antisemitism, educational policies against hate speech, and the work of memorials and museums.

Recognizing that ease of implementation will be influenced by national and regional contexts, IHRA Member Countries should share good practices in this and other matters.



Build Professional Capacities



Foster Cooperation and Exchange



Develop Tools and Guidelines



Secure Sustainable Funding

SECTION OVERVIEW

I



Identifying and Monitoring Holocaust Distortion

In order to address the scope, depth, and the problems associated with Holocaust distortion, governments and civil society must ensure the sustained identification, monitoring, and tracking of its manifestations.

II



Training Programs about Holocaust Distortion

In order to increase awareness and build capacities about Holocaust distortion, governments in cooperation with civil society should develop and support sustainable training programs for a variety of audiences.

III



Strengthening Memorials and Museums

These institutions are increasingly important bulwarks against Holocaust distortion. They offer manifold opportunities for safeguarding the historical record, and need help facing the challenges posed by those who distort the truth.

IV



Social Media Strategies

There is a need for Holocaust-focused institutions to make use of social media in ways that will strengthen their audiences' awareness of Holocaust distortion. An international exchange of good practices is needed, as is more support for the social media output of these institutions.



Identifying and Monitoring Holocaust Distortion

This section raises the issue of monitoring the scope and depth of Holocaust distortion as an essential step in addressing this problem. In order to understand the problems posed by distortion, governments and civil society must enhance identification, monitoring, and tracking.

Experts agree that Holocaust distortion appears in a variety of forms and can influence other forms of hate. Monitors of hate speech or hate crimes regularly encounter distortion, but current statistical indicators, including those focused on antisemitism, insufficiently address it. To understand the scale and impact of distortion we need tools for identifying and tracking this phenomenon.

Tracking strategies should complement and conform to internationally agreed-upon standards and good practices.

It is recommended that policymakers:

1 Develop monitoring guidelines.

In cooperation with significant governmental, intergovernmental, and civil society stakeholders, policymakers should work toward developing guidelines for groups that monitor hate speech and hate crime so they can deal adequately with distortion in an effective way that also respects universal standards for human rights, including freedom of expression.

2 Encourage the use of transparent methodologies for tracking and monitoring.

Monitoring bodies and digital platforms should utilize transparent approaches that facilitate the sharing of information to enhance accountability, while respecting the right to privacy. This should include the reporting of outcomes through formal mechanisms and international frameworks, or in the case of digital platforms, regular transparency reporting.

3 Strengthen domestic and international cooperation.

Recognizing that the problem requires global solutions, policymakers and civil society actors must engage in cooperative international multi-stakeholder dialogue through multilateral organizations, such as the OSCE, whenever possible, in order to develop common strategies.

1



Develop Tools and Guidelines

Guidelines for monitoring: Recognizing distortion

International guidelines will enable governments, international organizations, civil society, the media, fact-checkers and online platforms to identify and track Holocaust distortion.

Distortion is usually not criminalized. Judicial actors should know, *a fortiori*, how to distinguish between legal and illegal speech, following international standards for freedom of expression.²

IHRA resources can help build understanding of the problem, but there is still a need for international guidelines that capture the various manifestations of Holocaust distortion. Policymakers and their relevant partners should engage in sustained multi-stakeholder dialogue aimed at developing standards by which they can act to minimize and counter distortion.

² Set out in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (Articles 19 and 20) and the Rabat Plan of Action on the prohibition of advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence.

Partners In and Users of Monitoring Guidelines

International bodies, such as the OSCE/ ODIHR, the Fundamental Rights Agency or the Council of Europe, which are charged with monitoring hate crime/ hate speech manifestations, or UNESCO which has a mandate on freedom of expression and countering hate speech.

National agencies that are responsible for monitoring and reporting hate crime/ hate speech

NGOs and civil society organizations that gather information about hate crime/ hate speech and other forms of discrimination

2



Build Professional Capacities

Transparent methodologies: Focusing in on distortion

Beyond the need for easy-to-use identification tools, there is a need for new, transparent methodologies for tracking distortion across communities, countries, and international borders, as well as across communication platforms.

