

## Public Access and Restricted Access to Archival Documents: National Archives of Estonia

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### *ABSTRACT*

As a result of the work in accomplishing the mission of the NAE - to ensure the access to information regardless of time and location - there are nearly 12 million images in the portal of digitalized archival sources SAAGA. The NAE photo collection is described in the database FOTIS and the maps are described in the Register of the maps. Both of these databases contain a large number of digitalized images. The number of digitalized archival records is rising steadily. Archival documents with public access are available in reading rooms, where researchers can search archival records from the databases in our virtual reading room VAU and order the documents via internet. Restricted access is established to the documents containing private information and to the documents with the restricted access, established by the transferor or the creator of the documents. It is possible to apply for access to the records, pointing out the need for access. After that archive consider and decide on the possibility of access. Customers can apply for access also via internet.

**Key words:** National Archives of Estonia, public access, restricted access, archives

Accessibilità e restrizioni alla consultazione dei documenti archivistici: l'Archivio Nazionale Estone

### *SINTESI*

Come risultato del lavoro nel compiere la missione della NAE - garantire l'accesso alle informazioni indipendentemente da tempo e luogo - ci sono quasi 12 milioni di immagini nel portale di fonti d'archivio digitalizzato SAAGA. La collezione di foto NAE è descritta nel database FOTIS e le mappe sono descritte nel Registro delle mappe. Entrambi questi database contengono un gran numero di immagini digitalizzate. Il numero di documenti d'archivio digitalizzati è in costante aumento. Documenti d'archivio con accesso pubblico sono disponibili nelle sale di lettura. I clienti possono cercare documenti d'archivio dal database nella nostra sala di lettura virtuale VAU e ordinare i documenti via internet. Un accesso limitato è stabilito per i documenti contenenti informazioni private e per i documenti con accesso limitato, che è stabilito dal cedente o dal creatore dei documenti. E' possibile fare domanda per l'accesso agli atti, sottolineando la necessità di un accesso. Dopo di che, l'Archivio esamina e decide sulla possibilità di accesso. I fruitori possono richiedere l'accesso anche via internet.

**Parole chiave:** Archivio nazionale d'Estonia, accesso pubblico, accesso limitato, archivi

Javni in omejen dostop do arhivskega gradiva v Nacionalnem arhivu Estonije

### *IZVLEČEK*

Kot rezultat dela in uresničevanja poslanstva Nacionalnega arhiva Estonije, da se zagotovi dostop do informacij, ne glede na čas in kraj, se na portalu digitaliziranih arhivskih virov SAAGA nahaja skoraj 12 milijonov digitaliziranih dokumentov. Zbirka fotografij Nacionalnega arhiva Estonije je popisan v podatkovni zbirki Fotis, zemljevidi pa v Registru zemljevidov. Obe omenjeni podatkovni zbirki vsebujeta veliko število digitaliziranih slik. Število digitaliziranih arhivskega gradiva vztrajno narašča. Arhivsko gradivo, ki je dostopno javnosti, je na voljo v čitalnici. Uporabniki lahko pregledujejo in iščejo arhivsko gradivo v zbirki podatkov v virtualni čitalnici VAU in naročajo gradivo preko interneta. Omejen dostop velja za gradivo, ki vsebuje osebne podatke in za gradivo, za katerega so omejen dostop določili predajniki ali pa ustvarjalci gradiva. Možno je zaprositi za dostop do omenjenega gradiva, pri čemer je potrebno navesti namen uporabe. Na osnovi zaprosila arhiv preuči zadevo in odloči o možnosti dostopa. Stranke lahko zaprosijo za dostop tudi preko interneta.

**Ključne besede:** nacionalni arhiv Estonije, javni dostop, omejen dostop, arhivsko gradivo

Avatud ja piiratud juurdepääs arhiividokumentidele. Eesti Rahvusarhiiv

### KOKKUVÕTE

Rahvusarhiivi missiooni - tagada teabele ajast ja kohast sõltumatu juurdepääs - täitmise töö tulemusel on digiteeritud arhiiviallikate portaalis Saaga avalikult nähtav juba ligi 12 miljonit kaadrit arhiividokumente. Rahvusarhiivi fotokogu on kirjeldatud fotode infosüsteemis FOTIS ja kaardid on kirjeldatud kaartide infosüsteemis. Mõlemates andmebaasides on ka kümneid tuhandeid digiteeritud kujutisi. Kõik kolm andmebaasi täienevad pidevalt. Digimata arhivaalidega on võimalik tutvuda Rahvusarhiivi uurimissaalides. Vajalikke dokumente saab huviline otsida/leida läbi virtuaalses uurimissaalis VAU pakutavate andmebaaside. Säilikute tellimused saab klient vormistada läbi VAU kliendimooduli. Juurdepääsu piirangud on rahvusarhiivis kehtestatud delikaatseid ja eraelulisi andmeid sisaldavatele dokumentidele ning arhivaalidele, millele arhiivimoodustaja või üleandja on piirangu kehtestanud. Piiranguga arhivaalidele on võimalik taotleda juurdepääsu, põhjendades selle vajadust, misjärel arhiiv kaalutleb ja otsustab juurdepääsu võimalikkuse. Ka juurdepääsutaotlust on mugavalt võimalik esitada läbi VAU kliendimooduli.

