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Between Life and Death

Stories of Rescue During the Holocaust



Cover photograph: POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews, courtesy of Jadwiga Gawrych

The persons recognised with the title of Righteous Among the Nations have been active in many countries, including those not featuring in this exhibition. By presenting the most recent list of the Righteous available from Yad Vashem, we wish to remember them all.

Albania	75	Latvia	136
Armenia	24	Lithuania	891
Austria	109	Luxemburg	1
Belarus	641	Macedonia	10
Belgium	1,731	Moldova	79
Bosnia	43	Montengero	1
Brazil	1	Netherlands	5,595
Bulgaria	20	Norway	67
Chile	2	Peru	2
China	2	Poland	6,706
Croatia	115	Portugal	3
Cuba	2	Romania	60
Czech Republic	116	Russia	204
Denmark	22	Serbia	135
Ecuador	1	Slovakia	572
Egypt	1	Slovenia	10
El Salvador	1	Spain	9
Estonia	3	Sweden	10
France	3,995	Switzerland	49
Georgia	1	Turkey	1
Germany	601	Ukraine	2,573
Greece	335	United Kingdom	22
Hungary	844	USA	5
Indonesia	2	Vietnam	1
Ireland	1		
Italy	682	Names and numbers of Righteous Among the Nations – per country & ethnic origin, as of January 1, 2017	
Japan	1		

**These stories are our
heritage through which
we can learn more about
human beings, their attitudes
and behavioural mechanisms
in the face of tragedy as well
as the strength to oppose
discrimination and the human
will to survive.**

Stories of Rescue

B E T W E E N

Life and Death

During the Holocaust

On 1 September 1939, the German Reich invaded Poland starting one of the greatest and bloodiest conflicts in human history. War-torn Europe was divided among countries which were either occupied, occupying, collaborating with Nazi Germany or else neutral. As a result of military operations, the policy of destruction and the inevitably worsening living conditions, millions of civilians perished. Many more fell victim to war crimes committed in particular by the German Nazi regime.

Jews were the main target of German repression. Although their legal status varied in different countries, they were all stigmatised, isolated, persecuted and eventually doomed to death. Various ethnic groups, in particular Poles, Byelorussians or Russians, suffered mass terror and heavy human losses, but Jews were to be exterminated entirely. Only Roma and Sinti were treated in a similar way. Thousands more, including people with disabilities, homosexuals, Jehovah's Witnesses, and political opponents, also suffered severe oppression.

In the face of the Jewish genocide, local populations of the occupied countries had to make choices they would never have imagined: how should one react to this mass atrocity? Attitudes differed widely: the majority remained passive, fearing reprisals and concentrating on the fate of their own families. There were also those who exploited the tragic plight of Jews for their own gain, engaged in blackmail, denunciations and even murder. At the same time, others offered help to Jews seeking to flee ghettos and looking for hideouts. The helpers were driven by various motives – humanitarian, religious, personal, political or material. For others still, it was a form of resistance.

Offering assistance to Jews was severely punished by the Germans: one could lose their job, be beaten, imprisoned or sent to a concentration camp. In some countries such as Poland and the occupied areas of the Soviet Union – Ukraine, Lithuania, Belarus – as well as Serbia, the sentence could be even harsher: the death penalty. All attempts at offering help were thus extremely risky. The decision to aid a Jew would often inextricably link one's fate to that of the person who was doomed to death.

This exhibition presents stories of rescue in fifteen European countries: Croatia, Denmark, France, Germany, Hungary, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Poland, Slovakia, Romania, Italy, Estonia, United Kingdom, Ireland and Ukraine. We seek to give a voice to both rescuers and survivors – to let them speak about what they lived through. We draw attention to their endeavours, courage and will to live. Their fates are shown against a broader historical background, indicating the particular circumstances they had to face.

Many of those who received help did not survive the war. Those who did for many years rarely spoke of their wartime experience. For various reasons many rescuers did not talk about their good deeds, either.

Since 1963, Yad Vashem – The Israeli Holocaust Martyrs' and Heroes' Remembrance Authority – has been honouring Gentiles who selflessly helped Jews by awarding them the title of Righteous Among the Nations. The distinction is rooted in Jewish tradition. The Talmud states: "Whoever saves one life, saves the world entire". This creed appears on the medal bestowed to the Righteous. To date, over 26,000 persons have been honoured with this title and the number is still growing.

Due to the passage of time, many stories of rescue will remain forever unknown.

G

The Nazis' assumption of power in 1933 marked the beginning of discrimination against and persecution of roughly 500,000 German Jews. Most Germans welcomed the new authorities and their policies. Only a small minority mounted resistance.

E

The Nuremberg Laws of September 1935 defined Jews as a race and degraded them to second-class citizens. Marriages between Jews and non-Jews were banned. In the course of the nationwide pogrom organised by the Nazi state on 9 November 1938, more than 30,000 Jewish men were imprisoned in concentration camps; about 100 were murdered.

R

Recognising how dangerous life in Germany was becoming, many Jews prepared for emigration. More than 300,000 fled the country before the start of the Second World War in the autumn of 1939.

M

Following the outbreak of the war, the government imposed new restrictions on Jews remaining in Germany. They were prohibited from using public transport and entering designated areas in many German cities. Curfew for Jews was also introduced. They were ordered to wear the Star of David. Although ghettos were generally not established in Germany, Jews had to live in so-called Jewish houses.

A

With the German invasion of the Soviet Union (Operation Barbarossa) in June 1941, mobile killing units (*Einsatzgruppen*) under the Chief of the *Sicherheitspolizei* and the SD security service and Police Battalions of the Order Police were sent eastward to follow the Wehrmacht. These formations had to perform all police duties in the occupied territories, but from the very first days of their existence, they carried out extensive mass murder operations against communist functionaries, Sinti, Roma and Jews.

N

October 1941 marked the beginning of the deportation of German Jews to occupied Poland and the occupied part of the Soviet Union. They were murdered in Nazi German death camps and other killing sites. In total, more than 165,000 German Jews were deported and killed. The plan to annihilate all Jews of Europe was coordinated by German authorities at the Wannsee conference in January 1942.

Y

Ten to twelve thousand German Jews tried to escape that deadly threat. Since emigration was prohibited and virtually impossible, the only alternative was to go underground. Of those who escaped deportation, presumably more than half did so in Berlin. Those who were used as forced labour in the armaments industry were supposed to be deported in early 1943.

