OPENNESS OF STATE ARCHIVES
IN POST-SOVIET REPUBLICS AND EASTERN BLOC STATES
DURING THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC

MARCH–SEPTEMBER 2020

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Introduction

The Institute for Development of Freedom of Information (IDFI), in partnership with international scholars, conducted a study within the framework of the "Evaluation of the Openness of State Archives in Post-Soviet Republics and Eastern Bloc States" project in 2019-2020. The study established the transparency ratings of the national archives of 18 countries, reached several interesting conclusions, and revealed characteristics specific to the state archives found in various countries.[1]

When the research project was beginning in June 2019, the pandemic was of course not considered as a factor. Nevertheless, the circumstances around not only the archives, but all aspects of life, have changed drastically in the entire world. Naturally, this could not have been reflected in the methodology and final ratings of the research project. Therefore, a new study was initiated within the framework of the project, the purpose of which was to discover what level of openness of the state archives was encountered by researchers during the pandemic and subsequent lockdowns in various countries, and how the state archives adapted to novel circumstances. Another question the project asks is whether the state archives elaborated a strategic action plan for similar situations in the future. For the purposes of this study, IDFI created a questionnaire that was filled out by international partners who have had research experience in the archives. Additionally, the study used various sources available on the internet.

The following countries were considered in the study: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Hungary, Kazakhstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania and Ukraine.

Questionnaire

The questionnaire (see appendix 1) for the study was developed by the IDFI Memory and Disinformation Studies Direction Head, Anton Vatcharadze, with the assistance of a Hungarian partner, Sandor Horvath. The questionnaire aimed to evaluate the openness of the state archives in various countries during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Authors of the questionnaire:

- Sandor Horvath is the head of the Department of Modern History and Senior Researcher of the Institute of History of the Academy of Sciences of Hungary, senior coordinator of the international research project COURAGE – "Cultural Opposition – Understanding the CultuRal HeritAGE of Dissent in the Former Socialist Countries", founder and editor-in-chief of Hungarian Historical Review. He has many years of experience working in the archives of Hungary and many other countries.
- Anton Vatcharadze is the Memory and Disinformation Studies Direction Head at IDFI. He worked at the State Archive of Georgia since 2009. In 2012-2017, he was the director of the Central Historical Archive. He has participated in numerous research projects concerning the study of archives.

The questionnaire was sent to the international partners of IDFI in 10 countries. It contained questions regarding topics like: the nature and duration of the restrictions imposed at the archives during the pandemic;

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[1] http://www.open-archives.org/en/newsblogs/interestingnews/36

the influence of the pandemic on archival operations; the financial situation of the personnel and archival institutions; the availability of archival resources in online spaces; and remote activities of the archives.

The questionnaire developed by IDFI has allowed the authors of the study to quantitatively and qualitatively evaluate the changes introduced to the state archives in various countries during the pandemic and the adaptation level to the new reality. Additionally, based on the examples of the countries that were evaluated in the study, the responses to the questionnaire made it possible to reveal the best and worst practices concerning archival operations and access to archival documents during the pandemic in state archives.

Principal Conclusions

The circumstances arising due to the COVID-19 pandemic made the importance of proper functioning of the website of an archive and online communication with users especially clear, which the study also confirmed. In a time when people across the world were forced to remain in their homes and work remotely, the only remaining access points to materials in the archives for historians and researchers were the internet, the websites of the archives, and the fonds and electronic databases found therein. The archival inventories, catalogues and documents uploaded to the websites of archival institutions will play an ever-increasingly important role in the future development of research. The study led to several general discoveries:

- The openness rating of state archives revealed by IDFI's project directly correlates with the effective operation of the archives during the pandemic: the most open archives took into consideration the satisfaction of researchers and citizens with electronic services, and vice versa;
- The archives that had already begun the process of creating and developing digital databases offered much better service and work opportunities to the users than the archives where digital services had been developed poorly;
- The Ukrainian state archives functioned actively and with the most transparency during the pandemic: they published monthly overviews of the work at the state archives, mainly touching upon the creation of new electronic resources and digitalization of existing documents. Another active archive was that of Lithuania – 40% of the "Emergency Cultural Fund" established during the pandemic was allocated to digitalization projects, including digitalization of archival documents. The Latvian State Archive, despite remote operations, did not cease research projects of genealogical nature, when the analogous service was put on hold by the State Archive of Belarus, while the State Archive of Georgia made the decision to allow researchers in the reading hall with the exception of those studying genealogy. Hungary reduced funding for archives, while the majority of the archives in Kazakhstan did not respond to inquiries remotely.
- For the future, it is crucial to develop an action plan for tackling crises, as the proper functioning of the archives, retaining employees and other issues will be largely dependent on the existence and implementation of one.
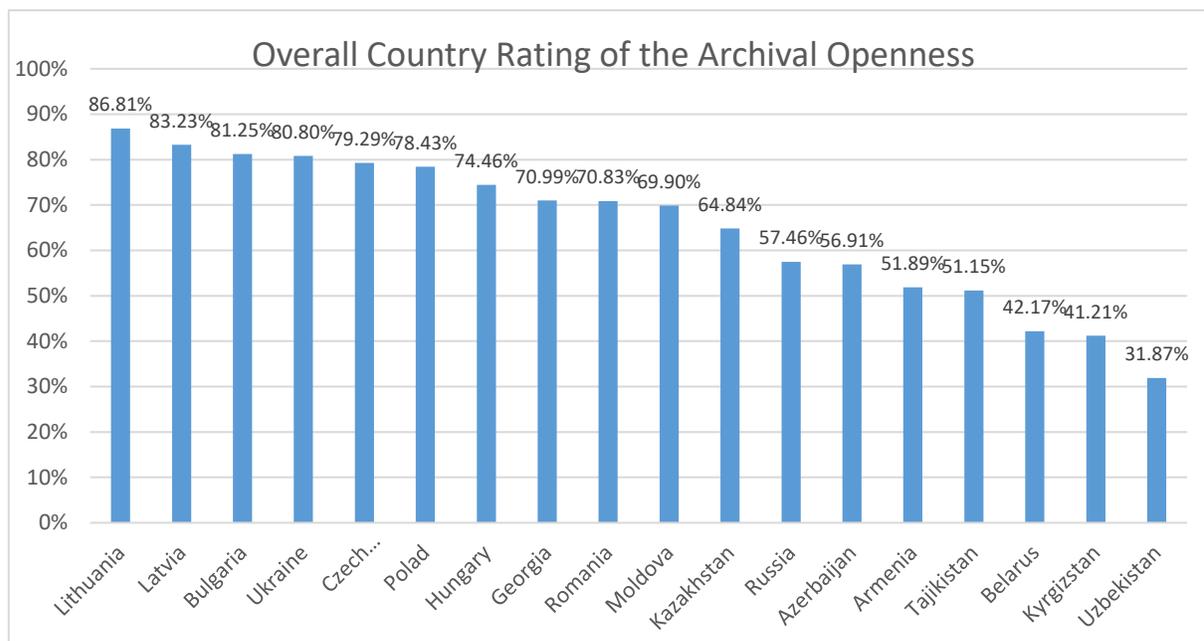
Limitations and Factors to Consider