In addition to collecting and preserving, managing, granting access to archival records and their use, constitutes an important part of the main functions of the National Archives. This is carried out within the scope specified in Archives Act and legislation enacted on the basis of this Act. In today's world, it seems natural that access to archival records should be ensured in a way not dependent on place and time. Thus, the National Archives has set the digitizing of and online access to archival records as one of its priorities. This article introduces the possibilities of open access to archival records offered by the National Archives, and also access restrictions imposed on records.

Today the National Archives contain approximately 8.8 million records (documents, photos, filmed footage, parchments, seals and maps). All persons interested in records can look at those without restrictions in reading rooms in Tallinn and Tartu. In addition, clients can borrow archival records and have them brought to smaller towns such as Pärnu and Viljandi. Earlier, in order to use archival material, people doing research had to come to an archive, find the items of interest listed on paper, order these and wait several hours until these reached the reading room. Now, all this is considerably easier and more comfortable. For this purpose, the National Archives has created several online databases and search systems.

In order to facilitate the finding of archival documents, the National Archives has created the information system AIS, which enables the user to carry out searches using different keywords and/or reference codes. Entering data into AIS started already in 1999 and it continued until 2009. The database was made public on the internet in 2004. Today all archival records preserved in the National Archives are available in AIS (Tennasilm, 2010, pp. 383-388).

In the age of internet clients' access to archival materials does not have to depend on the opening times of reading rooms. For this purpose, the National Archives has created a number of databases and digital archives. The largest source of digital resources is SAAGA ([www.ra.ee/saaga](http://www.ra.ee/saaga)), which contains today already more than 13 million images of archival records. At first, it was planned to collect in Saaga all records which can be used for genealogical research, whereas now it contains all digitized archival records, regardless of their content. Saaga holds the most often used archival records from the National Archives, the archives of Lutheran congregations in Estonia, and Tallinn City Archives. The records are church records, soul revision lists, lists of parish members, records of courts, towns, schools, various organisations, state institutions and the army, and Baltic Germans' genealogical records. Saaga contains also materials related to Estonia collected from archives abroad. Digitized parchments, seals and coats of arms are available in Saaga. It also contains documents with restricted access. Such records can be used after access has been granted.

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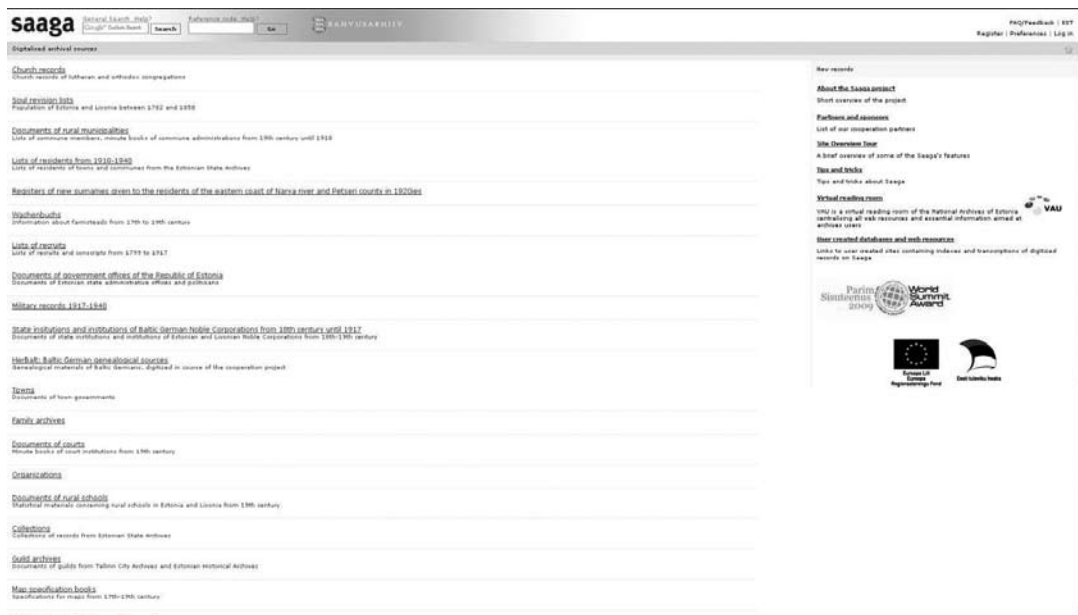