The survival of Jews in hiding was usually only possible with the help of people who defied the Nazis. While attempts were made to save Jews, networks of helpers often developed. About 5,000 of those who went into hiding survived.

Alice Löwenthal

I found lodgings with people who I would never have believed would help. And I was also denied the slightest assistance by people who earlier would have called themselves my best friends. They rejected me in such an insulting way that I thought I would go to pieces.

Alice Löwenthal, Holocaust survivor

The Jewish seamstress Alice Löwenthal lived in Berlin with her husband Adolf and daughters Ruth and Brigitte. When Adolf got arrested in the *Fabrikaktion* in February 1943, their non-Jewish neighbour Johannes Gabriel appealed to Alice to go into hiding.

Löwenthal had to change quarters several times and finally stayed in Strausberg, east of Berlin, with Luise Nickel, a 59-year-old widow and communist. When the situation there became too risky, the mother and daughters had to “disappear” again. In May 1943, she ventured to take a train to Weimar. When the acquaintance with whom they were supposed to stay pretended she was not home, Walter Schmidt, a former policeman, spontaneously offered to help. His cousin Elly Möller took in the two girls. Believing her children were safe, Löwenthal returned to Berlin. She found lodgings with various helpers and worked as a sewer. In late 1943, she moved back to Luise Nickel’s place.

After the war, Alice came back to her own apartment in Berlin. Several months later, she learnt about the tragic fate of her daughters. They were denounced in June 1944 and two months later deported and killed in KL Auschwitz.

Otto Weidt

Already as a young person, Otto Weidt was involved in anarchist and pacifist circles of the German working-class movement. In 1936, after becoming almost completely blind, he opened a workshop in Berlin where brushes and brooms were made.

During the wartime, the factory was classified as “important for the war effort” because some of its products were commissioned by the Wehrmacht. However, Weidt was an opponent of National Socialism.

Between 1941 and 1943, he hired up to 30 blind and deaf Jews and made a lot of effort to protect them from persecution. Weidt organised hiding places and tried to save them from deportation using bribery and deception.

Though Weidt, forewarned, kept his workshop closed on the day of the *Fabrikaktion* in February 1943, many of his employees were deported. Among those saved was Alice Licht, later imprisoned in the Theresienstadt concentration camp and KL Auschwitz. Weidt supported her and her parents by sending food parcels to Theresienstadt. He helped Licht to return to Berlin and hide there until the end of the war.

Weidt succeeded in saving other people’s lives although the exact number is not known. He is one of about 600 Germans recognised as Righteous Among the Nations.

**My life was a struggle.
I struggled for a better world.**

Otto Weidt, Righteous
Among the Nations

SLOVAKIA

As a direct consequence of the September 1938 Munich Agreement, the First Vienna Award (a treaty between Germany and Italy) was signed a month later. As a result, southern Slovakia was ceded to Hungary. The remaining part of the country formed an autonomous territory within the Czechoslovak Republic, which soon disintegrated. On 15 March 1939, German troops entered Czechoslovakia. It was divided into the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia in the west and the client Slovak State, a pro-Nazi regime led by Jozef Tiso, a Roman Catholic priest, in the east.

Following the German policy, the regime aimed to turn the public against Slovak Jews and was involved in taking measures ultimately leading to their extermination. At the time, the Jewish population in Slovakia was around 90,000.

The new government adopted anti-Jewish restrictions which gradually deprived Jews of their basic rights and freedoms. The first regulations included inscribing the term 'Jew' in legislation, and launching the process of transferring Jewish property to Slovak non-Jewish owners, or its liquidation. The 'Jewish Code' of September 1941 deprived Jews of almost all goods, excluded them from many professions, forced to wear a yellow badge with the star of David and banned from intermarriage.

The anti-Jewish propaganda addressed to Slovak society had an important impact on its attitude towards those repressions and rising anti-Semitism. Many accepted the regulations.

By October 1942, the majority of Slovak Jews had been placed in the labour and concentration camps of Sered, Nováky and Vyhne. Units of the Hlinka Guard (the Slovak People's Party's paramilitary organisation), assisted by Slovak gendarmes and members of a Slovak ethnic German paramilitary unit, concentrated almost 60,000 people there. Finally, state authorities accepted the deportation of Jews and even paid the Third Reich for each deportee. Between March and October 1942, approximately 58,000 Slovak Jews were sent to concentration and death camps in German-occupied Poland. Some Jews avoided deportation by fleeing to Hungary.

Due to a number of reasons the deportations stopped at the end of 1942, at that time 24,000 Jews were still remaining in Slovakia. They were protected by 'certificates of exemption'. After the outbreak of the Slovak National Uprising (29 August 1944), with the country occupied by the Third Reich, the deportations were carried out by German troops with approximately 13,500 Jews sent to death camps.

Despite strict bans by the regime, and even the death penalty announced in the media, some Slovaks aided the persecuted Jews providing them with shelter or emergency assistance. Also, the Lutheran Evangelical Church as well as Catholic and Greek-Catholic bishops sent official pastoral letters condemning the racial policy against the Jews.

The total number of Holocaust victims in Slovakia was approximately 70,000. It is estimated that 10,000 Slovak Jews were saved in hiding. Thousands of Jewish businesses, land property and houses were transferred to Slovak owners or liquidated.

Zita Kurz

A young Jewish woman walked from door to door in a village, asking for shelter. She kept a six-week-old baby in her arms. It was crying, drawing people's attention and causing danger. People refused to give any help. Some said she should rather drown the girl or leave her in front of a random house.

Until that time, the woman, Alžbeta Löwenbein, and her husband Ignác lived in Trenčín, a city in western Slovakia. In 1942, thanks to "certificates of exemption", they managed to avoid deportation to a concentration camp. Two years later, the documents became invalid. With a newly born baby Zita, they started to look for a shelter. Someone told them to go to the Rehák family. Mária and Peter with two boys lived in the village of Kubrica. At first, they tried to find a place for the whole family but with no success. Finally, they accepted to take care of Zita. Feeling great pain but relieved, the Löwenbeins left the girl behind.