One factor that needed to be considered during the study was the level to which the COVID-19 pandemic affected the countries considered within it. For instance, if one were to consider two countries with approximately equal population and similar economic circumstances, namely Georgia and Armenia, one would find that, while Georgia had a total of 963 cases of COVID-19 during the period between March and July, with 15 fatalities, Armenia in the same period had 29,285 infections and 503 fatalities as a result of the virus (source: https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/ - as of July 8, 2020). The numbers change, however, in September-October, when the daily number of cases in Georgia began increasing. As of October 15, the number of daily cases in Georgia – 919 – practically equaled those in Armenia – 1.371 (source https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/ - as of October 15, 2020).

Another factor to consider was the difference in the approaches to managing coronavirus in terms of official policy in different countries. Some countries chose to cease most activities by adopting radical measures, including declaring a complete lockdown and instituting a curfew. Some adopted the so called "Swedish model" [2] and made the management of the pandemic dependent on the personal responsibility of their citizens. Moreover, certain countries changed their policies as more time passed. For instance, Georgia adopted stricter measures during the start of the pandemic, then proceeded to relax them to a minimum. Among the countries considered within the scope of this study, no country adopted the "Swedish model" initially, although none declared a complete lockdown with the second wave of the pandemic in October 2020.

Ratings of the Evaluated Archives

The ratings of the countries evaluated within the framework of the 2019-2020 archival project looked thus:

Overall Country Rating of the Archival Openness

Lithuania 86.81%, Latvia 83.23%, Bulgaria 81.25%, Ukraine 80.80%, Czech... 79.29%, Polad 78.43%, Hungary 74.46%, Georgia 70.99%, Romania 70.83%, Moldova 69.90%, Kazakhstan 64.84%, Russia 57.46%, Azerbaijan 56.91%, Armenia 51.89%, Tajikistan 51.15%, Belarus 42.17%, Kyrgizstan 41.21%, Uzbekistan 31.87%

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[2] https://www.bmj.com/content/369/bmj.m2376

Figure 1: Openness of state archives according to the countries.

According to the 2019 results of the evaluations of the openness of state archives of the post-Soviet and Eastern Bloc countries, Lithuania (86.81%) had the most open and accessible archives among the 18 countries considered in the study. It is in turn followed by Latvia (83.23%), Bulgaria (81.25%) and Ukraine (80.8%). These archives fall within the so called "Green zone", which comprises archives with 80%+ openness rating. The results from the Czech Republic (79.29%) and Poland (78.43%) are also close to the "Green zone". Hungary (74.46%) is in the seventh spot, followed by Georgia (70.99%), Romania (70.83%) and Moldova (69.9%) in the eighth, ninth and tenth spots, respectively.

According to the rating, the countries with the least open archives were Belarus (42.17%), Kyrgyzstan (41.21%) and Uzbekistan (31.87%). The former Committee for State Security (КГБ) archives of all of these countries are completely inaccessible.[3]

The 2019 Ratings of the Websites of the Archives and Their Characteristics

According to the 2019 international openness rating, among the 18 countries that had been evaluated, in terms of the functionality of the website, the first two national archives are from Lithuania: the Central State Archive of Lithuania (97.86%) and the Special Archive of Lithuania (93.57%). The website and online services of the National Archive of Romania similarly received high marks (91.43%), as did both archives of the Czech Republic – the National Archive of the Czech Republic (89.29%) and the Archive of the Security Service of the Government of the Czech Republic (87.14%). Also high on the list were the State Security Service Archive of Bulgaria (87.86%) and the Central National Archive of Bulgaria (83.57%).

The progress of the Georgian State Archive in terms of the functionality of its website in 2019 was particularly noteworthy when compared to the results from 2018, with the Archive showing an improvement of 21% (60.71% in 2018, as opposed to 82.14% in 2019). The State Archive of Georgia took practical steps to increase the number of finding aids, scanned documents and other materials uploaded to its website. Additionally, the Archive created a version of the website for the visually impaired and the blind. [4] When compared to 2018, the situation did not change in the second archive of Georgia, the Archive of the Ministry of Internal Affairs.

The work of the archival institutions that do not have a dedicated website at all can be considered the worst practices for the purposes of the study. These are:

- State Security (КГБ) Archive of Belarus;
- The Archive of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Azerbaijan;
- State Security (КГБ) Archive of Uzbekistan;
- The Archive of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Kyrgyzstan;
- Both archives in Tajikistan;

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[3] http://www.open-archives.org/en/rating
[4] https://archive.gov.ge/ge/adaptirebuli-gverdi-1

- Security Service Archive of Armenia;
- The Archive of the Federal Security Service (ФСБ) of Russia.

Online services are poorly developed in the following archives:

- The National Security Service Archive of the Republic of Azerbaijan;
- Archive of the Judicial Statistics and Special Cases of the Head Prosecutor's Office of the Region of Karaganda, of the Republic of Kazakhstan;
- Both archives in Moldova.

One of the main purposes of a website is to make it possible for researchers to remotely access archival documents and finding aids.