Technological tools alone remain insufficient; the subtleties involved in identifying Holocaust distortion and determining whether action should be taken to remove or de-amplify it, often require human intervention, and policies and approaches may differ from one community to the next. Therefore, there is a need for social media companies to enhance their engagement with governments and subject matter experts to better account for local, regional, national, and international differences in the ways that Holocaust distortion appears.

3



Foster Cooperation and Exchange

Domestic and international cooperation: The borderless approach

The tracking of Holocaust distortion should be a permanent part of efforts to enhance knowledge of the Holocaust and counter antisemitism. Presently, no international or national body tracks distortion in a systematic manner, although some do monitor related phenomena such as Holocaust denial, antisemitism, and hate speech. In part, this lack may be ascribed to the challenges of recognizing Holocaust distortion and about the dangers associated with it. One solution is to share good practices with international and national bodies that already monitor forms of antisemitism, and developing and applying consistent tools for monitoring distortion.



Training to Tackle Distortion



This section addresses the challenge of raising awareness about Holocaust distortion among policymakers and other professionals. Governments at the local, national, and regional levels should ensure support for training programs on recognizing and countering distortion. Wherever possible, they should cooperate with international bodies.

Due to the many ways Holocaust distortion can appear, government and police professionals need the tools and capacities to recognize and respond to it. Governments and major international organizations – in cooperation with Holocaust-focused institutions and civil society partners – should develop sustainable training programs for a variety of audiences.

There is a sense of urgency: Recent surveys indicate significant declines in awareness of the Holocaust and of history in general. This sometimes shocking deficit informs the rise of distortion of these crimes, a phenomenon closely tied to antisemitism.

It is recommended that policymakers:

1 Develop a sustainable, funded framework.

Governments should provide consistent funding for training on how to recognize and respond to forms of distortion. Policymakers should advocate for financial support for organizations with recognized expertise in hate speech, antisemitism, and Holocaust-related issues, including civil society, media, academic, and international organizations.

2 Develop targeted and sustainable training programs.

Local and international experts should collaborate with the IHRA and relevant international and national organizations to design and lead sustainable training programs for target audiences (including opinion leaders, media representatives, internet companies, and others) and / or use existing materials either as focused discussions or as full-fledged training programs.

3 Encourage participation in training.

IHRA Member Countries should identify policy- and decision-makers whose work would benefit from training programs focused on recognizing and responding to Holocaust distortion, and then encourage them to participate.

A survey of Millennials and Gen Z in all 50 US states revealed...

September 2020: A survey of Millennials and Gen Z in all 50 US states by the Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany (Claims Conference)

A significant number... cannot name one concentration camp or ghetto and believe that two million or fewer Jews were killed.

Approximately half (49 percent)... said they had seen Holocaust denial or distortion posts online.

A “concerning percentage”... believe that Jews caused the Holocaust.

The Claims Conference Holocaust Knowledge and Awareness Survey of Austrian citizens (Feb–March 2019) found...

56% over all, and 58% of Millennials and Gen Z, did not know that six million Jews were killed during the Holocaust.

The frequency of hearing or seeing the statement...

“The Holocaust is a myth or has been exaggerated”

was **5%** for “all the time”, **19%** for “frequently” and **38%** for “occasionally”

According to the survey by the EU’s Fundamental Rights Agency on experiences and perceptions of antisemitism, December 2018

In Europe poll showed that:

**One third of European respondents...
said they knew little or nothing about the Holocaust.**

**Four out of 10 Austrian adults...
said they knew “just a little.”**

**20% of French respondents aged 18–34 and
12% of Austrians in that age group...
said they’d never heard of the Holocaust.**

According to the CNN – Anti-Semitism in Europe Poll (carried out by ComRes) September 2018

A survey of French citizens revealed that...

The Claims Conference Holocaust
Awareness Survey of French citizens
November 2019:

**Only 56% of Millennials and Gen Z
knew about the Vel d’Hiv’ Roundup
of Jews in 1942, compared to 74% of
French respondents overall.**

**Only 2% of all respondents knew
about the Drancy internment camp,
located in a suburb of Paris.**

An Infratest survey of Germans for the Deutsche Welle news agency
(November 2019) suggested that...

The number of those who think it’s time to put the Nazi past behind them is slowly climbing.