Zita spent ten months with the Reháks, who took good care of her. Their sons were told not to tell strangers about the child but the boys' friends saw her many times while playing or listening to the radio. "I once took her in a baby-stroller. We ran with my friends so I needed to adjust the speed, and she fell out," recalls Petr Rehák, six years old at the time. "I checked if she had no wounds and I did not say anything to my parents..."

The Löwenbeins survived the war in hiding and came back for the baby in June 1945. The Rehák family was honoured with the title of Righteous Among the Nations.

As a child, I listened to a tale about a girl who could not be raised by her parents so she was given to an aunt. As she was growing, she started to call the aunt 'mummy'. After a long time, the girl's parents came back. When I was twelve, I discovered it was my own story.

Zita Kurz, Holocaust survivor

Joseph Jaksy

During the Second World War, the forty-year old physician Joseph Jaksy was head of ward at urological clinic in Bratislava. He was held in high esteem and enjoyed trust of the authorities – he was the personal doctor of Andrej Hlinka, the founder of the Slovak People's Party, but also treated other party and Gestapo officials. At the same time, Jaksy actively helped Jews persecuted by the regime.

First anti-Jewish repressions in Slovakia had an indirect impact on him as well. Married to a Jewish woman, Joseph was supposed to follow the Nazi order and divorce her. Yet he refused to do so and took his wife to Budapest, where he rented a flat and provided her with false papers. He soon helped her move to Switzerland.


Jaksy became involved in underground activity and aiding other persecuted individuals. The wife of the director of the internal medicine ward in Budapest was hiding for over two years in the bathroom of his flat at the clinic. He also helped his Jewish acquaintances, the Suran family, to leave the country.

Acting in a larger group, mainly in 1944, he saved around 25 persons from deportation. He would admit them to hospital as patients under the pretext of a surgery. He issued certificates to men that they had been circumcised as a result of a medical treatment and not because of their religion or origin. Jaksy also treated those in hiding and provided them with financial support, food, medication and false papers.

What I did, I did in my role as a doctor and out of my feelings as a human being.

Joseph Jaksy, Righteous Among the Nations

Fearing repressions from the communists, Joseph Jaksy left Slovakia in 1948 and went to the US. In 1991, at the age of 91, he was awarded the title of Righteous Among the Nations held by nearly 600 Slovaks.



After the invasion of Poland by the German Reich and the Soviet Union in September 1939, the country was divided between the two occupying powers. Its western part was incorporated into the Reich, the east into the Soviet Union and the central region became the General Government under German occupation.

The Jewish population of pre-war Poland numbered almost 3.5 million. The first repressive measures against Jews in the General Government were introduced by the Germans already in the autumn of 1939. Other decrees issued by the occupying power resulted in the confiscation of property, restrictions on the freedom of movement of the Jews, and mandated forced labour. Jews were obliged to wear signs with the Star of David and had to move to the ghettos.

In the summer of 1941, after the German invasion of the Soviet Union and the occupation of pre-war eastern Polish territories, *Einsatzgruppen* (mobile killing units) began mass shootings of the civilian population, mostly Jews. Additionally, commanders of the killing units incited local Poles and Ukrainians to pogroms of Jews, as in Jedwabne and Lviv.

In March 1942, the Nazi Germans began Operation Reinhardt with a view to annihilating all Jews in the General Government and Bialystok District. They were transported in cattle cars to the death camps of Belzec, Sobibor and Treblinka where most of them were murdered in gas chambers immediately after arrival. When the fate of deported Jews became known, uprisings broke out in some of the ghettos, the 1943 one in the Warsaw ghetto being the best-known example.

In order to survive, Jews had to hide. They sought shelter outside the ghettos, on the “Aryan side”. Among Poles who were witnesses to the Holocaust but also subjected to German terror themselves, attitudes to the systematic murder of Jews varied. The majority remained passive. Some collaborated with the Germans, reporting on Jews or else blackmailing them for financial gain. Others, however, tried to save them. In October 1941, to deter such efforts, the death penalty for helping Jews was introduced in the General Government; the execution of some 450 persons is well documented.

Despite the risk, there were people who helped, for example by hiding Jews in their own homes. Their motivation was not always altruistic. Organised assistance was provided by a structure established by the Polish Underground State known as the “Żegota” Council for Aid to Jews, co-financed by foreign Jewish organisations. It was the only organisation of that kind in Europe. Some Catholic Church clergy and religious orders also provided help.

Over three million Polish Jews perished in the Holocaust. Only between 60,000 to 80,000 survived in occupied Poland, about 30,000 of them in hiding.

Elżbieta Ficowska

Henia Koppel gave birth to a daughter in the Warsaw ghetto. Although there was no guarantee that the child would survive, she used her underground contacts in an attempt to save it. Using a medicine, the six-month-old baby was made to sleep and taken out of the ghetto to the “Aryan side” in a wooden box hidden among bricks. In the box was also a silver spoon bearing the girl’s name and birth date: “Elżunia, 5 I 1942”.

Henia Koppel died in the Poniatowa labour camp in November 1943. Jossel, Elżunia’s father, was shot dead during the liquidation of the Warsaw ghetto.

The child’s removal from the ghetto was organised by Stanisława Bussold, a 56-year-old midwife and member of the underground who helped Jews out of the ghetto and assisted Jewish women in giving births in hiding. Her apartment served as temporary refuge for Jewish children.

**I have never seen
a photograph of my
mother or father.
No one. Everything
was lost in the ghetto.
My birth certificate is
a little silver spoon.**

Elżbieta Ficowska, Holocaust survivor

Although it had not been planned, Elżunia (little Elżbieta) stayed with Stanisława for good. Given the time and circumstances, her childhood was spent in unusual comfort, far away from the realities of the Holocaust. During the war, she was hidden from Germans and again after the war from Jewish organisations seeking out surviving Jewish children. She found out she was Jewish only at the age of seventeen.

Stanisława Bussold was honoured with the title of Righteous Among the Nations.

The Gawrych Family

Dad was telling us that in Warsaw there were posters announcing the death penalty for helping Jews. And suddenly we hear shots, it was the Gestapo. They shot Teresa in the yard, they took Father away and killed him, too. The house was in flames. A woman from the village denounced us.