 70-100% finding aids are found in the following archives:

- National Archive of Hungary;
- Lithuanian archives;
- Romanian archives.

70-100% finding aids can be accesses on the websites of the following archives

- Bulgarian archive (COMDOS);
- Archive of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia (the Archive consists of two departments: the finding aids of the documents from the former State Security (КГБ) are not available online, while the finding aids of a large share of the documents from the Communist Party Archive have been scanned and uploaded);
- National Archives of Georgia.

25-50% of finding aids:

- National Archive of the Czech Republic.

Less than 25% of the finding aids are available on the websites of the following archives:

- National Archive of Belarus;
- Central Archive of Bulgaria;
- Security Committee Archive of the Government of the Czech Republic;
- National Archive of Latvia;
- CDAVO Archive of Ukraine.

Finding aids are not present on the websites of the archives of Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Moldova, Kyrgyzstan, Poland, and Russia, as well as the Security Archive of Hungary, Security Service Archive of Ukraine and the archives that do not have a website at all.[5]

At the same time, one factor is noteworthy in terms of the level of comfort created for working with the archival materials. Some of the websites of the abovementioned archives have scanned versions of old inventories, but have not created a relevant search function and thereby make it possible to look through

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[5] http://www.open-archives.org/en/rating

these inventories only by going through individual pages on the website. For instance, the State Archive of Georgia has published the inventories on its website in this form:

Archival inventory available on the website of the State Archive of Georgia (source: https://archival-services.gov.ge/fonds/welcome/aidFiles/2/9)

On the other hand, some archives offer users "complete" finding aids, where it is possible to conduct searches by specific key words. The National Archive of Romania, for example, is like this:

Online queries in archival fonds - Centrul Regional București

Search   Last search result   Workbooks   Shopping cart

BU-F-00694-114 Hrisovul lui Alexandru cel Bun vv., 1427 (niv.Document)

Archive plan context

- București Datacentre
  - Arhivele Naționale ale României
    - BUCUREȘTI - Central
      - BU-F-00694 Colecția PECETI (1361-1910)
        - BU-F-00694-113 Hrisovul lui Alexandru cel Bun vv. (1411.09.22)
        - BU-F-00694-114 Hrisovul lui Alexandru cel Bun vv. (1427)
        - BU-F-00694-115 Hrisovul lui Alexandru cel Bun vv. (1428.07.29)

Information on identification

Ref. code:	BU-F-00694-114
Ref. code AP:	BU-F-00694-114
Former reference codes:	Mitropolia Moldovei, CLII/1
Title:	Hrisovul lui Alexandru cel Bun vv.
Creation date(s):	1427
Creation date(s), remarks.:	1427 (6935) f.l.z.
Level:	niv.Document

Information on extent

Dimensions W x H (cm):	39x26,5

Information on content and structure

Content:	Hrisovul lui Alexandru cel Bun vv., domnul Moldovei,și a fiului său, Ilias, prin care dăruiește lui Onicica un sat, la Cârligătura. Scrie Neagoe logofăt.
Contains:	Alexandru cel Bun vv.;Ilias vv.;Onicica;Mihail;Vâlcea;Cupcici,vornic;Negrea;Giurgiu;Nesteac;Ilias;Dan;Isaia, ceasnic;Domoncuș, stolnic;Neagoe, logofăt
Loc (emitere/referință):	Moldova;Suceava;Cârligătura
Forma de păstrare:	orig.
Description of seal:	Pecete mare (100 cm), atârnată, cu șnur de mătase roșie, scut heraldic triunghiular ascuțit, cap de bour, stea între coarne, luna și soarele de o parte și de cealaltă, cu legenda † Печать Їѡ Олєзанда воєвдъ г<осподи>на Зємлъѣ Мо<лдавскоі >
Appraisal and destruction:	permanent

Conditions of access and use

Language:	Slavonă
Physical properties:	Legenda peceții deteriorată
State of preservation:	Să fie verificat

Information on related materials

Copies (existence, storage location):	Fotografie la Institutul de istorie și arheologie "A.D. Xenopol" din Iași, Fotografii, II/210;Copie din a doua jumătate a secolului al XIX-lea, după o traducere din 1854 a lui Hrisant ieromonah, la Arhivele Naționale ale României, Colecția Manuscrise, nr. 522

Fond inventory available at the website of the National Archive of Romania (source: http://cautare-b.arhivelenationale.ro/cautare-b/detail.aspx?ID=409650)

In Lithuania, which has the highest rating in terms of the functionality of the websites of its archives, the reception of archival services and search for documents in synchronized with the electronic portal of the government. The same portal can be used by the citizens to access e-bank, e-signature and other electronic services. As noted by our research partner in Lithuania, Vitautas Starikovicius, the electronic portal allows its users to search for archival documents. Users need to indicate key words, topics, archives, dates of the documents, etc., in order to access the appropriate materials. Each of the central or regional archives of Lithuania have an obligation to proactively provide information regarding their fonds (by 2020, most of the archives have met this obligation). The next step on the portal is the availability of archival materials (documents, items) and the ability to download them. Some archives of Lithuania meet this obligation and upload the appropriate materials. Other, for instance the Literature and Arts Archive of Lithuania, have made the decision to create a parallel database and webpages. The abovementioned archive was not satisfied with the centralized database because it does not allow the sharing of high-resolution photos and films. Another problem facing the Lithuanian archives, especially in the regions, is the lack of high-quality equipment and the low qualifications of personnel when it comes to the process of digitalization of documents.

Archival inventories found on the special Lithuanian citizen's web-portal (source: the personal page of Vytautas Starikovicius, IDFI's research partner)

Scanned documents in the archives evaluated in the study are accessible autonomously, as well as within the frameworks of various European initiatives in the cases of the countries that are members of the European Union[6]. This again underlines the importance of the legal framework of the European Union and the necessity of the unification of services.

The examples of best practices are those countries and individual archives that make it possible to access scanned documents remotely. The importance of such services was once again confirmed when millions of people switched to working remotely. Examples of such institutions include:

- Central National Archive of Bulgaria;
- National Archive of Latvia;

- Both archives of Lithuania;
- National Archive of Romania;
- Historical Archive of Russia;
- Security Service (SBU) Archive of Ukraine.