Fig. 1: Opening page of SAAGA (see [www.ra.ee/saaga](http://www.ra.ee/saaga))

Digitized material can be found in other databases of the National Archives as well. The most widely used among those is the database of photos, FOTIS at [www.ra.ee/fotis](http://www.ra.ee/fotis), which contains about 600.000 descriptions of photos and half a million of the described images. The digitizing and describing began in 2009. In the National Archives' register of maps at [www.ra.ee/kaardid](http://www.ra.ee/kaardid), about 120.000 maps have been described, over 33.000 of these have been digitized.

To facilitate access to archival material, the National Archives has developed the virtual reading room VAU. It contains all archival databases, a webshop, auxiliary materials, and information regarding archival services. VAU enables a client to make inquiries regarding archival material, purchase publications of the Archives, apply for access to records with restricted access, request to borrow or copy materials. VAU is connected to the information system AIS. Having found an interesting item, the client can use a direct link to ordering environment where a request can be forwarded to the reading room in the Archives. Customer service checks if the order is fine and forwards it to repository where the archival item is found and taken to the reading room. At the same time, the client can keep track of the item moving online and they can receive the item instantly when it reaches the reading room.

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Fig. 2: Opening page of virtual reading room VAU (see [www.ra.ee/vau](http://www.ra.ee/vau))

Although a huge effort has been made to make archival records publicly available, the National Archives is constantly developing public access further. AIS2 is scheduled to be launched this summer. It offers considerably more possibilities to clients and archivists for working with archival materials online. For example, AIS2 links all systems (digitized images, documents of digital origin, photos, video footage, etc.), enables more specific searches (by geographic location, person's or organisation's name, historical periods or free text) (Leht, 2013).

Pursuant to legislation, access to a number of archival records has been restricted (Procedure for accessing archival records with restricted access, 2012). There are three categories of records with restricted access:

- documents containing sensitive and private personal data
- private records with restrictions established by the person who transferred the records
- records created in the process of performing public duties, the institution transferring these has restricted access and these are meant for internal use

Access is not restricted to:

- basic personal data - name, gender, date of birth and death and death certification, also connections to other persons in the same family tree, except in case confidentiality is required (adoption)
- sensitive and private personal data created at an earlier time when damage to person's private life during their lifetime or 30 years after they have passed away is not likely (documents dating back 75 or more years in case the person's date of birth or death cannot be determined)
- documents related to main activities of institutions, enterprises and organisations if these contain personal data which cannot be managed employing resources of reasonable proportions

Archival records with restricted access can be viewed when applying for access and it is granted depending on a person's positions or research interest.

Access to archival documents with restrictions is granted without any further consideration if:

- a researcher wishes to grant access to their own data
- they have obtained written consent from the research subject or their successor(s), spouse, etc.
- subject passed away at least 30 years ago
- the data is required for research or national statistics
- permission from owner of or the person/institution that transferred the private archival records
- decision made by the head of the institution
- a person is doing research as part of their work duties

In case the conditions listed above do not apply, it is determined whether the public benefits from granting access to restricted archival material and this outweighs potential impingement on someone's rights or interests. When such matter is undergoing consideration, risks to the subject and the National Archives which may arise when access is granted are assessed. The decision is made by the Head of Access and Enquiry Department of the Historical Archives and State Archives.

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## SUMMARY

An important part of the main functions of the National Archives is managing granting access to archival records and their use. Thus, the National Archives has set as one of its priorities digitizing of and online access to archival records. The largest source of digital resources is SAAGA ([www.ra.ee/saaga](http://www.ra.ee/saaga)), which contains today already more than 13 million images of archival records (church records, soul revision lists, lists of parish members, records of courts etc). In order to facilitate the finding of archival documents, the National Archives has created the information system AIS, which enables the user to carry out searches using different keywords and/or reference codes. The virtual reading room VAU contains all archival databases (Fotis, database of maps etc), a webshop, auxiliary materials, and information regarding archival services. VAU enables a client to make inquiries regarding archival material, purchase publications of the Archives, apply for access to records with restricted access and request to borrow or copy materials. Pursuant to legislation, access to a number of archival records has been restricted. Archival records with restricted access can be viewed when applying for access and it is granted depending on a person's positions or research interest.

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