Jadwiga Gawrych, Righteous Among the Nations

Aleksandra and Jan Gawrych and their children lived in a forester’s lodge in a Mazovian village. People often came to them asking for a glass of water and food, also Jews hiding in the surrounding forests. One day Abram Słomka came to their doorstep. He was a violinist and a fugitive from the Warsaw ghetto, earning a little cutting people’s hair. He noticed a violin in the Gawrychs’ house, took it in his hands and played. Aleksandra suggested that he stay longer and teach her children to play, and so he did. Whenever anyone came, he would hide in the loft.

Fryda Szpinger, a daughter of friends from before the war, hid at the Gawrychs’, too. There were also Tirca (Teresa) Zylberberg and her husband Chaskiel Papier, who came from time to time. They were hiding in a barn in the field.

On the evening of 18 March 1943, the house was surrounded by the Gestapo and plain-clothes police. Fryda, Abram, Tirca and her husband fled immediately, but pregnant Tirca came back for her jacket. They shot her in the yard. They took Jan Gawrych away and killed him, too. Their house was looted and burnt down. The violin was taken away. Afterwards, Aleksandra found out that a woman who was their neighbour had denounced them to the Germans.

Jan and Aleksandra Gawrych and their daughter Jadwiga are among more than 6,700 Poles honoured as Righteous Among the Nations.

D

The German army entered Denmark on 9 April 1940. As the Nazis considered the Danes to be “Aryans”, the occupation of Denmark was relatively free of terror. The Danish government was given autonomy in internal affairs, including control of the police and the judiciary system. Up until 1943, the “policy of cooperation” prevailed. The Danish monarch, King Christian X remained in power. However, censorship was introduced, members of the communist party were arrested and the Danish fleet had to serve the German wartime purposes.

E

N

The Jewish community in Denmark was very small. Most of the 7,800 Jews were assimilated. During the occupation, they were neither forced to wear identification badges nor separated from society at large. State institutions remained the guardian of their rights as Danish citizens. However, high-profile jobs were not available to Jews and their businesses faced certain restrictions.

M

In the summer of 1943, the Danish resistance movement started a general strike in response to the policies of the occupation authorities. In retaliation, Werner Best, the Reich Plenipotentiary for Denmark, demanded the punishment of the “saboteurs” but the Danish government refused. The Germans dissolved the government, assumed full control of the country and soon began the deportation of Jews.

A

In early September 1943, the Nazi Germans pillaged the Copenhagen synagogue and the Jewish community building. Membership files were confiscated and mass arrests planned for 2 October, which fell on Rosh Hashanah – the Jewish New Year – as the Germans believed that Jews would gather in their homes on that day.

R

However, rumours of impending arrests were leaked to the Jewish leaders. One of the informants, the German diplomat George Duckwitz, negotiated with the Swedish government to admit Danish Jews. As a result, Sweden opened its borders to them. From that moment on, they went into hiding assisted by the Danish population.

The roundup of Jews began on 2 October. The German police were helped by a number of Danish volunteers. Only ca. 500 Jews were apprehended by the Germans with the majority deported to the Theresienstadt concentration camp.

K

Members of the Danish resistance movement as well as some ordinary Danes assisted in sending the Jews in boats to the safe haven of Sweden. The cost was borne mainly by the refugees themselves or covered with resources mustered by the underground.

By the end of October 1943, 7,200 Jews and 700 non-Jews reached the Swedish shores.

The Paikin Family

We were most fortunate that my father had a friend like him. But in addition to the bonds of friendship, Bob also acted out of his deep religious and humanitarian convictions.

Henning Paikin, Holocaust survivor

In September 1943, when the rumour about deportation of Jews from Denmark spread, Abbe Isak Paikin asked his friend Robert “Bob” Petersen to help him and his family. Although he had no connection with the Danish resistance movement, Bob started organising their rescue immediately. He found two fishermen in the town of Køge, who promised to arrange a boat and take the Jews to Sweden. Just before the escape, the Paikins hid in a café thanks to a helpful waiter.

When it got dark, the fishermen came, but only to tell Bob that the owner of the boat had changed his mind. Bob gave them money so they could make the owner drunk and steal the keys. The plan succeeded and 14 members of the Paikin family were taken to Sweden, among them Abbe Isak’s son, Henning, eight years old at the time.

Bob supported many more people in arranging their escape to Sweden, mostly relatives and friends of the Paikins. He has been honoured with the title of Righteous Among the Nations.

The Thomsen Family

The inn run by the Thomsens in the fishing village of Snekkersten was a key point on the route of Jews escaping to Sweden in the autumn of 1943. Fishermen who ferried Jews over met in the inn while Jews waited there for the transport. The inn’s owners, Henry Christian Thomsen and his wife Ellen Margrethe were active members of the Danish resistance and were responsible for the logistics of that rescue route. Their thirteen-year-old son Franz Eling was also involved in the rescue missions.

Although many of the Snekkersten villagers took part in the aid effort, there were those who opposed it. One of them informed the Danish police station in Elsinore about the operation. Police officers arrived and arrested a group of Jews walking towards a boat. However, once they were a safe distance away from the informer, they let them go.

The Gestapo suspected that Henry Thomsen was a member of the resistance movement. He was questioned but no incriminating evidence could be found. Arrested for a second time in August 1944, he was sent to the Neuengamme concentration camp, where he died.

Henry and Ellen Thomsen helped hundreds of people. They are among the very few Danes who have been individually named Righteous Among the Nations. The Danish resistance considered providing assistance to Jews as a joint effort and requested Yad Vashem not to honour them individually.

We learnt from underground sources when there was a risk of German patrols and then we had to remain at port. As soon as we got it all clear, we could go out, which we did two or three times a week. Our boat was shot once.

Franz Eling Thomsen, son of Henry Christian and Ellen Margrethe

The German invasion of the Netherlands ended with the country's defeat on 18 May 1940. Arthur Seyss-Inquart became Reichskommissar and assumed control of the Dutch civil service. At this time, about 140,000 Jews lived in the Netherlands.

Racist legislation was soon introduced stripping the Jews of certain rights. They were banned from employment in the civil service and practising free professions as well as excluded from business activity. Their freedom of movement was restricted and legislation aimed at the confiscation of their property enacted.

