



ועד הקהלות היהודיות בפולין

ZWIĄZEK GMIN WYZNANIOWYCH ŻYDOWSKICH W POLSCE
THE UNION OF JEWISH COMMUNITIES IN POLAND

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and the Members of the German Bundestag
GERMAN BUNDESTAG
Platz der Republik 1
D-11011 Berlin

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During World War Two, Jews and Roma were bound together by a common fate. Through ruthless exploitation we were condemned to systematic destruction. One aspect of our shared persecution was the ghettos established by the Germans. Yet as East European survivors of the Shoah and the Porajmos, we were for decades denied what was due to us by way of reparations and compensation for our work.

On 27 January each year thousands of people assemble to remember the murdered victims of National Socialism. As we reflect on history and the current dangers of old-age poverty, we must not allow our common watchword of “Never Again” to have a hollow ring. Appropriate remembrance demands that we also accept the humanitarian problems of old-age poverty among the survivors of the Holocaust. We, the last survivors of fascist barbarity, need support and recognition for our work.

The Union of Jewish Religious Communities in Poland (Związek Gmin Wyznaniowych Żydowskich w Polsce) and the Association of Roma in Poland (Stowarzyszenie Romów w Polsce) therefore urge the Presidium of the German Bundestag and the Members of the German Bundestag to work on a cross-party and consensual basis to fill a gap in the legislation and bring about the incorporation of a subsidiary waiting period of at least five years in the ZRBG (Law regarding the conditions for making pensions payable on the basis of employment in a ghetto), where this is not already fulfilled by other contribution periods or substitute periods.

The intent and purpose of the ZRBG is to grant independent pension benefits on the basis of work which we performed and which National Socialism ruthlessly exploited. The objective of the ZRBG, adopted unanimously by all the parliamentary groups in the Bundestag, was to establish an independent claim to a ghetto pension and not merely an expectation thereof. The ZRBG also recognised the employment of children and young people under the age of 14. This was based on the findings of historical research regarding the actual living conditions in ghettos, where in the face of extreme hunger, everybody – regardless of age – had to work to survive, even for a bowl of soup. Up to now there has been no clarifying provision regarding recognition of waiting times in the ZRBG, which means that some of the former ghetto workers are barred from receiving the benefits due to them. Without this provision, it is only possible in exceptional cases to establish entitlement to a ghetto pension. This is because 60 insurance months is the qualifying period for a German pension while no ghetto existed for longer than 48 months.

The difference between already documented contribution periods from employment in a ghetto and the requirement of 60 months can in exceptional cases be made up for by so-called substitute periods. Given the personal scope of application of the ZRBG, which essentially includes almost exclusively children and young people, this is often, however, not possible. Because of their age at the time, victims in this group are not entitled to count their period of persecution as substitute periods for pension purposes since at that time they were not yet 14 years of age.

Extending recognition of employment in a ghetto to include those who were children at the time they were working is an important act of reparation and of acceptance of historical responsibility.

A new regulation is needed because surviving Roma and Romnia in Eastern Europe in particular are unable to document any additional insurance periods in Germany counting towards their pension apart from the contribution periods earned in the ghetto. This problem also affects women who were employed as girls in the ghetto, survived in hiding or in concentration camps and who very soon became pregnant. As a consequence of these circumstances, many such women were unable to undertake any work or at least any suitable work subject to social insurance payments since any work had to fit in with bringing up their children and running the household. They too are barred from receiving the benefits due to them under the ZRBG since they cannot prove any eligible insurance periods in Germany. It was the express will of the legislature to “tread new ground” in the area of statutory pension insurance and to provide for payment of an independent ghetto pension.

We, the survivors of the German policy of systematic extermination, protest against these attempts to remove pension entitlements under the ZRBG through reference to the Ghetto Work Recognition Directive. We have suffered enough and far too long to have to fight for the recognition of the work we performed and to find that now, at this age, we are barred from receiving a ghetto pension. We demand solutions which represent an equivalent to ghetto contributions in German pension insurance over which there is no dispute.

We ask you, as the legislative power, to change this situation. This is of particular importance to those people who, as a result of such a narrow interpretation of legal provisions and the lack of coherence between different laws, are barred from receiving a ghetto pension. This matter is made all the more important since it affects only a small group of elderly people, many of whom are in poor health and living in difficult social circumstances.

This injustice can be corrected quickly and with a minimum of bureaucracy. At present the Committee on Labour and Social Affairs of the German Bundestag is discussing a draft amendment of the ZRBG, which is supported not just by our associations but also by the Central Council of Jews in Germany, the Central Council of German Sinti and Roma, the Jewish Claims Conference and numerous further associations and concerned individuals.

We therefore call on the German Bundestag and the Federal Government to work on behalf of the survivors of the ghettos and ask all people of good will in the Federal Republic to support our concerns by signing the enclosed **Open Letter** to the Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (BMAS).



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