

# Is Digital Better? Lessons learned from building the European Holocaust Research Infrastructure (EHRI)

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## **Abstract:**

EHRI is a consortium of the most important Holocaust archives, libraries and research institutions. It aims to overcome the enormous fragmentation of Holocaust archives across Europe and beyond by developing a permanent European Research Infrastructure that offers integrated access to dispersed Holocaust resources.

The digital transformation of archives is a powerful enabler for EHRI. On the one hand, the ability to virtually unite what has been physically dispersed is a key affordance of the digital age. The EHRI Online Portal (<https://portal.ehri-project.eu>) is built around this affordance by providing unified access to information about more than 2,200 Holocaust-relevant collection holding institutions in around 60 countries. At the same time, digital approaches to research also have significant potential to generate new insights and to disseminate these in novel ways.

However, going digital is no panacea to all challenges, and the shift from (mainly) analogue modes of access and research to predominately digital ones must be handled with care. For instance, there always lurks the danger of widening existing, or opening up new, “digital divides” with the associated risk that researchers focus predominately on sources that are conveniently (digitally) available rather than the ones that are best suited to answer their research questions. Furthermore, archivists and other collection specialists have traditionally been important interlocutors for researchers and purveyors of extensive, informal knowledge about the sources under their custodianship. It is of vital importance not to lose this source of knowledge in the move towards remote, rather than on-site, access to archives.

The proposed paper will offer reflections on these and similar issues based on the experience of developing EHRI for more than a decade. Thereby we will also provide some pointers what the future for digital archival collection research might hold.