Initially, the repressions met with public opposition. When the Germans deported several hundred Dutch Jews to concentration camps in February 1941, a general strike broke out in the Netherlands. It failed, however, and led to the intensification of repressions against the civilian population. The Germans set about segregating Jews from the rest of society and 15,000 were placed in labour camps. Furthermore, Jews were ordered to assemble in Amsterdam, from where those who were non-Dutch or stateless were removed to the transit camp of Westerbork. Those living in the provinces were isolated in the camp in Vught.

Further regulations provided for identity papers of Jews to be marked with the letter "J", and from May 1942 on, all Jews had to wear Star of David badges. As a sign of protest against those new directives, many Dutch citizens would mark their clothes with yellow flowers, while in Rotterdam wall posters appeared calling for a public display of solidarity with Jews.

The first transports with Jews destined for death camps left the Netherlands in mid-June 1942 precipitating a protest by Dutch bishops. By September of the same year, however, the Germans supported by their Dutch collaborators deported more than 100,000 Jews, over half of whom were sent to KL Auschwitz.

Underground Dutch organisations, clergymen as well as ordinary members of the public sought to offer assistance to Jews. The occupation authorities countered such activity with repressions which made for arrests, prison sentences and deportation to concentration camps.

About 35,000 Dutch Jews survived the war as a result of individual and collective endeavours. In comparison to the neighbouring countries, however, the Jewish death toll was high. It possibly resulted from a combination of the country's geography, which made escape difficult, the ruthlessness of the Germans in tracking down Jews and the fact that some members of the Dutch police and administration as well as some civilians collaborated with the Nazi Germans.

Claus Victor Bock

Claus Victor Bock was one of the Jewish pupils who were hiding in the Dutch painter Gisèle van Waterschoot van der Gracht's Amsterdam home. In that little community, art, poetry and culture were core activities that helped one stay sane in a situation of fear and constant threat.

Born in 1912, Gisèle had just set the first successful steps in her career when Nazi Germany occupied the Netherlands. She did not subscribe for the *Kulturkammer* so she could not officially practise as an artist.

When Gisèle heard about planned roundups of Jews, she immediately offered her apartment as a hideout to the exiled German poet Wolfgang Frommel and his Jewish friends. "I couldn't watch these kids being slaughtered like chicken", she said years later. From 1942 onwards, with the help of artist friends like Max Beckmann or Eep and Adriaan Holst and through clandestine work, she managed to sustain the living of the group that went by the code name *Castrum Peregrini*.

After the war, Gisèle founded a cultural centre and publishing house, going by that coded war name, in the same building where she had organised the hiding. It operates until today. Gisèle has been recognised as Righteous Among the Nations.

As long as we write poems, nothing can happen to us.

Claus Victor Bock, Holocaust survivor

The Bogaard Family

Johannes Bogaard was brought up in a religious family of Calvinists who lived in the village of Nieuw Vennep in northern Holland. His deep religious convictions motivated him to help persecuted Jews during the German occupation.

With the support of his family, Johannes hid Jews on the Bogaard farm and made successive journeys to Amsterdam to collect further fugitives. He organised hideouts within the local farming community as well as false papers, money and food. He also offered assistance to members of the Dutch resistance.


Towards the end of 1942, Germans raided the farm and eleven Jews were seized. Johannes's father was imprisoned for ten weeks. The Bogaard family continued their mission regardless.

In the autumn of 1943, Germans came again and were able to find and arrest 34 Jews. The raid was a reprisal for the killing of a Dutch SS man by one of the hiding fugitives. Many survived the search, some holed up in haystacks. However, that time around Johannes's father was taken away together with his brother and sister. Soon afterwards, Johannes's wife Klaasje was denounced and arrested while he, now also in hiding, continued to support Jews.


From 1941 to 1943, some 200 individuals were in hiding on the Bogaard farm and in its surroundings. Johannes Bogaard and his brothers are among the more than 5,500 Dutch people honoured with the title of Righteous Among the Nations.

If more of my fellow countrymen had seen with their own eyes what I had seen happening to the Jews, I am sure that they would have done more.


Johannes Bogaard, Righteous Among the Nations



Following the German invasion of France in June 1940, the country was divided into two zones: the northern part placed under direct German rule and the southern part under the jurisdiction of the collaborationist so-called Vichy government.




Approximately 350,000 Jews lived in the northern sector. Some of them were refugees. For fear of repressive measures, many Jews moved to southern France where they hoped to be safer. Many were also deported south from the French territories incorporated into the German Reich. Over successive months of the war, thousands of Jews found refuge in a small area of south-eastern France which had been under Italian occupation since 1940. The Italian authorities refused to implement anti-Jewish laws.



From 1940 onwards, both parts of France saw the introduction of such regulations related to economic matters, restrictions on employment and social activities as well as introducing racial segregation.

The Vichy government issued its own legislation targeting Jews in October 1940 and June 1941 publishing Statuts des Juifs, binding in both parts of France as well as in its overseas territories. That legislation laid down the criteria for determining Jewish origin and barred Jews from working in the civil service and professions associated with culture. In late May 1942, Jews in German-occupied France were ordered to wear Star of David badges. Many non-Jewish French citizens protested against such stigmatisation by pinning such badges to their own clothes.



The mass deportations of Jews from France began in 1941, with the participation of the French police and railway authorities. Jews were first sent to internment camps located in France, e.g. Drancy and Pithiviers, from which they were sent to KL Auschwitz.


On 16-17 July 1942, the Germans carried out the largest of their Jewish manhunts in France known as the Vel d'Hiv Roundup. With the assistance of the French police, some 13,000 Jews were arrested in Paris, interned in transit camps and then sent to KL Auschwitz.



Southern France was placed under German occupation at the end of 1942. Thousands of Jews held in internment camps there, controlled by the French police, were deported "east". By August 1944, approximately 75,000 persons had been sent to concentration or death camps.

Some French citizens decided to actively assist in saving Jews in spite of the threat of punishment ranging from the imposition of relatively light fines to incarceration in concentration camps.

Over 200,000 French Jews survived the Holocaust, some on their own, others thanks to assistance from civilians, underground Jewish and non-Jewish organisations as well as church institutions.



Elisabeth Drillich

We were among wonderful people. My mother told that man we were Jewish. And do you know what he did? He lowered the rent!

