

DGAL 136

## ARCHIVAL POLICY

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### 1. BACKGROUND

1.1. This policy forms part of the ongoing work to develop a complete information management strategy at the Council of Europe. It is based on the principle that information is one of the Organisation's most valuable assets and on the concept of Information Life Cycle Management.

1.2. In the current information context paper and electronic resources co-exist and practices and policies governing creation, access and archiving vary. There is therefore a growing need for an integrated information system and clear objectives for the sound management of electronic and paper archives for the whole of the Council of Europe. The new archival policy applies to major administrative entities (see "MAEs concerned"), with the exception of those that are governed by specific regulations, in particular the European Court of Human Rights, and those partial agreements, and entities that have already defined their individual policies on the basis of specific operational requirements (*Council of Europe Development Bank, European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, European Commission against Racism and Intolerance, Group of States against Corruption, European Directorate for the Quality of Medicines, European Audiovisual Observatory, and the Social Charter*). The individual policies will be registered by Central Archives and made available in the Administrative Handbook. The agreement of the MAEs concerned is required and will be formalised in the Disposal Schedules.

1.3. As well as filling the gap with regard to electronic information, this archival policy also aims to introduce a new concept of archiving, as proposed by the International Council of Archives, which calls for archiving at the beginning of the information life cycle rather than at the end.

1.4. Definitions of certain technical terms used in this paper appear in section 8.

## 2. OBJECTIVES

2.1. The main objective of this policy is to create the right environment for the correct management of archives,

in order to:

- provide the evidence required to carry out daily activities
- keep track of transactions
- allow for continuity in the event of a disaster
- meet regulatory compliance requirements
- create and manage authentic, reliable and usable archives, for accountability purposes and the preservation of the Organisation's collective memory.

by:

- defining the Secretariat General's archiving responsibilities
- laying down basic rules
- implementing and improving policies for accessing the Council of Europe archive, making changes when necessary
- establishing an ongoing programme of records and archival training. The programme should include the roles and responsibilities of management and all staff, as well as skills development for archive professionals.

2.2. These objectives will make it possible to establish a regulatory basis for archiving and will result in cost-effective, efficient and reliable archive management within the Organisation.

## 3. REGULATORY ENVIRONMENT FOR ARCHIVING THROUGHOUT THE INFORMATION LIFE CYCLE

3.1. These provisions apply to information produced, received and held by all Council of Europe entities and staff members in their professional capacity, with the exception of the European Court of Human Rights and those partial agreements and entities that have already defined their individual policies on the basis of special operational requirements (see § 1.2).

3.1.1. The MAEs concerned will comply with archival regulations as defined in decisions of the Committee of Ministers, instructions of the Secretary General and standards

laid down by the Data Protection Commissioner and taking into account recommendations made by the Directorate of Internal Audit. These regulatory texts will be published in the Administrative Handbook.

- 3.1.2. Archiving will be carried out in accordance with the Secretary General's Regulation of 17 April 1989 outlining a data protection system for personal data files in the Council of Europe and with the general principles of data protection, particularly as defined in ETS 108, Convention for the Protection of Individuals with Regard to Automatic Processing of Personal Data and related instruments and the relevant recommendations of the Committee of Ministers.
- 3.1.3. The disposal schedules of the MAEs concerned must meet the regulatory compliance requirements and contain access rules and conditions if these are not covered in a specific policy document.
- 3.1.4. MAEs are advised to apply the same principles of transparency as those recommended by the Council of Europe for member countries (Recommendation Rec(2003)15, Recommendation No. R (2000) 13, CM/AS(92)Rec1173intE).
- 3.1.5. Before taking any decisions to modify the architecture of new applications or introducing a local information system, those concerned should consult the archival policies, as published in the Administrative Handbook and the Central Archive's website and strategies, to ensure that these changes comply with the Council of Europe's basic architectural structures and standards and will permit system interoperability. The Directorate of Information Technology (DIT) and Central Archive staff should be consulted directly in the event of any doubt.
- 3.1.6. The Central Archive of the Council of Europe will issue recommendations on required archival standards, taking into account international/European archiving and exchange standards and the requirements for introducing IT documentary, record and archival management tools. The standards and practices in use in the MAEs will be taken into consideration. Required archival standards will be published in the Administrative Handbook.
- 3.1.7. It will be mandatory to adopt a minimum set of metadata and standard archival formats as recommended by the Central Archive, in order to avoid the risk of information loss during the migration of information from one system to another, in the event of a change in IT tools. The recommendations will be agreed with the entities and approved by the Information Management Working Group. Recommended archival formats will be subject to revision at least every five years to adapt to technological developments.
- 3.1.8. Any information identified in a disposal schedule as having indefinite archival value will become part of the historical archives. It will be copied into electronic format if it was not created digitally and made accessible via a content management system. Documents of textual value containing contributions from well-known

figures will also be archived in paper format. The digitisation of historical archives will be carried out by Central Archive.

- 3.1.9. A collection policy defines which items are eligible for historical archiving and is subject to revision every 5 years, or more often if required. If an entity requires assistance in appraising its information, it should seek advice from the Central Archive.