Remote Services – Issuing Archival Documents

Our researchers, including from those countries where archives have well-developed electronic services, have noted that online service is relatively new and most of their archival portals are still working in test regime. Meanwhile, the amount of scanned and electronically accessible documents is still quite low.

In 2019, online services and online forms – requesting access to archival materials and receiving them remotely – were actively implemented in Bulgaria, Latvian archives, National Archive of Belarus, Kazakhstan, Lithuanian archives, National Archive of Romania, CDAVO Archives of Ukraine and Georgian archives. Online services and forms are not available in Azerbaijan, Moldova, Securitate Archive of Romania, Security Archive of Ukraine, Hungary, and Uzbekistan.

Trends Revealed in the Archives of Various Countries During the Coronavirus Pandemic

Azerbaijan:

Evaluator: Eldar Zeynalov – human rights activist and researcher at the archives. Founder and director of the non-governmental organization - "Human Rights Center of Azerbaijan".

The reading halls of the National Archive of Azerbaijan were closed, while other services, such as, for instance, requesting-receiving archival documents, were still available.

The National Archive of Azerbaijan made the decision to institute restrictions and close the reading hall on March 11, 2020 and opened after August 31.

According to the Registry of Legislative Acts of the Ministry of Justice of Azerbaijan, no changes in archival legislation have been enacted. The restrictions were put in place by the leadership of the archive in accordance with the recommendations of the pandemic response task force of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Azerbaijan. The National Archive of Azerbaijan did not fire any employees with the purpose of conserving financial resources.

Communication with researchers took place through email. The archive received requests for document and issued them through email as well. Our researcher in Azerbaijan, Eldar Zeynalov, could not acquire any information regarding the activities related to the shifting employees to working remotely.

The National Archive of Azerbaijan has not developed a strategic action plan for future situations of a similar nature (pandemic or other obstacles and impediments to regular work).

Belarus:

Evaluator: Dmitriy Drozd – researcher at the Belorussian Document Center (Белорусский документационный центр).

Following the April 7, 2020, Decree № 1069 of the Minsk Urban Executive Committee (Мингорисполкома), the reading halls of the archives were closed after April 10. The other departments of the archives continued working normally, with masks being mandatory.

A novelty was introduced to the National Archive of Belarus – the ability to request scanned copies of archival documents and receive them electronically (through email). All requests that encompassed the preparation of the copies of archival documents were processed in a timely manner, and the users of the service received them by regular mail or email after paying the appropriate fees. Genealogical documents represented the one exception to the above, due to the large number of people requesting such documents and the volume of work associated with them.

The reading halls of the National Archive of Belarus were reopened on July 21, 2020, although a limit on the number of concurrent guests was instituted.

There were no changes in archival legislation related to the pandemic. Additionally, the regulations around archives and activities therein were not altered, and the number of employees was not reduced. Employees did not move to remote work and instead continued working at their regular places.

The National Archive of Belarus has not developed a strategic action plan for future situations of a similar nature (pandemic or other obstacles and impediments to regular work).

Latvia:

Evaluator: Edgars Engizers – Faculty member of the Department of European Research of the Baltic International Academy.

The National Archive of Latvia was completely closed to researchers from March 16, 2020 to May 18, 2020.

No changes were introduced to the legislation regarding the archives, as well as the regulations regarding the archives and the work therein, nor was there a reduction in the number of employees due to the pandemic. Some new general rules related to the pandemic were introduced as per the international guidelines of the National Archive of Latvia (wearing masks, social distancing, etc.).

The Archive functioned in the remote regime – documents were requested, processed, and issued remotely. Genealogical research and all activities related to sending documents to researchers and all services for students were also conducted remotely.

Around half of the employees began working remotely. They uploaded information to various databases, worked on improving electronic search functions and provided information to authorities and citizens by telephone and other means of communication.

The electronic resources used by the employees of the National Archive of Latvia included: the electronic program of the Latvian Archive (Task tracking system of Archival information system (VVAIS)), Zoom Meetings, Microsoft Teams. All communication with the users was carried out by email.

The National Archive of Latvia has not developed a strategic action plan for future situations of a similar nature (pandemic or other obstacles and impediments to regular work).

Lithuania:

Evaluator: Vytautas Starikovicius – Lecturer at the Department of History of the Vilnius University.

Despite the fact that the Lithuanian archives (or other institutions) were not closed fully on the basis of any legislation, the lack of organization and coordination led to the introduction of several obscure articles of law. Additionally, in order to create a safe working environment and avoid administrative penalties, the administration of the archives incorporated some of the new articles developed by the coordination task force created for the emergency situation into their internal regulations. From March 17, 2020 until April 24, 2020, all services of the Lithuanian archives were accessible to users by internet or phone. These services included requesting and issuing digital copies of archival documents, in addition as other activities. On April 24 the restrictions were relaxed, although the work in the archives was still conducted with some limitations: due to social distancing being put into place, between 1 to 3 people were allowed in the reading halls at one time, and only with prior registration and the requirement to take a "sanitary break" every 15 minutes (per the internal regulations of the National archive of Lithuania – Articles 3 and 4). In the regional archives, which face problems related to infrastructure and equipment, the situation was even worse. Nationwide quarantine came to an end on June 16, 2020, although the recommendations related to social distancing and hygiene and the rules for public services are still in place. Therefore, the administration of the archives is obligated to institute rules appropriate to the work environment. Consequently, face masks and gloves, hygiene, limitations on the number of people allowed into the archives and pre-registration are still recommended measures. Starting with August 1, 2020, the restrictions on public services in these institutions were renewed.