Elisabeth Drillich, Holocaust survivor

Thirteen-year-old Elisabeth Drillich fled Belgium with her parents in May 1940. They took refuge near Valence, in territories with a long Protestant tradition. They were saved thanks to the help offered by pastors: in Saint-Laurent-du-Pape (Ardèche) by Roland Tartier and in Mazet-Saint-Voy (Haute-Loire) by Marcel Jeannet. Provided with false documents, the Drillich family lived in several villages in the area of Haute-Loire on the Chambon-sur-Lignon plateau and the young Jewish girl was able to go to school.

On the plateau, where the tradition of welcoming foreigners is century-old, each village became a refuge for Jewish families. Pastor André Trocmé and his wife Magda were ones of the most active in organising the rescue. Magda took responsibility for finding foster families and encouraging boarding schools to open their doors. “There was a general consensus”, she said. Arrested in February 1943 and then released, the pastor joined the resistance but the Jews were still protected.

It is estimated that 2,500 Jews passed through Chambon-sur-Lignon plateau between 1940 and 1944. The extraordinary scale of these acts of rescue and the number of rescuers earned the whole town the title of Righteous Among the Nations, unique in all of France.

Lucienne Clément de l'Épine

A simple seamstress in her thirties and a mother of an eight-year-old boy, Lucienne Clément de l'Épine was outraged by the fate of the Jews. In 1942, at the request of a Jewish neighbour, she dropped off a parcel at the camp in Compiègne where Polish Jews were interned. She was shocked by what she saw. She got in touch with a clandestine Jewish women's organisation, the WIZO, and began her work saving children from deportation and execution.

“Madame Clément”, as she was called, took the children to farms situated west of Paris in the department of Sarthe. In two years, she saved more than 150 children. She travelled with several of them and recruited nurses whom she paid for their help. Most of the time, the families hosting children on the farms did not know their Jewish identity. Madame Clément went from village to village to visit the hidden children to make sure they were being properly cared for.

Arrested twice and questioned by the Germans, she succeeded in convincing them that she was a teacher giving private lessons to “pupils”. She kept an up-to-date teacher's logbook and a list of children to go through. After the war, she continued her mission by collecting the children and bringing them back to the WIZO.

Lucienne Clément de l'Épine is one of almost 4,000 French people honoured with the title of Righteous Among the Nations.

“Such an injustice!” Madame Clément would constantly repeat to her son about the fate of the Jews.

Lucienne Clément de l'Épine,
Righteous Among the Nations

ROMANIA

Following the outbreak of the Second World War, Romania declared neutrality. Due to the revisionist demands for Romanian territory from the Soviet Union, Hungary and Bulgaria, Romania lost a third of its land by the autumn 1940. Soon after the Second Vienna Award (a treaty between Germany and Italy), King Carol II was forced to abdicate and succeeded by his son Michael. A coalition government under General Ion Antonescu and the Iron Guard, a fascist party, was formed. The new regime, known as the National Legionary State, was an ally of Nazi Germany. The Jewish population of pre-war Romania was over 750,000. Even before the country joined the Axis powers, its authorities had launched a policy against Jews. The first mass beatings and pogroms of Romanian Jews were initiated by the local population in the summer of 1940 when, as a result of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, Romania had to cede some of its lands to the USSR. Jews were attacked under a pretext of collaboration with the Soviets. Later the same year, many other anti-Jewish measures were implemented under the fascist regime. Jews became victims of abuses, looting and tortures.

In January 1941, the Iron Guard rose against its political partner. It staged a coup and instigated a deadly pogrom in Bucharest, where more than 120 Jews were killed. Within a few days, Antonescu suppressed the coup and forced the Iron Guard out of the government. Some of those involved in the rebellion were arrested and convicted. Romania participated in the German invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941 and soon reannexed the previously lost territories of Bessarabia and North Bukovina and took over Transnistria. At the end of June, the Romanian authorities staged a pogrom against the Jewish population in the city of Iași, again accusing the Jews of collaboration with the Soviets, which claimed the lives of 13,000 people. By the end of 1941, the Romanian army and gendarmerie, in cooperation with the Einsatzgruppe D and some members of the local population, killed up to 60,000 Jews of Bessarabia and North Bukovina. Those Jews who were not killed in the summer of 1941 were deported to ghettos and camps in Transnistria. It is estimated that about 120,000 of the deportees perished there as a result of murder, forced labour, weather conditions, starvation and diseases. Additionally, over 25,000 Romani people were deported there on Antonescu's direct order.

Even though plans were made to deport Romanian Jews to death camps in occupied Poland in mid-1943, Antonescu's policy changed and the transports were never carried out. His move was based on political and economic calculations in the face of an unclear outcome of the war.

A handful of intellectuals, members of the Romanian Orthodox Church, representatives of the Romanian royal house and diplomats protested against the anti-Jewish policy. There are some examples of ordinary people rescuing Jews, although such help was punishable by the regime.

Between 1941 and 1944, the Romanian authorities, assisted by German troops and SS units, murdered or caused the deaths of between 280,000 and 380,000 Romanian and Ukrainian Jews on the territories controlled by the Romanian state. It is estimated that approximately 375,000 Romanian Jews survived the war.

Magdalena Stroe

You cannot ask someone's identity papers just to save yourself and let the other to be executed instead. You cannot ask this, but you can offer to do it. So I did it. I gave her my papers.

Magdalena Stroe Righteous Among the Nations

Magdalena Stroe was 15 years old when Cluj-Napoca, a city in the region of Transylvania where she lived went under Hungarian rule. Hanna Hamburg, a Jewish girl, became one of Magda's new classmates. After two years, in 1942, Hanna changed school for a Jewish one, but the girls' friendship stayed strong.

In the spring of 1944, soon after Germany's invasion of Hungary, deportations of Jews living under its power started. Jewish families of Cluj-Napoca had to move to the Kolozsvár ghetto. They were allowed to take just a few most necessary items with them. Magda witnessed that. "It was tragic to see them forced to leave their homes and carry nothing but single suitcases," she recalled after the war.

Hanna went to Magda to say goodbye. She said the only way to avoid deportation was to get "Aryan" papers which would allow her to join her mother in Hungary. Although she was not asked for that, Magda gave Hanna her own birth and baptism certificates so she could leave safely.

Magda lived with no documents for months, until the Soviets came. She could barely leave home as walking in the streets without papers could cause a mortal danger. The only document she had was her certificate of secondary education which she carried while out of home. Still, she would shudder whenever she saw a man in a uniform in the distance. Both girls survived the war. Hanna went back to Cluj-Napoca just for a couple of weeks and then she moved to Budapest.

