

Outcome Paper

Safe havens for archives at risk

International Expert Working Meeting
6-7 October 2016
Bern, Switzerland

1 Introduction

The International Expert Working Meeting “Safe havens for archives at risk” took place on 6-7 October 2016 in Bern, Switzerland. The meeting was organized by swisspeace in collaboration with the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs and the Swiss Federal Archives and convened 37 representatives from international, governmental and non-governmental institutions. The goal of this one and a half day meeting was to bring together sending and receiving institutions¹ as well as experts and practitioners on the subject matter to jointly discuss the needs, challenges, good practice and the way forward of safe havens for archives at risk. The participants acknowledged the importance to continue the discussions and the process on safe havens for archives at risk and decided to create a working group, which shall move the agenda and the issues discussed forward. In this outcome paper, the major conclusions and the next steps discussed during the meeting are summarized.

2 Major conclusions

2.1 Evaluate options for knowledge exchange

1. Safe haven solutions should **only** be envisaged by a sending **institution if there are no sufficient solutions *in situ*** to safeguard archives at risk.
2. **Knowledge exchange** between institutions offering a safe haven and institutions seeking a safe haven can help to find solutions to safeguard archives locally and/or nationally without requiring safe haven solutions abroad. Such knowledge exchange can also help to define needs more precisely and to find more adequate solutions.
3. **Language** issues need to be addressed at an early stage in order to make sure that potential power imbalances can be settled and misunderstandings can be prevented.

2.2 Develop a typology of archives at risk

There is a **vast range of different risks** that archives can be exposed to. In order to assess the level and the immediacy of risk as well as which type of safe haven solution may be necessary, a typology of archives at risk should be developed taking into account the following differences:

- Risks emanating from climate change versus risks emanating from armed conflict, situations of internal disturbances and tensions, occupation or authoritarian/repressive regimes
- Risks emanating from state actors versus risks emanating from non-state actors
- Archives of governmental institutions versus archives of non-governmental institutions
- Archives containing sensitive information versus archives with no or little sensitive information

2.3 Define criteria for trustworthy safe havens allowing for different models and solutions

A set of criteria should be defined that allows institutions seeking a safe haven and others interested to assess the trustworthiness of receiving institutions. The following criteria could be used as a starting point:

- Geographical safety (no civil war or unrest), no foreseeable geological risks
- Perception of being neutral or sympathetic to the political position of the institutions seeking a safe haven for archives at risk
- Physical safety, including good infrastructure and sufficient security measures
- Stable, long term funding (including resource allocations and support from the own organizational hierarchy and the governing board)
- Ability to provide for accountability and transparency with regard to its working methods
- Experience in handling the format that is to be transferred
- Experience in handling sensitive materials
- Willingness to accept the materials as a non-public deposit, not as a donation
- Adherence to international standards and certification mechanism

¹ The term “sending institution” refers to a governmental or non-governmental organization/ institution that has found or is looking for a safe repository for its archives. The term “receiving institution” refers to a governmental or non-governmental organization/ institution interested in or already offering a safe repository for archives at risk.

2.4 Identify standards that could be useful for safe haven solutions

1. **International standards should be identified** which can be used to evaluate the type of services offered by institutions offering a safe haven. These standards should be based on the need for functionality and the frequent necessity for rapid responses in cases of emergency.
2. The standards should be **pragmatic, operational and stringent**. They should define measures of accountability, commitment, transparency and technological capacities and should lay out basic conditions that need to be fulfilled to ensure the functionality of safe havens as well as the needs of the institutions seeking a safe haven in the long term. The implementations of such standards should not be too costly and complicated in order to keep fixed costs for safe haven solutions low.
3. Useful standards should be defined, as some of the existing standards are currently unattainable for many institutions that could potentially offer a safe haven (e.g. [ISO 16363:2012 standards for assessing the trustworthiness of digital repositories](#)). There is a need to weigh out the need for sound, long-term, trustworthy solutions against the often present need for practical solutions under urgency, and at reasonable costs. The functionality of safe havens should not be impeded by technical standards which are not realistic and may not necessary to guarantee the required level of security.
4. The **question which institution could and would actually evaluate** and assess the fulfilment of such standards needs to be defined.

2.5 Establish a central information point for safe havens for archives at risk

1. It was suggested that an **emergency procedure** and draft guidelines for archives at imminent risk should be developed.²
2. A **central information point should be established** to provide guidance based on the experience, good practices and lessons learnt for situations of risks that require rapid response. Upon request, it may further link up interested actors with existing sending or receiving institutions. The detail of such a network and information system need to be further developed.
3. The question **which institution could provide such a central information point** has not been clarified.