## 4. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE ARCHIVAL POLICY THROUGHOUT THE INFORMATION LIFE CYCLE

### 4.1. General Principles

- 4.1.1. A clear statement of archiving rules and responsibilities is necessary at every phase of an information life cycle from creation to final disposition (destruction or archiving).
- 4.1.2. A **team of archive specialists** (Central Archive) exists for the purpose of advising and assisting entities in meeting their responsibilities.
- 4.1.3. The **disposal schedule** drawn up between Central Archive and authors identifies the retention period for specific types of information (in both paper and electronic format) and determines the responsibility of both the MAEs and Central Archive for conservation and use of information. The existing disposal schedules must be updated with instructions relating to electronic information. The disposal schedule must take account of rules established by bodies with cross-departmental responsibilities, such as the Directorates of Finance and Human Resources. This initial appraisal will determine which types of information become records. Records may be archived in paper or electronic format. Non-structured electronic information is archived by means of a **records management system**.

### 4.2. Prerequisites for implementing a Records Management System

- 4.2.1. It is necessary to make an inventory of existing information typologies and limit the number to a minimum for archival purposes.
- 4.2.2. It is proposed to use only 3 categories of documents for archival purposes:
- *Referenced adopted document*: all referenced documents or publications bearing a serial identification number or an ISBN, appearing in their final, approved version
  - *Referenced preparatory document*: all referenced documents or publications bearing serial numbers or ISBNs, which do not yet exist in their final version and/or have not yet been approved by the responsible author

- *Administrative document*: documents that are not in either of the above categories.

4.2.3. Any other information is limited to 3 categories:

- Record : see definition in section 8
- Non-record: Council of Europe-owned information that does not fit the definition of a record
- Personal file: document containing personal data about an identifiable physical person.

4.2.4. It is necessary to clarify the rules for the classification/declassification of documents:

- the existing rules for classification/declassification are available from the Central Archives
- any archival items not covered in the existing rules must be specified in the entity's disposal schedule and include a clear definition of access rules.

4.2.5. It is recommended that a common file plan be applied to the organisation of the Council of Europe's information resources, whether in the form of:

- a collaborative space
- public folders and their future replacement
- web sites
- audio or video files
- paper files
- any other information organisation system.

4.2.6. The basic common plan will be prepared by the Central Archive in collaboration with the Archive correspondents group and will be used for automatic archival procedures. The common file plan can then be further developed and supplemented by each entity.

4.2.7. The Central Archive will keep the register of all individual file plans. If an entity has already established its own file plan, it is requested to submit a copy to the Central Archive. Recommended disposal schedule samples for electronic information shared across the Organisation will be drafted by the Central Archive.

4.2.8. The Central Archive, in collaboration with the Human Resources Directorate, will ensure that the MAEs have access to appropriate training according to their roles and responsibilities and help them to develop the necessary skills for the correct management of their archive.

### **4.3. Transfer to Archives**

- 4.3.1. Paper: The MAEs concerned send the records and archival material to Central Archive. The transferred batches must be accompanied by an appropriate transfer form (i.e. temporary/permanent record preservation form). If an entity takes responsibility for the destruction of its records, it must notify Central Archive by sending a notification for records destruction form.
- 4.3.2. As far as possible, electronic objects should be collected automatically in line with the agreed disposal schedules.

### **4.4. Recommended Archival Format for Electronic Objects**

- 4.4.1. Recommended formats for each type of information are available from Central Archive. The list is updated regularly. Central Archive will not take responsibility for long-term archiving of formats which do not appear in this list.
- 4.4.2. DIT will deliver appropriate tools for the transfer of electronic objects. The retention/destruction period for all objects must be specified by entities in their disposal schedules.
- 4.4.3. Central Archive is responsible for archiving electronic information stored on all user stations and servers permanently connected to the DIT network, in accordance with the rules agreed with entities concerned in the disposal schedules. Archiving at remote sites is the responsibility of the head of IT at each particular site. Central Archive is not responsible for archiving information stored on stand-alone and mobile equipment such as handhelds or mobile phones, USB keys, Blackberry devices.
- 4.4.4. Once the record management system is in place Central Archive will prepare a user manual with detailed guidelines for automatic and manual transfer of electronic objects intended for archiving.

### **4.5. Access to information**

- 4.5.1. Access to historical archives is provided by the Central Archive in accordance with Council of Europe rules.
- 4.5.2. Access to records and documents is provided on the basis of agreements with author departments and is formalised in the disposal schedule of each individual entity.
- 4.5.3. In the interest of transparency and information sharing, it is recommended that any digitally generated document is attributed a default access right "INTERNAL", meaning open to all staff, offering access to all internal users. Restricted or

Confidential access should be adopted only for specific cases, which will be defined in the disposal schedule of a particular entity.

