

**Open letter to Federal Labour Minister Andrea Nahles on
anchoring subsidiary recognition of completion of the qualifying period
for ghetto pensions in the Ghetto Pensions Act**

During the Second World War, Jews and Roma shared a common fate. Ruthless exploitation left millions at the mercy of systematic annihilation. The ghettos established by Germans formed one part of this shared ordeal. However, the survivors of the Shoah and the Porajmos living in eastern Europe were, for decades, excluded from receiving the compensation and corrective payments to which they were entitled for their labour.

It was not until 2002, after many years of interventions by survivors, that entitlements to ghetto pensions were recognised via the Act Regarding the Conditions for Making Pensions Payable on the Basis of Employment in a Ghetto, or Ghetto Pensions Act (ZRBG).

Former ghetto workers resident in Poland remained unable to receive ghetto pensions under the Ghetto Pensions Act, however. It was only after years of protests and thanks to the support of parliamentarians, dedicated social court judges, lawyers and historians that this changed, with the signing in December 2014 of the German-Polish Agreement on the Export of Special Benefits for Entitled Persons Resident in the Territory of the Republic of Poland.

Yet many former ghetto workers continue to be excluded from receiving ghetto pensions. This affects Roma and Sinti men and women in particular. It is undisputed that these individuals have acquired contribution periods as a result of work in a ghetto. However, in view of the multiple discrimination which they continued to experience even after the liberation from the Nazis, some of these individuals fall a few months short of meeting the full qualifying period of 60 calendar months in the German pensions system. This is a prerequisite for receiving a ghetto pension, however. An equivalent to the acquired contribution and substitute periods already recognised by the pension insurance system is needed to compensate, by means of a ghetto pension, for the work these people carried out. Most Holocaust survivors are no longer able to pay voluntary contributions to cover the small number of contribution months they lack.

A correction of the Ghetto Pensions Act is also urgently needed due to the risk of poverty in old age among Holocaust survivors in Europe, but also in Germany and elsewhere. Even though this requires holistic measures, the survivors of Nazi persecution deserve particular consideration and protection. It must therefore be possible for all former ghetto workers to access ghetto pensions.

Establishing a provision stipulating that a subsidiary qualifying period of at least five years is deemed to have been met if this period has not already been completed on the basis of other contribution periods or substitute periods offers a rapid and unbureaucratic solution to the problem. Correcting the Ghetto Pensions Act is necessary and fair because it makes it possible to access the ghetto pension and, as in all other cases, the amount of the pension is calculated solely on the basis of the earnings points acquired. This correction therefore does not constitute discrimination against all those survivors who, in certain cases, had the possibility of retrospectively paying voluntary contributions. The Central Council of Jews in Germany, the representative of the Jewish Claims Conference in Germany and many other associations and experts have therefore expressed support for a correction of the Ghetto Pensions Act in the statements they have submitted to the Committee on Labour and Social Affairs, which is due to take a decision on a corresponding bill in the coming days. This correction also creates legal certainty by finally rectifying the failure to incorporate a clear provision regarding qualifying periods in the Ghetto Pensions Act. Correcting the Ghetto Pensions Act is thus a necessary means of compensating for Nazi persecution.

By signing this open letter, I am supporting the efforts of the Union of Jewish Religious Communities in Poland and the Association of Roma in Poland and calling for subsidiary recognition of completion of the qualifying period to be anchored in the Ghetto Pensions Act!

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