While 37% overall agreed, 56% of those with at most 8 to 10 years of
schooling wanted “to close this chapter.” The survey also found that 72%
of supporters of the right-populist party Alternative for Germany agreed
that Germans should not spend so much time dealing with the Nazi period.

1



Secure Sustainable Funding

Sustainable funding for training: Staying ahead of the game

Governments should provide Holocaust-focused organizations with sustainable and consistent financial support so that they can shape, develop, and lead training programs for policymakers, the judiciary, prosecution, police, journalists, clergy and other opinion makers. The beneficiaries of such support might include academic, educational, and resource institutions with recognized expertise in hate speech, antisemitism, and Holocaust-related issues, and ones that cooperate with the IHRA and relevant international organizations.

Consistent, dependable funding can ensure that these institutions can commit the time and personnel necessary to developing training programs that are capable of adjusting to a constantly evolving challenge. Distortion is a moving target.

Whether it is at the secondary school level, in universities, or in other learning environments, Holocaust education is not a panacea by itself. Distortion continues to proliferate, particularly during times of social, political, or economic upheaval, and conspiracy myths – including the distortion of history – have enormous pull.

Yet it is clear that improved educational approaches, including media and information literacy, can play a major role in holding Holocaust distortion in check. To that end, funding must be secure and unconditional.

Goals of Training

- Engage with and learn from academic and educational institutions with recognized expertise in hate speech, antisemitism, and Holocaust-related issues
- Ensure that candidates for training reflect the diversity of the local society, the visiting public and any additional desired audience
- Develop ways to enhance knowledge of and critical thinking about the Holocaust with a focus on distortion and its link to antisemitism
- Help policymakers and others to develop historical consciousness by studying interpretations and remembrance of the Holocaust, and participating in national and local traditions of commemoration and remembrance

2



Develop Tools and Guidelines

What to teach: **The ABCs of distortion**

Curricula on Holocaust distortion for professional audiences should cover many facets and be accessible to a variety of participants, including but not limited to the police, the judiciary, civil servants, or other groups of decision makers.

Local and international experts should jointly design training programs and / or use existing materials in focused discussions on Holocaust distortion, depending on factors such as local context, priorities, and target groups.

Education about Holocaust distortion will vary depending on national contexts, which will inform decisions regarding which topics are to be explored more or less deeply. Educational programs should reflect the diversity of pluralistic societies. Although courses may require specific features to suit the needs of particular audiences, there may also be a need to anticipate the perspectives and concerns of a broader public, as well as local communities in prospective training courses. Such training must make use of the most recent data gained through research and monitoring of distortion.

The questions listed here represent a set of core learning goals and content. Concerns will change over time. Given these important caveats, training programs should address the questions of why Holocaust distortion is a threat, what forms it takes, and how it relates to other phenomena. They should take a multi-pronged approach, covering trends in media and online communities, the dynamics of Holocaust distortion, relevant local and international standards, as well as regulations or laws concerning freedoms of expression.

Key Questions to Address in Training

- Why is recognizing and countering Holocaust distortion relevant?
- What are key forms and manifestations of Holocaust distortion?
- What is the difference between Holocaust denial and distortion?
- What are international, national, and local contexts?
- How does Holocaust distortion relate to phenomena including general historical misrepresentations, antisemitism, hate speech/ hate crimes, or freedom of speech?
- If national histories distort memory or understanding of the Holocaust, what is the individual's responsibility to rectify this problem?
- What are effective ways to prevent and counter Holocaust distortion in the target group's respective field of work, while respecting freedom of expression?

Possible formats range from focused discussions to full-fledged workshops. In certain contexts, a module on Holocaust distortion might be appropriate within a broader program on hate speech and freedoms of expression, human rights, or more specifically on antisemitism or Holocaust issues.

In other contexts where the problem may be particularly potent, a full workshop could be offered for a target audience such as judicial operators or the media on, for example, respecting international standards on freedom of expression while countering the denial of atrocity crimes.

Key Topics for Workshops

Historical literacy

Including basic historical knowledge of the Holocaust, notions as to how it has been remembered and researched, and an understanding of persistent challenges in these fields.

Forms of Holocaust distortion

Including identifying Holocaust distortion, rhetorical strategies, related political and ideological motives and their relationship to expressions of hate, and the harms that this causes to individuals, communities, and societies as a whole.