#### **4.6. Security**

- 4.6.1. The Central Archive will draw up access rules for external researchers.
- 4.6.2. IT risks will be defined in co-operation with audit and preventive measures will be included in the security plan of the DIT.
- 4.6.3. A special disaster prevention plan for archives will be regularly updated, at least once every five years.
- 4.6.4. The Central Archive will ensure that tools are developed to maintain the integrity of archived information.

### **5. ACCOUNTABILITY: ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

- 5.1. Archive Correspondents: their role is defined in RAP-INF(2001)6.
- 5.2. Managers: each entity is responsible for identifying, obtaining and preparing its department's records for archiving. Managers must prepare disposal schedules in collaboration with the Central Archive.
- 5.3. Professional archivists, record managers and storage administrators are responsible for providing access to all files and documents transferred, regardless of medium or format, and for guaranteeing the authenticity of this information. They also provide appropriate tools for rapid access to and accurate retrieval of information.
- 5.4. Archive staff are responsible for archival collection policy, managing disposal schedules, drawing up file plans, preparing recommendations on metadata, setting conditions laid down in common access rules and implementing them. Central Archive will run and update a website, listing detailed rules and common policies applicable to all staff.
- 5.5. Other staff: each Council of Europe staff member is accountable for her/his own documents, but these documents are not the staff member's property. She/he is bound to apply the rules laid down in the file plan and the disposal schedule and comply with documentary standards established for her/his organisational entity.

### **6. COST**

- 6.1. The central budget will cover the cost of document and record management systems, provided that entities follow the recommended policy, as laid out above, and provided that

the existing budget is maintained. Any exceptions negotiated by individual entities could involve participation in archiving costs.

## 7. FOLLOW-UP

- 7.1. The archival policy will be revised at least every five years by the Central Archive of the Council of Europe in close collaboration with author entities, who are the most important partners in determining future policy. The networks of archive and computer correspondents and the Information Management Working Group have been established to ensure that the interests of each entity are taken into account.
- 7.2. Intranet pages dedicated to archiving policy will be available for consultation by all entities of the Council of Europe, containing archiving tips, recommendations, good practice, full text of all agreed standards and rules for implementing archival policy. The site will be updated regularly and an annual progress report will be published to provide information on archival practice at the Council of Europe.
- 7.3. The Central Archive will also play an active role in the “Section of International Organisations” of the International Council on Archives and will co-operate with partners in other international organisations to ensure that archival policy at the Council of Europe reflects European state of the art archiving techniques and standards.

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## 8. DEFINITIONS

- 8.1. **Appraisal** is the process by which records are evaluated to determine whether they should be retained or destroyed, based on a set of guidelines.
- 8.2. **Archive/archiving**: the process of transferring records to a repository managed by personnel specialised in storing, appraising, conserving and authorising access to the records entrusted to their care. Archiving allows for future retrieval and use of information. Archiving serves two main functions: conserving evidence in case of a legal claim or audit, and preserving the historical memory and proof of an activity.
- 8.3. **Compliance**: in the context of this paper compliance means adherence to the Council of Europe’s internal rules.
- 8.4. **Data**: A reinterpretable representation of information in a formalised manner suitable for communication, interpretation or processing. Examples of data include a sequence of bits, a table of numbers, the characters on a page or the recording of sounds made by a person.



- 8.5. **Disposal Schedule:** a document which identifies and describes the records kept by an entity and defining the instructions and responsibilities entailed for each type of document throughout its life cycle. It includes the Major Administrative Entities (MAE) level agreement between each MAE and Central Archive for the retention and use of the MAE's documents
- 8.6. **Document:** a document is traditionally considered to mean information fixed on paper, but the present definition has been broadened to include any recorded text, image or sound, in digital or analogue format, created by an author.  
“Recorded information or object which can be treated as a unit” (ISO 15489).
- 8.7. **Electronic object:** e.g. documents in electronic format, emails, information contained on websites or in databases.
- 8.8. **File plan:** a classification system for file organisation using alphabetical, numerical or decimal codes in combination with headings related to subject or activity.
- 8.9. **Information:** In this context, it is the information created, disseminated or received in the initiation, conduct or completion of an institutional or individual Council of Europe related activity, regardless of format or medium.  
"Structured information may be characterised as information whose intended meaning is unambiguous and explicitly represented in the structure or format of the data. The canonical example of structured information is a relational database table. Unstructured information may be characterised as information whose intended meaning is only loosely implied by its form and therefore requires interpretation in order to approximate and extract its intended meaning. Examples include natural language documents, speech, audio, still images, and video."
- 8.10. **Information Life Cycle Management** refers to the process by which information is handled from its creation to its final disposition. The 5 stages involve creation/acquisition, identification/cataloguing, storage/preservation, access, elimination/reuse for creation.
- 8.11. **Metadata:** Data describing the records and their management through time.
- 8.12. **Record:** Recorded information produced or received in the initiation, conduct or completion of an institutional or individual activity which comprises content, context and structure sufficient to provide evidence of the activity. This applies to all records regardless of format and medium.  
A record provides evidence of a transaction or a decision. Information or a document may become a record after being declared in a record management system.
- 8.13. **Transaction:** any action related to specific information (e.g. loan, modification or destruction).