No changes were introduced to the legislation regarding the archives, as well as the regulations regarding the archives and the work therein, with the exception of general rules related to the pandemic that were added to the internal regulations, such as: frequent disinfection, wearing face masks, social distancing, allocating appropriate square footage to each researcher in enclosed spaced, "sanitary breaks", etc. There was no reduction in the number of employees due to the pandemic in the National Archive of Lithuania.
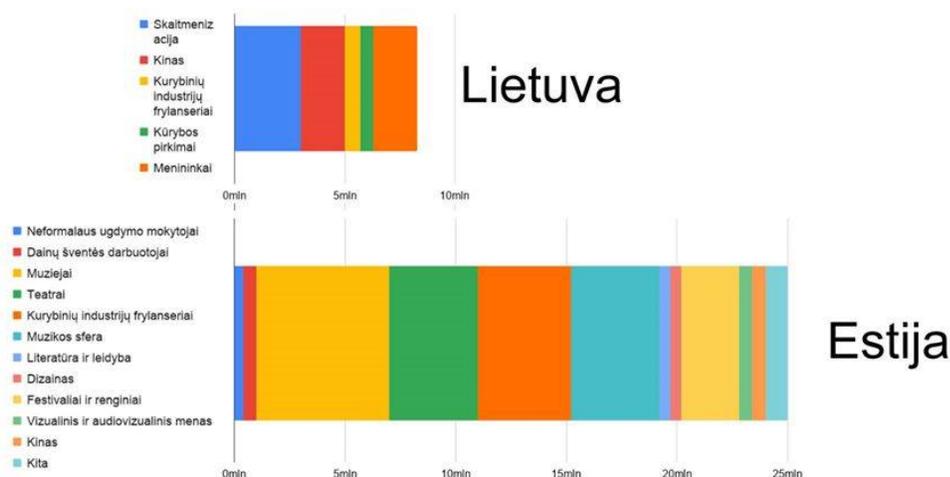
The Lithuanian archive has not yet developed a long-term strategic action plan for tackling similar situations (pandemic or other obstacles and impediments to regular work) in the future, although the Lithuanian archival authority is responsible for developing an action plan that will be in compliance with state regulations. As a general rule, every archive adopts new regulations (relaxing or strengthening restrictions) based on the epidemiological situation and the recommendations issued by the emergency situation coordination group of Lithuania.

Owing to the fact that the archives did not close, with the exception of the reading halls, each department of the National Archive of Lithuania continued its work activities in the normal regime, just like before the pandemic. The responsibilities of the personnel stayed the same even as they worked remotely. It should be noted that the presence and level of activity of the archives in social media grew significantly during the quarantine period: there was an increase in virtual exhibits and social media posts with interesting documents and articles (especially those related to stories related to the pandemic).

For communication purposes, the personnel of the National Archive of Lithuania that worked remotely initially used Zoom, then switched to Microsoft Teams or Google Meets at the later stages of the pandemic, primarily due to concerns regarding the security of various platforms.

Vytautas Starikovicius additionally notes that the Ministry of Culture established a fund with an endowment of 8 million Euros during the pandemic. 40% of these funds were allocated to digital projects (marked blue on the figure below). At the same time, researchers and citizens were largely dissatisfied, as a similar fund in the neighboring Estonia had an endowment of 25 million Euros instead.

Comparison of the Cultural Fonds of Lithuania and Estonia During the Pandemic (Source: Graph by the member of the European Parliament Aušra Maldeikienė).

Romania:

Evaluator: Alexandru Murad Mironov – member of the Department of History of the University of Bucharest.

The National Archive was closed to the public and researchers in the period of March-June 2020.

Archival services were available normally online, as was the case before the pandemic.

Following the month of June, reading halls were reopened with the standard restrictions: social distancing, shorter business hours, limited numbers of researchers.

Communication, such as requesting and accessing scanned materials and the preparation of various documents, was conducted by email.

Our research partner could not acquire information regarding any changes to archival legislation or archival regulations related to the pandemic, as well as information regarding the changes to the personnel, from the National Archive of Romania. No such changes were announced through the public information platform of Romania that publishes legislative changes. Additionally, the archive has not published any information regarding the development of a strategic action plan for future situations of a similar nature (pandemic or other obstacles or impediments to normal work).

Georgia:

Evaluator: Anton Vatcharadze - Memory and Disinformation Studies Direction Head at the Institute for Development of Freedom of Information (IDFI)

The State Archive of Georgia and the archives of the Ministry of Internal Affairs were closed to researchers, while other types of services were provided by these institutions remotely.

The reading hall of the State Archive of Georgia closed to researchers on March 6 and reopened on October 1, but with some restrictions – only researchers originating from institutions of higher learning or research institutions were allowed into the reading halls, while those with private interest in accessing the materials, such as the people researching genealogies of family names, were not allowed access to the reading halls. It should be noted that the share of researchers exploring genealogies of family names is generally the highest in the State Archive of Georgia, comprising more than 70% of all research. Therefore, the motive for their exclusion was precisely the high number of researchers, rather than any other objective reason. A practice similar to that of the State Archive of Georgia was only put into place on the Belorussian archive, which also restricted access to researchers of genealogical records and documentation precisely because of the large number of researchers and the volume of respective work. In contrast, the National Archive of Latvia, which boasts a higher overall rating, continued receiving requests for and issuing materials of similar nature to researchers.

No changes were introduced to archival legislation. According to the internal regulations of the State Archive of Georgia, all documents accessed by researchers and employees of the archive are subject to a 72-hour quarantine period before being returned to storage.

The pandemic did not cause a reduction in the number of the employees of the State Archive of Georgia. 80-90% of all workers of the archive began working from home. Their main responsibilities included the translation of Russian-language inventories of the fonds created during the Soviet era, their improvement and digitalization. Despite the number of employees at the State Archive of Georgia (400 full-time employees, most of whom are archivists) and the switch to remote work for several months during the pandemic, the public at large has no information regarding the results of their activities. So far, no improved finding aids or archival inventories translated from Russian to Georgian have been published on the website.

The State Archive of Georgia allowed the opportunity to receive reference services related to archival documents online during the coronavirus pandemic, through the governmental services portal - my.gov.ge. [7] A similar service was offered to those wishing to access materials in the archive of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, by emailing the archive directly.[8]

The State Archive of Georgia and the archives of the Ministry of Internal Affairs have not developed a strategic action plan to tackle future crises.