Media and information literacy

Including demonstrating and identifying trends in Holocaust distortion in traditional and online media, as well as the critical thinking skills needed to recognize and counter it.

Regulations and laws

Including local, regional, and national regulations on hate speech, Holocaust denial, and Holocaust distortion; how these mechanisms work; whether they protect and promote freedom of expression in line with international standards; and who is responsible for enforcing these regulations/laws.

General topics

Including intolerance and discrimination, human rights education, countering violent extremism, Holocaust-related topics and antisemitism.

3



Build Professional Capacities

Whom to reach: Opinion leaders and mentors

Training programs will help diverse audiences to recognize the seriousness of the phenomenon and build capacity and skills to effectively address it.

Training programs should be tailored to target audiences of various cultural backgrounds and professions, including policy and decision makers (ministry officials, local authorities; media; lawmakers and judiciary; police; staff of social media and search companies). Training in recognizing and countering Holocaust distortion might inspire additional policy changes, including in arenas that influence general education. These programs might also influence other training efforts, such as those responsible for curriculum and textbook development in colleges, universities, or schools.

Tailored programs can help...

Policymakers

- to recognize the seriousness of the phenomenon
- to identify distortion and inaccuracy when the Holocaust is used as a rhetorical device in the service of social, political and ideological agendas
- to incorporate the subject of Holocaust distortion into governmental and intergovernmental action plans against antisemitism and related forms of bias

Educational stakeholders

- to ensure that educational policies and programs recognize and address Holocaust distortion and media and information literacy

Law enforcement and judiciary

- to build skills for effective implementation of existing regulations and laws
- to recognize the grey zones and borderlines of distortion and its mainly non-criminal nature, to ensure that efforts to counter Holocaust distortion do not unduly infringe on the right to freedom of expression

Journalists, media-content creators and fact-checkers

- to build an understanding of the need to publicly debunk and reject Holocaust distortion

Technology companies

- to recognize Holocaust distortion on their platforms and best practices for responding to in a transparent way in line with international human rights standards



Strengthening Institutions that Address the Holocaust:

Safeguarding the Historical Record

This section looks at the challenges that memorials, authentic sites, museums, archives and other sites that deal with national or local history face when confronted with Holocaust distortion. Here, too, international cooperation can have a significant positive impact.

More than 75 years after the end of World War II, institutions that teach about and commemorate the Holocaust and its aftermath are increasingly important bulwarks against distortion. Documents, photographs, artifacts, access to authentic sites, and recorded testimony of survivors and other witnesses are key to this task, especially as we move to an era without eyewitnesses among us.

Such institutions are often the point of broadest direct contact with the public (from school groups to scholars, from tourists to individual visitors), and thus offer manifold and unique opportunities for safeguarding the record and countering Holocaust distortion.

The passing of the generation of Holocaust survivors will require these institutions to keep alive the memory and understanding of the Holocaust. Yet, at this moment, these institutions face many new and unique challenges. In some countries, for example, right-wing extremists and figures from right-populist movements target such institutions; they challenge historical facts and interrupt guided tours. Some institutions exist within societies and cultures that tolerate distortion of history, that juggle competing historical memories (e.g. Soviet versus Nazi crimes), or celebrate as resisters those whom others consider war criminals; some face a loss of public financial support; and they often are subjected to politicization of history (including in commemoration ceremonies) for partisan and other ideological ends.

Equipped with the support that allows for updated exhibitions and proper training, professionals in authentic sites and institutions that address the subject of the Holocaust – including management and guides – will be better able to respond to the wide array of challenges that occur when conveying this history to diverse and growing audiences.

Governmental funding for such institutions must be secure. This support should be unconditional, in keeping with IHRA International Memorial Museums Charter, according to which "...states, governments, and local communities bear a great responsibility to memorial museums and should safeguard their collections and assure them the highest degree of independence from political directives"; that is, local or government authorities should not pressure institutions to present history in order to suit particular political or ideological perspectives. Greater cooperation is needed between governments and institutions to enhance visitor programming; to prepare professionals to respond to distortion; and to ensure that exhibitions do

not inadvertently distort history themselves. As the International Memorial Museums Charter notes, memorial museums as contemporary history museums are always engaged in criticism of their own history.

