

Holocaust Victims Assets Programme/Swiss Banks (HVAP)

In 1996 and early 1997, a number of class action lawsuits were filed in the United States of America against several Swiss banks on behalf of "Victims of Nazi Persecution". The cases called for the release of dormant accounts of Holocaust victims. The plaintiffs alleged that these banks knowingly retained and concealed assets of Holocaust victims and collaborated with and aided the Nazi Regime by accepting and laundering illegally obtained Nazi loot and profits of slave labor.

In August 1998, the parties reached an agreement to settle the lawsuits for \$1.25 billion, signed in January, 1999.

IOM established the Holocaust Victims Assets Programme (HVAP) (Swiss Banks) at the request of the Swiss Banks Settlement Fund. HVAP's purpose was to process and pay the claims of Holocaust survivors who were members of certain target groups and were not recognised in other reparations programmes, as well as forced or slave labourers for Swiss companies during the Nazi era.

Reaching out to particularly vulnerable groups suffering from social stigma, reduced personal agency or social exclusion such as Roma, Homosexuals, Jehovah Witnesses and Disabled, was particularly challenging. In order to reach out to the victims i.e. potential claimants, IOM designed a targeted outreach strategy and established collaborative and coordinative models with representative organizations and individuals.

IOM received 58,272 claims in more than 11 languages. IOM disbursed a total payment value of USD 32,273,115.

Under HVAP, IOM processed the applications and made payments to three classes of claimants:

Forced Labor Class I: non-Jewish victims or targets of Nazi persecution (Roma, Jehovah's Witness, handicapped and homosexual victims) who performed forced or slave labor for private entities which may have transacted their profits through Swiss entities (around 40,630 claims).

Forced Labor Class II: Persons who performed slave labor for a Swiss entity or a German subsidiary of a Swiss entity that was a party to the Swiss Banks Settlement (around 16,474 claims).

Refugee Class: Roma¹, Jehovah's Witness, homosexual and disabled persons who sought entry into Switzerland to avoid Nazi persecution and who were either denied entry into Switzerland or, after gaining entry into Switzerland, were deported, detained, abused or otherwise mistreated (around 1,169 claims).

The HVAP was completed in 2006. **Kindly note IOM can no longer accept claims, issue cheques or make new payments to beneficiaries.**

For more information, kindly contact iomrp@iom.int

¹ The term 'Roma' is used here to refer to persons describing themselves as Roma, Gypsies, Travelers, Manouches, Sinti and other groups perceived as 'Gypsies'. The use of the term 'Roma' is not intended to downplay the great diversity that exists within these communities or to promote stereotypes.