It should also be noted here that the State Archive of Georgia became more active on social media by posting interesting documents and articles. Additionally, the State Archive held several online exhibits during this period. [9] The State Archive of Georgia generally increased the availability of archival documents on their website in recent times. These documents are published on a period basis. In 2018-2019, the website of the State Archive underwent significant technical improvements, and the institution began proactively publishing

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[7] https://archive.gov.ge/ge/distantsiuri-momsakhureba-1
[8] https://archive.mia.gov.ge/servisebi.html
[9] https://archive.gov.ge/ge/pavilioni/exhibition

documents, fonds, and individual collections online. So far, only a small portion of the documents has been uploaded, but this should still be considered a significant step forward. [10]

Armenia:

Evaluator: Hranush Kharatyan – historian, archivist. Archival Direction Head of the non-governmental organization "Hazarashen" – Armenian Center for Ethnological Studies.

The reading halls of the National Archive of Armenia were closed for a period of three months, from March 16 until June 17. Beginning with June 17, they were reopened with limited business hours, working until 15:00, while following August 19 they reopened fully. Access to archival documents went uninterrupted. Additionally, it was possible to request and receive digital copies of the documents online.

No changes were implemented in the archival legislation of Armenia. The National Archive of Armenia did not reduce the number of employees during the period. Rules for working in the archive were changed in accordance with the regulations introduced to the country in general in response to the pandemic.

The staff of the archives continued working normally and for the most part did not switch to remote work. Less than 1% of the staff – those who conducted research studies – began working remotely during this period.

The National Archive of Armenia has not developed a strategic action plan for future situations of a similar nature.

Ukraine:

Evaluator: Anna Oliinik – Director of the Center for Research into the Liberation Movement.

The State Archival Service of Ukraine issued several directives, rules updates and recommendations for regulating the work conducted in state archives immediately upon the restrictions to manage the pandemic were put into place by the government of Ukraine.

One of the first documents[11], published during the beginning of the lockdown, included recommendations for conducting information campaigns, stopping the spread of disease among the staff, and ventilating and disinfecting the reading halls. A subsequent decree[12], issued in the following days, defined the circumstances of remote operating mode for the employees of the State Archive of Ukraine.

Later, on July 1, 2020, parts of the State Archival Service of Ukraine and scientific organizations of Ukrainian archivists developed methodological recommendations[13] and user instructions[14] for the protection of the health of the workers and visitors of the archives during the pandemic. These documents contain detailed recommendations for the prevention of the spread of the virus, and the development of electronic services constitutes an important part of these recommendations.

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[10] https://archive.gov.ge/ge/saarkivo-fondebi
[11] https://srpi.archives.gov.ua/tmp/1313_1.pdf
[12] https://srpi.archives.gov.ua/tmp/1312_1.pdf
[13] https://bit.ly/3ow5FhO
[14] https://bit.ly/3dY0Lp3

On a monthly and occasionally weekly basis, the State Archival Service of Ukraine prepares complete overviews of the activities of various archives throughout Ukraine: said activities include renewing electronic databases of the documents from various archives of Ukraine[15]; publishing inventories and finding aids online; adding electronic resources/databases[16]; publishing parish records[17] and alphabetical indexes[18] online; as well as initiating various digital projects (for instance: digitalization of the correspondence between the participants of the World War II, conducted by one of the regional archives[19]). The links to these overviews can be accessed through the website and the social media pages of the archives: August 2020[20], July 2020[21], June 2020[22], May 2020[23], April 2020[24].

The Ukrainian archival society initiated a campaign to preserve the modern documents created in 2019-2020 in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The State Archive of Ukraine headed the effort to acquire, preserve and collect the documents reflecting the struggle of Ukraine against the pandemic. According to the announcement[25] by the head of the State Archival Service, this collection will become an important source not only for future researchers, but for the efforts to overcome future crises of a similar nature.

The most important decision made by the State Archival Service of Ukraine during the pandemic was the shift to remote operations. As soon as the lockdown was instituted, the state archives across the entire country began opening access to their digital collections, publishing important documents online, holding digital exhibits, etc. Many archival services were available online even before the beginning of the pandemic, such as, for instance, the ability to request and receive documents electronically.

The major restriction put in place in Ukraine in response to the pandemic was the restriction of visitors in reading halls during the active phase of the lockdown, put in place for the purposes of medical safety. In July, the archives began opening their reading halls to researchers again and developed preventative measures (limited numbers of visitors, permanent disinfection, ventilation, obligation to wear face masks, etc.). After being accessed, all documents are put through a "quarantine period".

The State Archival Service of Ukraine put forth the initiative to create a new strategic plan for developing the archival sphere. The plan would include detailed descriptions and instructions for the measures to be adopted in similar circumstances in the future, as well as plans for the optimization of archival services via the internet.

Our researcher, Anna Oliinik, besides the overall situation in the archival sphere, also evaluated one specific archive – the State Security Service (SBU) Archive of Ukraine.

The reading halls in the SBU Archive of Ukraine were closed, although interested persons could still receive scanned materials online, completely free of charge. During the pandemic, the SBU Archive proactively

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[15] https://cdiak.archives.gov.ua/full_files/
[16] http://cdago.org.ua/?fbclid=IwAR3s7dEAbBBpk-vpYS8jcPAyOIr1pdosqa543J9SrFndC-6Hu50bLORNv0A
[17] https://dp.archives.gov.ua/index.php/digitized-documents/metryka/705-synagoga
[18] http://mk.archives.gov.ua/tsifrovyi-arhiv-metrychni-knygy/1056-nda-alfabet.html
[19] https://bit.ly/2J2Sjt2
[20] https://bit.ly/37JHW7R
[21] https://www.facebook.com/archives.ua/photos/a.414617238896348/1191290421229022/?type=3&theater
[22] https://www.facebook.com/archives.ua/photos/a.414617238896348/1174691252888939/?type=3&theater
[23] https://www.facebook.com/archives.ua/photos/a.414617238896348/1145103519181046/?type=3&theater
[24] https://www.facebook.com/archives.ua/photos/a.414617238896348/1135154003509331/?type=3&theater
[25] https://bit.ly/3mnEHXK

published several important documents online: "Concealment of Information regarding the Great Terror" [26], "Protocol of the Kiev Operational Group on the Elimination of the Consequences of the Chernobyl Disaster"[27].