Magda Stroe is among over 60 Romanians honoured with the title of Righteous Among the Nations.

**I made a lot of comedies
to make people happy,
to make them laugh.
But deep in my heart
I am very sad. Very sad.**

Andrei Căărășu, Holocaust survivor

Andrei Căărășu

Andrei Căărășu was 19 years old when the city of Iași – where he grew up, attended school and lived a life of a regular teenager – became the scene of a brutal massacre of Jews staged by the local authorities on

direct orders of Marshal Ion Antonescu. The pogrom started on 27 June 1941. Thousands of people were killed in the streets by Romanian soldiers, the police, and local mob. In the following days, more Jews were loaded onto trains to be taken to internment camps.

"All Jews outside!" heard Andrei (at the time called Bernard), his father Zalman Grupper and brother Paul. They left home and were immediately taken to a police station. On the way, they saw dead bodies lying on pavements. When the night came, the three men, together with more than a hundred others, were forced to enter a train carriage and closed inside.

Overcrowded, the train was moving back and forth for a week. People squeezed inside the carriages had no space to move, no food, no water. "I drank urine of my father and brother and they drank mine." Many people, including Andrei's close ones, died.

The train stopped at the city of Roman. Hearing terrible moans of people trapped inside, Viorica Agarici, head of the local Red Cross, who was there to serve refreshments to soldiers, insisted on the station's guards to open the carriages and let people exit and breathe. Dead bodies and those still barely alive fell outside. Andrei was one of them.

Viorica Agarici asked to remove the corpses and gave food and water to survivors so they could continue the terrible journey. Thanks to her help, many people stayed alive but that was not appreciated by the Romanian authorities. She was immediately fired from the local Red Cross.

Andrei was taken to a forced labour camp and worked there for three years. After the war, he became a successful theatre and film director.

Viorica Agarici was recognised as Righteous Among the Nations.

On 6 April 1941, Nazi Germany and its allies attacked the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. Part of the country was divided between the Third Reich, Hungary, Italy and Bulgaria. The remaining territory was formed into two Axis puppet states – Serbia and the Independent State of Croatia (Nezavisna Država Hrvatska – NDH) led by Ante Pavelić. Power was wielded by the Ustaša – a Croatian fascist movement which collaborated with the Germans.

By October 1942, the NDH passed many anti-minority laws, chiefly against Jews. At that time the Jewish community there numbered some 40,000. On 30 April 1941, three specific anti-Jewish laws came into force: Act on racial identity, on the preservation of the purity of Aryan blood and on the protection of the honour of the Croatian nation, respectively. Jews were forced to wear badges with the Star of David. Their freedom of movement was curtailed and their property confiscated. However, some Jews – such as those who lived in mixed marriages – were treated less harshly.

“There is no room for Jews in the NDH” was the slogan which accompanied physical attacks on Jews as well as plunder and destruction of their property. Those crimes, initiated mainly by the Ustaša, were also committed by ordinary Croats. There were other individuals, however, who, as best they could, sought to give Jews assistance and offered them refuge. Such efforts were made at the risk of punishment, e.g. incarceration in a concentration camp.

At the beginning of the occupation, a part of the Jewish community fled to the areas of Yugoslavia annexed by Italy, either on their own or helped by Croats. They lived there relatively free from danger until September 1943 (i.e. the capitulation of Italy).

In early June 1941, concentration camps were established in the NDH for communists, political prisoners, Serbs, Roma and Jews. One of them was Jasenovac-Stara Gradiška, the largest camp complex in Croatia. By the end of 1941, half of the Jewish population of the NDH were imprisoned in local concentration camps.

In August 1942, the Germans began the deportation of some 5,000 Jews to German Nazi extermination camps, mainly to KL Auschwitz. In May 1943, a second deportation wave followed. From that time onwards, the only Jews to remain in Croatia were the “honorary Aryans”, a category which included persons born to mixed marriages and “half-Jews” married to non-Jews. A small number remained in hiding. It is estimated that about 7,000 to 9,000 Croatian Jews survived the war.

Dina Büchler

At the beginning of 1942, a parcel was delivered to the Jewish community centre in Zagreb. It contained an eighteen-month-old girl with a card attached to her neck, giving the child's name, date of birth and a request to take the girl to Blanka Sitzer Fürst, one of the community's employees. Dina Büchler, the little girl, was the daughter of Blanka's cousin who had been imprisoned in the Loborgrad camp.

Totally committed to her resistance activity, Blanka could not take care of the child. She initially passed Dina on to one woman yet did not consider her help good enough.

Finally, she decided to ask an old pre-war school friend Djina Beritić for help. When Djina came to see the girl, she found out the baby was malnourished and dirty. She took her home in a suburb of Zagreb and looked after Dina with the help of her son Tihomil.

Although the girl was kept away from strangers and barely leaving the house, the neighbours began to gossip about the Jewish child and threatened to denounce Djina and Tihomil. To stay safe, Dina was baptised and lived on false papers until the end of the war. She was then taken back by Blanka Sitzer Fürst and brought to Israel.

Djina and Tihomil were honoured with the title of Righteous Among the Nations.

I was Jewish, which is why I lived as if under house arrest. I did not go out, I did not meet other children, no one. When in the street, I always walked holding Djina's hand. And so it lasted for nearly three years.

Dina Kahn née Büchler, Holocaust survivor

The Dolinar Brothers

Žarko Dolinar, a popular and award-winning table tennis player, lived in Zagreb and worked at the Maccabi Jewish sports club as a table tennis trainer. In 1941, when the Ustaša assumed power, Žarko was able to use his position to help Jews. As a celebrated sportsman, he was invited to official events as well as the offices of high-ranking officials. There he would steal blank identity papers and official seals which – together with his brother Boris – he would use to produce false papers for their Jewish friends.

Among those Žarko assisted was Geršon Apfel, an old trainee of his from the Maccabi club who he knew was to be deported to a concentration camp. He first hid Geršon in his own home, provided him with the appropriate documents for travel to the Hungarian-controlled part of the country (where the anti-Jewish policy was relatively less severe) and finally even saw Geršon off at the railway station.

