

New York • The Jewish Week

www.thejewishweek.com

MANHATTAN • \$1.00

February 1, 2019 • 26 SH'VAT 5779

Red Tape Slowing Romanian Restitution

Although the Romanian government has begun paying monthly pensions to Romanian Holocaust survivors, the restrictions it has placed on eligibility have meant that thousands of Romanian survivors have not benefited, according to the World Jewish Restitution Organization.

The new law, adopted in November 2016, for the first time assured pensions to non-Romanian citizens who were Holocaust survivors. Until then, pensions were restricted to citizens and did not cover all of those who fled the country during the Holocaust or during Communist rule. But because of what the WJRO described as “a host of red tape and complications,” only a few thousand survivors have been able to benefit from the pensions.

Among the problems: thousands of applicants are no longer fluent in Romanian and can't read the application form. As a result, the WJRO has suggested to Romania that the forms be translated into English; that a website be created in English and other languages to help survivors complete the application process; that all applications and supporting documents be accepted in English; that it accept all applications that are received by mail instead of insisting that they be presented in person; and that it appoint someone in the Labor Ministry to answer all questions about the process by phone or email both in English and Romanian.

In addition, the WJRO said the government should not insist that survivors present a list of documents proving their persecution and identity when that has already been established by the Israeli government or the German government through the Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany.

Gideon Taylor, WJRO's chair of operations, noted that there are “thousands of Holocaust survivors from Romania living in poverty.” He noted that Israel's Ministry of Finance has recognized more than 1,100 Romanian Holocaust survivors living on less than 3,200 shekels (\$870) a month, the lowest income level in the country. The Romanian pension would give them 400 Romanian lei a month, about \$100 or 350 Israeli shekels.

Meanwhile, the European Parliament has passed a resolution strongly urging its member states to establish practices to identify and recover stolen works of art and cultural items such as books, manuscripts and ritual items looted by the Nazis.

Taylor said this move is another step towards seeking justice following the “largest cultural theft in history. ... WJRO has long called for heightened provenance research and removal of the many obstacles that survivors and their families face in recovering what was so wrongfully taken from them.”

The resolution estimates that millions of cultural items were looted during the war — including 65,000 works of art, 11,000 of which are still missing.

Stewart Ain