In keeping with this commitment, efforts should be made to avoid presenting the Holocaust together with crimes perpetrated by occupiers other than the Nazis and their accomplices in the same exhibition, whether temporary or permanent. Where this is not currently possible, particular care should be directed at avoiding the depiction of the Holocaust as a minor event in comparison to other crimes.

It is recommended that policymakers:

1 Ensure sustainable, unconditional support

Stable financial, material, and technical assistance enables institutions to create new exhibits, update existing ones, and fight distortion, while guarding independence from political pressure.

2 Develop tools and guidelines

Encourage governments to develop a sustainable framework to ensure that school curricula include student visits (both in person and online) to Holocaust-related museums and sites, with preparation beforehand and debriefing afterward.

3 Support professional development of staff

Ensure that governmentally funded Holocaust institutions support professional development and ensure that exhibitions do not unintentionally mischaracterize aspects of this history. Staff should be equipped to address diverse audiences.

4 Strengthen international cooperation and exchange

Engage with major oversight bodies (e.g., UNESCO and/or national cultural ministries) major professional organizations (e.g., ICOM) and international networks of institutions that address the subject of the Holocaust so that they can support efforts to counter distortion of the Holocaust in concert with IHRA experts (including the possibility of designing special exhibitions on this subject).

1



Secure Sustainable Funding

Ensure sustainable support: Backing for institutions that defend history

Institutions that address the subject of the Holocaust – such as museums, memorials, authentic sites and others that play an active role in education on this subject – need additional funds to combat growing ignorance about this history and to respond to an increase in antisemitic conspiracy theories linked to current events (currently related to the origin and spread of the Coronavirus).

Governments should provide regular and stable funding and support (including moral, material and technical assistance) to such institutions. States or local governments should reinforce specific initiatives aimed at countering distortion; should consult with international experts to check facts in their own historical narrative on the Holocaust; and should commit to publicly standing up for institutions under attack by intentional distorters. As noted in the IHRA International Memorial Museums charter, it is important that support be unconditional.

This assistance can ensure that exhibitions, publications, and educational opportunities are dynamic and speak to a wide range of audiences. In addition, governments must ensure that institutions that address the Holocaust have ease of access and a low financial burden when utilizing materials (documentary, filmic, photographic, etc.) held by government-sponsored or state-run archives.

Institutions need sustained funding for...

- Professional development and continuing education for staff, focusing on recognizing and responding to distortion
- Research on distortion
- Curating exhibits that help raise awareness
- Ensuring school visits, with adequate preparation and debriefing
- Development of an early warning system for emerging trends in deliberate distortion
- Maintaining a vigilant online presence, monitoring website feedback

2



Develop Tools and Guidelines

Finding frameworks for group visits and encounter programs: Preparation and debriefing

Policymakers should encourage governments to develop a sustainable framework to ensure that school curricula include visits to an authentic site, memorial, or museum for students of an appropriate age, with preparation beforehand and debriefing afterward. Participants should learn to recognize forms of Holocaust distortion. Educational visits should be the result of cooperation between the Holocaust-related institution and the educational authority.

Because they reach a wide range of audiences, Holocaust memorials, museums and authentic sites have dedicated themselves to presenting history in a clear and direct manner. This requires that they ensure that visits by educational groups incorporate appropriate preparation and follow up, in both in-person and online forums for engagement.

To ensure that the subject of distortion is included, institutions that address the Holocaust could – as capacities allow – work with educational authorities to prepare visiting groups with facts, historical context, and accessible narratives. Funding should be earmarked for this mandate.

3



Build Professional Capacities

Professional development: Providing training for guides

Guides encounter Holocaust distortion on a regular basis. They must have opportunities to update their knowledge of Holocaust history and their skills in responding to distortion. They also need the support of governments and policymakers for their work, which can lead to greater awareness and ultimately to individuals or governments understanding how to identify, and when it is appropriate to respond to, acts of Holocaust distortion.

Institutions that address the subject of the Holocaust with authority reach many audiences. They can advise on or engage in the training of policymakers and be key partners in countering Holocaust distortion. Stronger cooperation with educational authorities will enhance training and learning at these institutions, while at the same time ensuring that these institutions and their government funders do not (intentionally or unintentionally) mischaracterize aspects of Holocaust history.