2.6 Develop a “matching mechanism”³ based on a roster of potential receiving institutions

1. In order to be able to match the needs of institutions seeking a safe haven with solutions offered by institutions offering a safe haven, a **roster of the latter could be developed and potentially made accessible online or upon request**. Such a roster should not simply list which institutions are willing to provide safe havens, but should also set out what type of safe haven solutions they are able and willing to provide (e.g. with regard to the hosting of sensitive archival material, the technological capacity, the ability to provide security, the duration of commitments, funding possibilities, the potential for cooperation and knowledge exchange/transfer).
2. Such a **roster** could include potential institutions offering a safe haven, acknowledging the **different foci of receiving institutions**. It could further contain information on the storage of materials, preservation, provision of access and the like. In addition, a matching mechanism could be developed that can bring together the nuanced needs of different institutions seeking a safe haven with the type of services offered by receiving institutions. Such a roster could also take into consideration **different models of safe haven, the levels of security and technical possibilities** that are offered, ranging from the minimum solution (e.g. an external drive in a safe) to complex digital archival solutions.
3. The question of **which institution sets and manages such a roster** must be addressed. It has been suggested that it could be the International Council on Archives (ICA).

2.7 Development of a set of key issues to take into account in the process of negotiating agreements and provision of sample agreements

1. It was suggested that a set of key issues that should be taken into account in the process of negotiating **agreements on safe haven solutions for archives at risk should be developed**, based on the current experiences of different organisations and institutions that already have experience with safe havens for archives at risk.
2. **A collection of a number of past or existing agreements** from different institutions could be established and made available (e.g. by the central information point; see 2.5). Such sample agreements could be considered

² At the moment, there is no such system in place and most initiatives rely on personal contacts. Generally, inquiries on hosting archives at risk are initiated on the basis of previous personal contacts, experience and trust (or recommendation). Such a personalized system is not sustainable.

³ A more suitable expression than „matching mechanism“ is yet to be found.

as a **basis for discussion and negotiations** taking into consideration the reality of both sides of the agreements, the specific reason and purposes of the safe haven solution and all relevant contextual factors.

At the most basic level, a model agreement should address the following issues:

- Ownership of the archives and the documents contained in it
- Confidentiality and data protection rules
- Access policies
- Rules regarding publicity about the cooperation (which might in some contexts be desirable in others not)
- Rules regarding the return of the material
- Exit strategy (It needs to be defined what happens, if the sending and/or the receiving institution no longer exist. e.g. to whom will the material be transferred, if at all, and under what conditions, within what timeframe)⁴
- Liability for the damage to the materials while they are in the custody of the receiving institution
- Time and timing of the transfer of the documents from the sending to the receiving institution
- Definitions of the responsibilities of the parties involved

3. **Agreements should not be overly legalistic**, and should therefore be kept simple to **allow a certain flexibility**. Technical details can be dealt with in annexes. This gives more flexibility for amendment and re-negotiations.
4. Negotiations should be carried out in a way that all parties involved understand the technical details. Draft agreements should be **translated in the relevant languages** and technical terminology should be well explained. It was also proposed that a glossary with terms required in agreements was to be developed in different languages.

3 Next steps and way forward

1. In order to move this agenda forward, the participants have created a working group coordinated by swisspeace and composed of:
 - **Representatives of governmental and non-governmental sending institutions:** Luisa Franco (National Center of Historical Memory of Colombia), José Rodolfo Kepfer (Historical Archive of the National Police of Guatemala), Monika Borgmann and Lokman Slim (UMAM Documentation and Research)
 - **Representatives of governmental and non-governmental receiving institutions:** Andreas Kellerhals (Swiss Federal Archives), Jussi Nuorteva (National Archive of Finland; as corresponding partner), Serge Rumin (Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs), Brigitte Troyon (International Committee for the Red Cross), Theresa Polk (Texas University), Afelonne Doek (International Institute for Social History)
 - **Specific experts and potential leading institutions:** Iskra Panevska (UNESCO), Didier Grange (ICA) David Sutton (University of Reading Library, UK), Trudy Huskamp Peterson (Certified Archivist), Tim Gollins (National Records of Scotland)
2. This working group will:
 - Make the final revisions of the current outcome document based on the inputs received by the participants;
 - Draft further documents according to the priorities defined to be presented at a follow-up expert meeting in 2017
3. The working group will consider the major conclusions and the additional issues listed below, evaluate their necessity and set the priorities accordingly.

Overview of major conclusions (see 2.1-2.7):

1. Evaluation of options for knowledge exchange
2. Development of a typology of archives at risk
3. Definition of criteria for trustworthy receiving institutions allowing for different models and solutions
4. Identification of standards for safe haven solutions
5. Establishment of a central information point for safe havens for archives at risk
6. Development of a “matching mechanism” based on a roster of potential receiving institutions

⁴ It was mentioned that the exit strategy should also include a scenario for the extreme case when due to changed conditions, the receiving institution can no longer guarantee the preservation and safety of the archives it was entrusted with.

7. Development of a set of key issues to take into account in the process of negotiating agreements, provision of a collection of sample agreements and a glossary of terms to be used and translated in different languages

Additional issues:

- Clarification of the key terminology regarding safe havens for archives at risk⁵
- Evaluation of the need for special procedures for rapid response

⁵ e.g. the terms "sending and receiving institutions".