

# PREFACE

How did Germany deal with the historical injustice of the Second World War? It took a long time for the German government, parliament and society to assume full responsibility for the crimes perpetrated by the Nazi regime and acknowledge the suffering of the victims of this regime without reservations. In view of the massive deployment of forced laborers in Nazi Germany and its occupied territories, it is surprising that a compensation program for this victim group was only set up in the year 2000, 55 years after the end of the Second World War. Moreover, the program was not set up by Germany alone, but was the result of protracted and complicated negotiations between international stakeholders, which were themselves triggered by a wave of lawsuits against Germany and German companies. The negotiations resulted in the establishment of the Foundation Remembrance, Responsibility and Future which had the mandate to locate survivors of forced labor and create a process to pay out individual compensations. The establishment of the compensation program for forced labor is thus due, in a large part, to international pressure.

This book is a description of the practical implementation of the compensation program. It is neither a scientific publication, nor a report or handbook. Rather, it provides an insider's perspective to the compensation program for forced labor, written by authors who were directly involved in the implementation of the program, either as employees of the Foundation Remembrance, Responsibility and Future or of its partner organizations during the time of the compensation program. The authors hope that by sharing the experiences and the challenges encountered during the planning and implementation phase of the program, valuable knowledge can be passed on to other practitioners in the field of transitional justice and particularly reparations or compensation programs after mass crimes.

The book seeks to balance carefully between displaying the specific challenges of the German program, which were often due to the unique historical situation, and the information that would most likely be relevant to an international audience. The authors attempted an honest description of the lessons learned in setting up and implementing such a massive program. While the Law on the Creation of a Foundation Remembrance, Responsibility and Future defined the main features of the program, many decisions had to be taken on an ad hoc-basis, as the particular situations were not anticipated. This was also due to the fact that there was no precedent to a program of this size, on which the implementation could be modeled on. By illustrating why and how decisions were taken and how these affected the later phases of the program, the authors hope to provide insights, knowledge, and inspiration for those involved in setting up reparations programs in the future.

This publication addresses policy-makers, activists, victim representatives and others who are in the process of planning or effecting reparations programs or may be so in the future. It is meant for an international audience, including those unfamiliar with the historical context of the forced labor compensation program. At the same time, it is hoped that many of those who were engaged in implementing the program will read the publication.

The reasons for writing such a book are twofold. Over the past years, the Foundation Remembrance, Responsibility and Future received a growing number of inquiries about how the compensation program was designed and implemented. The Foundation noticed that its experience has garnered the interest of a wide range of political, civil society, and other actors from countries that face similar challenges of dealing with the past. At the same time, there is an interest and need of preserving the institutional knowledge of the Foundation Remembrance, Responsibility and Future and the lessons learned from this unique compensation program. At the time of writing, the program ended in 2007, and many of those directly involved in this process no longer work for the Foundation. This book is thus also an attempt to preserve the immense institutional knowledge built up over the years.

This volume is the product of a team of authors that represent different perspectives within the compensation program. As the design and implementation of the program were the common responsibility of the German and international partners, it was important for the editors to not only portray the experiences of the Foundation Remembrance, Responsibility and Future but also those of the partners in an exemplary way. This meant that representatives of the two most “typical” types of partner organizations were asked to contribute to the book. As a team, the editors and authors discussed the overall strategy of the publication, and each chapter in depth. Thus, while all authors accept responsibility for their viewpoints put forth in the chapters, there is nevertheless a shared responsibility for the publication.

Finally, it is not the goal of this publication to arrive at a unified or final evaluation of the forced labor compensation program, but to preserve and showcase the practical lessons learned from it. The authors of this book are conscious that many perspectives that may be relevant, in relation to the compensation program, are not included here. Voices of recipients of the compensation payments, of civil society or governments, of those victims associations that did not agree with the program, or of the other five partner organizations, just to name a few, are not represented in this book. It is thus important to keep in mind that the goal of this publication is not to present a technical analysis or political evaluation of the program, but to put forth the description of practical aspects of effecting such a large compensation program.

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