Policymakers should provide support and a framework for the education of museum guides to understand Holocaust history and to recognize/respond to forms of distortion.

Efforts should be made to hire staff from backgrounds that reflect those of an institution's environment and audience. Doing so can inform better responses to distortion and encourage a greater variety of visitors.

4



Foster Cooperation and Exchange

Strengthen international cooperation: Distortion knows no boundaries

International cooperation between institutions that address the subject of the Holocaust can boost efforts to counter distortion through the exchange of good practices in response to:

- audience misperceptions about the Holocaust;
- pressure to conform to politically acceptable but historically inaccurate narratives; or
- distortion that surges during times of political or social instability

Policymakers should engage with relevant institutions and international networks that address the Holocaust, antisemitism, and hate speech so that they can support efforts to counter distortion through multi-stakeholder cooperation in concert with IHRA experts. Outcomes of such engagement could lead to the development of focused presentations on the subject, greater dialogue on the challenges posed by distortion to the health of these institutions, and to new approaches to countering distortion of history and other forms of disinformation.

IV



Recognizing and Responding to Distortion Online

—

Online media has the potential to raise awareness about the Holocaust, while at the same time it has the potential to serve as one of the principal carriers of Holocaust distortion and other misinformation.

Holocaust distortion is a significant problem on social media. Distortive comments and campaigns have a deleterious impact on individuals and on institutions that address the subject of the Holocaust. Several civil society initiatives have focused on holding social media companies responsible for the content that appears on their platforms. These are important and necessary efforts. In addition, policymakers and Holocaust-focused institutions must become more aware of the challenges of online distortion and work together to push back against it.

To a certain extent, aspects of Holocaust distortion on social media resemble the phenomenon in other arenas: Both online and off, words or themes associated with the Holocaust are subject to misrepresentation, misinterpretation, or abuse, and the understanding of Holocaust content is influenced by a wide range of cultural and regional factors. But the online space has its own challenges.

Each online platform has particular features — including userbase, terms of service and community guidelines, and technological design—that affect the tenor and reach of content that distorts Holocaust history. Social media also allows such content to reach many more audiences than traditional media. Some of these audiences have an ingrained bias against Holocaust-related content, while others may not understand the relevance and importance of the Holocaust at all. Importantly, many of these consumers use social media to elevate their misinterpretations of the Holocaust in ways that attract new audiences and thus reproduce the distortion of this critical subject.

Challenges of Online Distortion

- Some platforms are conducive to spreading falsehoods
- Keywords attract clicks: Auschwitz, Holocaust, etc.
- Moderators must identify the difference between intentional distortion and distortion resulting from ignorance to respond adequately
- Responding to some distorters only encourages them
- Some distorters deliberately misuse content, including content from respected organizations, such as Holocaust museums and memorials
- Current events may prompt surges in online distortion

There are many potential responses. First and foremost, there is a need for social media, search and social messaging companies to monitor and, when necessary, take action on a wide variety of manifestations of hate speech and other content that may cause harm, including Holocaust denial and dangerous distortion. Actions may include promoting true and reliable content; adding fact-check labels; downranking, de-amplifying, placing under warning label or removing harmful content; disabling advertising revenue; and/or deactivating accounts of actors producing and spread such content, including through inauthentic coordinated behavior. All actions by companies should respect international standards on human rights—including the rights to freedom of expression and privacy—and provide transparency and possibility for redress.

Governments should ensure that Holocaust institutions have the capacity to develop material designed to teach online audiences how to recognize distortion. Moreover, these institutions should work with policymakers and social media companies to build understanding of the threat of Holocaust distortion and recognition of the patterns, trends, and forms that it can take. Social media companies and Holocaust-focused institutions must become partners in the effort to counter distortion. Doing so will not only lead to proactive approaches; it will also allow each to engage in developing good practice solutions.