There were no changes that were introduced to the archival legislation, as well as the regulations regarding the archives and the work therein, as a consequence of the pandemic, nor was there a reduction in the number of employees at the SBU Archive of Ukraine. The only changes were introduced to the internal regulations in accordance with the general measures adopted to combat the pandemic (wearing face masks, social distancing, etc.). Internal regulations also established that each researcher would be allocated 5 square feet for their work after the end of the pandemic, while any archival items accessed by researchers would be quarantined for 2-3 days.

The State Security Services Archive transferred around 60% of its employees to remote work on a rotational basis. Their main responsibilities included: research and technical analysis, work on research and technical projects, preparation of digital copies, structuring them and subsequent quality control, digitalization, and publishing of other materials, and editing and verification.

The SBU Archive of Ukraine mainly used email to send requested information to researchers, with the exception of large files, which were instead shared through various programs like Google Drive, Webtransfer, Mega, etc. Various messenger services, primarily Zoom Meetings, were used for communication among the employees and with citizens wishing to access the archive.

During the pandemic, the SBU Archive of Ukraine began the process of modernizing the reading halls and acquiring modern technical equipment. As a result of these efforts, more space became available for researchers in the reading halls, and the spaces were equipped with modern technology.

Hungary:

Evaluator: Sandor Horvath - Head of the Department of Modern History and Senior Researcher of the Institute of History of the Academy of Sciences of Hungary; Senior coordinator of the international research project COURAGE – "Cultural Opposition – Understanding the CultuRal HeritAGE of Dissent in the Former Socialist Countries"; founder and editor-in-chief of Hungarian Historical Review.

The national archives in Hungary (including the central and regional archives) were completely closed to researchers between March 15, 2020 and June 20, 2020. During this period, researchers could receive limited service on the internet or by phone. After June 20, 2020, the reading hall was reopened, but with the observance of social distancing rules, meaning that researchers had to keep a minimum distance of 1,5 meters between each other and wear face masks. Some of the smaller reading halls only allowed a limited number of researchers inside. Social distancing rules were also enforced with the beginning of the second wave of the pandemic in September (when the infection and death rates of COVID-19 were significantly higher than those during the lockdown), but no other restrictions were introduced. After June 20, 2020, less than 1% of archivists were still working remotely (for instance, archivists that had been in contact with COVID-19 patients).

There were several changes to the guidelines for working in the reading halls of the Hungarian archives, although no legislative changes were implemented by the Parliament. Apart from this, the number of employees in 2020 did not decrease. There was, however, a reduction of 100 million forints (equivalent of

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[26] https://bit.ly/39nl5hh
[27] https://bit.ly/2Wgdjjd

approximately 275 thousand Euros) in the funds from the overhead budget to the National Archive as a whole (including regional archives).

Around 60% of the staff of the Hungarian archives in Budapest began working remotely, while the percentage in the regions was closer to 30-40%. The employees mainly worked on the development of databases and online platforms while in remote operations mode.

The staff of the Hungarian archives used Webex and Zoom for communication. The archive did not use any specific programs to control the activities of its employees during this period. At the same time, the staff could access the archival databases via VPN functionality.

Kazakhstan:

Evaluator: Alexandra Tsay – independent researcher and curator of arts in the city of Almaty. Specialist of memory studies.

The archives of Kazakhstan were closed to researchers completely from March 16, 2020.

There were no changes that were introduced to the archival legislation, as well as the regulations regarding the archives and the work therein, as a consequence of the pandemic, nor was there a reduction in the number of employees of the National Archive of Kazakhstan. The only changes were those related to the general measures adopted to combat the pandemic (wearing face masks, social distancing, etc.).

Some archives offered online services (Archive of photo documents and Audio recordings) to researchers, although in the majority of Kazakhstan's archives such services were not in fact available.

Conclusion

Several overall trends emerged over the course of the monitoring and evaluation process conducted by IDFI and its partners in the archives of the 10 countries that are the subjects of this study during the COVID-19 pandemic: first of all, it should be noted that none of the countries considered within the scope of this study introduced any changes to archival legislation or the regulations regarding the archives and the work therein. Nevertheless, the archives in all 10 countries simultaneously adopted new general guidelines for conducting work during the pandemic based on such principles as making it mandatory to wear face masks in enclosed spaces, observing social distancing rules, norms of hygiene, etc. At the same time, no archives among these countries reduced their staff because of the pandemic, even though in some cases (for instance, Hungary) the funding of the archives had been reduced.

In terms of effectiveness of work activities in the circumstances of the pandemic, the study highlighted several examples of best practices. Even though the Belorussian archives are significantly lower-ranked in IDFI's ratings of archival openness than other countries, the National Archive of Belarus operated very effectively by, for example, introducing a novelty – the opportunity for researchers to request and receive scanned copies of documents by email. As the research partner of IDFI from Belarus noted, all such requests were fulfilled in the appropriate timeline and the researchers received their documents by regular or electronic mail as soon as they had paid the relevant fees. The only exception to this were genealogical documents, the research into which had been put on hold due to the large number of people requesting access and the volume of related work.

The experience of Ukraine and the timely and effective measures adopted by the State Archival Service of Ukraine should be highlighted among the examples of best practice. Apart from the general safety rules introduced for the benefit of the staff and researchers, the Service also prepared monthly and sometimes weekly overviews of the activities in various archives across the entirety of Ukraine. These activities included renewing electronic databases of the documents from various archives of Ukraine, publishing inventories and finding aids online, adding electronic resources/databases, publishing metric handbooks and alphabetical indexes online, and the digitalization of various collections. The links to these overviews can be found on the websites and official social media pages of the archives. As for archival services, the Ukrainian archives were in the leading position among the IDFI rankings of openness even before the pandemic, as they effectively assisted researchers online as well. Nevertheless, the service improved even further during the pandemic itself. The Security Service Archive of Ukraine is one example of this, as it provided scanned documents to researchers online, completely free of charge, even after the reading halls closed. Additionally, during the pandemic, the Security Service Archive of Ukraine proactively published several important and noteworthy documents. Simultaneously, the Archive began the process of modernizing reading halls and installing modern equipment, which is the best example of the effective use of the opportunity presented by the fact that the reading halls were empty during the pandemic.