Strategies should include providing fact-checking resources for online audiences; deciding when to respond to, hide, block or ignore distortive comments when they engage with institutions' social media or online programs; engaging with digital communities in joint responses; and encouraging social media platforms to identify and address forms of distortion. There is also a need for such institutions to engage with their audiences on topics related to media and information literacy and the identification of misinformation and disinformation, including distortion. Holocaust-focused institutions might also work with social media platforms to identify patterns and trends that indicate the interests or misunderstandings of particular audiences; cooperatively develop materials to help combat malicious forms of Holocaust distortion; or create standards for the training of social media monitoring bodies, including internet companies, governments, and civil society organizations. Cooperation will also enable social media companies and Holocaust institutions to identify strategies that work and how best to communicate with audiences at risk of misunderstanding the Holocaust and/or engaging in hate speech.

It is recommended that policymakers:

1 Cooperation between Holocaust-focused institutions and social media companies

Social media companies hold the data needed to understand the prevalence, spread and impact of Holocaust distortion on their platforms, which is essential for understanding the phenomenon and ways to counter it. In order to most effectively combat Holocaust distortion online, social media companies should cooperate with Holocaust-focused institutions and other organizations that have expertise and content. Building cooperation between the two is an essential first step.

2 Social media accounts of Holocaust-focused institutions

Memorials, museums and other institutions working in the fields of Holocaust education and commemoration require sustainable and vigorous support for the development of proactive tools and accessible educational resources that will be resistant to abuse by distorters in the fast-moving world of social media.

3 Cooperation with monitoring organizations

Organizations that monitor online distortion, disinformation and hate speech, and institutions that face challenges from Holocaust distorters, should be encouraged to share data and good practices in order to improve understanding of the depth and sources of the problem.

V



Additional Resources

IHRA Member Countries have developed valuable materials on topics connected to training and learning about Holocaust distortion that can be used for raising awareness and for capacity-building training programs. Additionally, certain Permanent International Partners of the IHRA offer some guidance that can complement training programs on distortion.

Please note that this list is not exhaustive. For a fuller list of available resources, please consult the individual country pages of the IHRA, as at <https://holocaustremembrance.com/about-us/countries-membership>, as well as the IHRA Overview of Holocaust-related organizations, at <https://www.holocaustremembrance.com/resources/overview-holocaust-related-organizations>

IHRA Recommendations for Teaching and Learning about the Holocaust

<http://holocaustremembrance.com/resources/educational-materials>

OSCE-ODIHR/ UNESCO Addressing Anti-Semitism Through Education: Guidelines for Policymakers

https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/8/0/383089_0.pdf

OSCE-ODIHR Addressing Anti-Semitism Through Education: Teaching Aids

<https://www.osce.org/odihr/441146?page=1>.

UNESCO Education about the Holocaust and Preventing Genocide. Guidelines for Policymakers

<https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000248071>

UNESCO Recommendation concerning the Protection and Promotion of Museums and Collections

<http://www.unesco.org/new/en/culture/themes/museums/recommendation-on-the-protection-and-promotion-of-museums-and-collections/>

UNESCO Recommendation Concerning the Preservation of, and Access to, Documentary Heritage Including in Digital Form

<https://en.unesco.org/memoryoftheworld/recommendation2015>

UNESCO Countering Online Hate Speech

<https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000233231>

Fact Checking Resources

The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Washington, DC

<https://www.ushmm.org/learn>

Yad Vashem, The World Holocaust Remembrance Center, Jerusalem, Israel

<https://www.yadvashem.org/holocaust/about.html>

Auschwitz Memorial and Museum at the former German Nazi concentration and extermination camp

<http://auschwitz.org/en/history/>

IHRA Charters and Working Definitions

Stockholm Declaration

<https://www.holocaustremembrance.com/about-us/stockholm-declaration>

2020 IHRA Ministerial Declaration

<https://www.holocaustremembrance.com/news-archive/ihra-2020-ministerial-declaration>

Working Definition of Holocaust Denial and Distortion

<https://holocaustremembrance.com/resources/working-definitions-charters/working-definition-holocaust-denial-and-distortion>

Working Definition of Antisemitism

<https://www.holocaustremembrance.com/resources/working-definitions-charters/working-definition-antisemitism>

Working Definition of Antigypsyism/Anti-Roma Discrimination

<https://www.holocaustremembrance.com/resources/working-definitions-charters/working-definition-antigypsyism-anti-roma-discrimination>

International Memorial Museums Charter

<https://holocaustremembrance.com/resources/working-definitions-charters/international-memorial-museums-charter>



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