One more noteworthy aspect of the Ukrainian experience was the information campaign initiated by the archival society of Ukraine. The campaign comprised the efforts to create a digital database of modern documents related to COVID-19 and their preservation in accordance with archival guidelines. The State Archive headed the effort to acquire, preserve and collect documents reflecting the struggle of the Ukrainian state against the pandemic, thereby making it easier for future researchers to study the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact. This is a unique example of best practice that should be adopted by archives across the world, so that future generations have access to systemic archival collections on the COVID-19 pandemic.

The State Archival Service of Ukraine was also noteworthy in that it initiated the development of a new strategy in a timely manner. This plan should include detailed descriptions and instructions for the measures that should be adopted for tackling situations of similar nature in the future, as well as the optimization of archival services with the help of the internet. **It should be noted that Ukraine was the only country among those surveyed in this study that began working on a strategic action plan**. While the Lithuanian archive has not yet developed a strategic action plan for responding to situations of a similar nature in the future, the research partner of IDFI from Lithuania has noted that the primary archival service of the country is responsible for developing an action plan that will be in accordance with national regulations. This approach guaranteed that the operations of archives and the work of the researchers will be safeguarded in future emergency situations like the COVID-19 pandemic.

Ukraine	●	● Plan has been developed
Lithuania	●	
Belarus	●	● Development of the plan has been initiated
Georgia	●	
Armenia	●	
Azerbaijan	-	● No plan has been developed, nor have any efforts been initiated in this direction
Latvia	-	
Romania	-	
Hungary	-	- Information unavailable

Kazakhstan	-	

Countries that have created a strategic action plan for future states of emergency or initiated the development of the action plan

The increasing activity of the Lithuanian and Georgian state archives on social media should also be noted among the examples of best practices. These archives increased the number of digital exhibits and post regularly on social networks, publishing interesting documents and articles, especially those related to the histories of pandemics, all of which can be seen as a smart strategy for the popularization of national archives and archival activities among the general public.

The archives that could not provide remote services to their citizens constitute the examples of the worst practices within the framework of this study. In this regard, according to the questionnaires completed by our research partners, among the 10 countries surveyed, the worst situation was observed in the archives of Kazakhstan. However, it should also be noted that, despite a number of archives continuing to communicate with citizens remotely, the lack of technically sound websites and digital copies of documents still gave rise to significant problems. As a result, most of the remote activities within these archives consisted of requesting and receiving documents online. Such was the case in Azerbaijan. Therefore, the recommendation of IDFI regarding the timely digitalization of the documents in the archives has become even more crucial during the pandemic.

Recommendations

Based on the results of our study, it is crucial for national archives to adopt the following measures in order to guarantee the openness and accessibility of the archives during a pandemic or other obstacle to regular operations:

- Develop a strategy for making services and documents accessible electronically and begin proactive work directed at increasing the number of archival materials that have been digitalized;
- During states of emergency, the archives should regularly publish information regarding their activities and the renewal of electronic collections, inventories, electronic resources/databases and alphabetical indices.
- During states of emergency, the archives should be more active on social media and proactively publish interesting documents, hold virtual exhibits and plan other similar activities aimed at the popularization of archival operations;
- The archives and archival organizations should initiate the efforts to collect and preserve documents and materials related to the COVID-19 pandemic in a timely manner;
- The archives should develop a new strategy for developing the archival sphere, as this is crucial for the proper functioning of archival institutions during states of emergency;

- The archives should clearly define the new job descriptions, responsibilities and functions of each employee. In the long-term, this will let the archives avoid mass reductions in staff, although one should keep in mind that this process is partially unavoidable with the introduction and development of electronic services that would lead archives to reduce their human resources with the purpose of conserving financial resources.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Questionnaire: Activities of National Archives during the COVID-19 Pandemic and Quarantine

1. **Were any restrictions on archival operations put in place during the coronavirus pandemic?**

   a. Yes, the archives were closed completely to the public

   b. Reading halls were closed, while other services (e.g. issuing certificated) remained available

   c. No restrictions were instituted

   d. Other: (Please explain)

2. **When did the national archives start limiting access to archival materials during the pandemic (if such limitations existed)?**

3. **When were the restrictions lifted (if such restrictions existed)?**

4. **Were any changes related to the coronavirus pandemic introduced to archival legislation? If so, please describe them.**

5. **Were any new regulations related to archival operations introduces with the purpose of preventing the spread of coronavirus? If so, please describe them.**

6. **Were there any reductions in staff or funds during the coronavirus pandemic? Based on what expenditures?**

7. **Were archival services available during the coronavirus pandemic?**

   Yes
   No

   Please explain in detail (for example, requesting and receiving documents; inventories (if they had not been uploaded yet), receiving the requested archival documents and materials; genealogical research, etc.):

8. **Did the archives develop an action plan for future crises of a similar nature? If so, please describe it.**

9. **What percentage of archivists began working remotely during the pandemic?**

10. **What were the main responsibilities of the archivists while working remotely?**

11. **Which online platforms were used for communication during remote operations (e.g. email, Zoom, Google Meet, Microsoft Teams, etc.):**

    a. **Among staff:**

    b. **With visitors:**

12. **What kind of software support did the staff of the archives have during remote operations (if such information is available)?**

Appendix 2: Contact Information of the Evaluators

Country	Evaluator	Email Address
Azerbaijan	Eldar Zeylanov	eldar.hrca@gmail.com
Belarus	Dmitriy Drozd	dmitriy_drozd@hotmail.com
Latvia	Edgars Engizers	edgars.engizers@gmail.com
Lithuania	Vytautas Starikovicius	vytautas.starikovicius@yahoo.com
Romania	Alexandru Murad Mironov	al.mironov@gmail.com
Georgia	Anton Vacharadze	a.vacharadze@idfi.ge
Armenia	Hranush Kharatyan	hkharatyan@gmail.com
Ukraine	Anna Oliinik	anna.oliinik.ua@gmail.com
Hungary	Sandor Horvath	sandor.horvath34@gmail.com
Kazakhstan	Alexandra Tsay	alexandra.tsay@gmail.com

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