The Dolinar brothers intensified their activity during the roundup of Jews in Zagreb in June 1941. Although the authorities suspected they were assisting Jews, they did nothing about it. The Dolinar brothers are credited with helping some 300 people and belong to the group of over 100 Croats awarded the title of Righteous Among the Nations.

People in this world are either good or bad. Rather than compete, we should learn and suppress ignorance and every sort of extremism. We fight for one thing in this unfair world – the world as it should be.

Žarko Dolinar, Righteous Among the Nations

Boris Dolinar and his brother Žarko arranged false travel permits and identity papers for a large number of Jews, including many of their friends.

After the outbreak of the Second World War, Lithuania found itself within the Soviet sphere of influence. In June 1940, the Soviet Union wanted to place its military bases on Lithuanian territory. Since the demand was rejected, the Soviets moved to occupy the country.

Under the occupation, the civilian population – which included about 210,000 Jews – was subject to repressive measures including deportations into the depths of the Soviet Union and confiscation of private businesses.

In the summer of 1941, after the outbreak of the German-Soviet war, Lithuania fell under the German sphere of influence and was incorporated into the *Reichskommissariat Ostland* as the Lithuanian General Commissariat with its capital in Kaunas. Following the German army, in the summer of 1941 came the *Einsatzgruppen* (mobile killing units). Their commanders were instructed to “eliminate” communists, Jews and Roma. Jews were also attacked and murdered by Lithuanians. Initially on the pretext of being communists, Soviet officials and supporters, they were soon persecuted solely for being Jewish. The deadliest pogrom, inspired by Germans, took place in Kaunas in June 1941 and claimed the lives of 3,800 persons.

By the end of 1941, the Germans, assisted by the Lithuanian police and auxiliary police battalions, shot about 130,000 Jews. They were murdered at 220 mass killing sites, the largest ones in the Kaunas Forts and in the Paneriai forest in Vilnius.

The remaining Jews were closed up in ghettos of which those in Vilnius, Kaunas, Šiauliai and Švenčionys were the biggest. Those assembled there were denied free movement and their property was confiscated. They were also ordered to wear the Star of David on their clothes. By the summer 1944, all the ghettos in Lithuania had been liquidated, their inhabitants sent to death camps, shot on the spot or incarcerated in concentration and labour camps.

The Lithuanian population reacted to the Holocaust in many different ways. Some remained passive, but a large number, not only police units, collaborated with the Germans and took part in the mass murder of Jews in Lithuania. However, some individuals rescued them, although it was severely punishable by the Nazi Germans, including by death.

It is estimated that about 9,000 Lithuanian Jews survived the war: some of them in concentration and labour camps, some hiding in the forests and often joining partisan units. Still others survived thanks to help from Lithuanians.

The Shochot Family

Jehoshua Shochot lived with his mother and year-and-a-half older brother Chaim in Telšiai, a small town with half of its population Jewish. The boys were raised by a Lithuanian nanny, Domicėlė Pajojutė, who they were very attached to. When the German-Soviet war broke out, they were little boys, Jehoshua just seven years old. The family went through camps (*stovyklos*) and the Telšiai ghetto established by the Germans and their local collaborators. Since its liquidation in late 1941, the Shochots went into hiding.

Domicėlė came to help them. She was then working as a nurse in a clinic located in the Shochots' house, where she also lived. She hid them there at one critical moment, even though the Gestapo office was just across the street. With active help of relatives and friends, Domicėlė arranged successive shelters for the Shochots in many villages and visited them as often as she could. The boys had to change shelters more than a dozen times while their mother was hiding in 22 places. They all survived the war.

Domicėlė provided help also to Rachel Taic-Zinger, a granddaughter of her former employer. Domicėlė and 13 other people who helped the Shochots have been honoured with the title of Righteous Among the Nations.

I am the only one to survive of all my Jewish school classmates. During the war, I lived an illegal life and hid in 15 places. It was all possible thanks to the extraordinary help and courageous dedication of Domicėlė and other Lithuanians.

Jehoshua Shochot,
Holocaust survivor

Sofija Binkienė


"It must have been a madhouse, and one of the most sophisticated homes in the city" is how Kama Ginkas remembers the Binkis family's apartment where he survived the German occupation. The journalist Sofija Binkienė and her husband Lithuanian poet Kazys, severely ill at the time, opened their home to refugees from the Kaunas ghetto. Sofija's daughters Lilijana and Irena as well as Lilijana's husband violinist Vladas Varčikas also got involved in providing help to Jews.

Although their apartment was surrounded by Germans' residences, the Binkises would give shelter to anyone until another safe place was found. Some of the escapees stayed for longer. All could benefit from a friendly atmosphere there, a source of courage and hope. The conspiracy action lasted for three years, from June 1941 until the end of the German occupation in 1944.

Sofija Binkienė and members of her family – Kazys Binkis, Lilijana Binkytė-Mozūriūnienė, Irena Nacevičiūtė-Damijonaitienė, Gerardas Binkis, Eleonora Binkytė, Vladas Varčikas, Natalija Likevičienė and Vytautas Likevičius – are ones of almost 900 Lithuanians recognised as Righteous Among the Nations.

On the streets of Kaunas, Germans with bayonets pointing forward were herding prisoners of war barely alive and people with yellow stars on their chests were walking on roadways. What could one do, how could one live? One thing was clear: you could not sit and watch. Something needed to be done, but what and how?

Sofija Binkienė, Righteous
Among the Nations



In 1939, following the Soviet invasion of Poland, part of its eastern territories known as Eastern Galicia was incorporated into the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic. After the German attack on the Soviet Union in June 1941, the territories of occupied Ukraine remained under German military administration, while Eastern Galicia was incorporated into the General Government.

In the occupied territories, the Nazis introduced repressive anti-Jewish measures. Jews were ordered to wear badges and mark their houses with the Star of David. Their property was confiscated, freedom of movement restricted and forced labour imposed.

Throughout the summer and autumn of 1941, Jews were brutally persecuted by the occupying forces and fell victim to pogroms staged by sections of the Ukrainian population. The most tragic pogrom took place in Lviv in the summer of 1941. Those crimes were sometimes initiated by the Organisation of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) counting on Germany to allow them to create an independent state.

As in the Baltic states and Belarus, Jews were rounded up and shot dead by units of the *Einsatzgruppen*. They were murdered in mass executions and buried in “death pits” dug by the victims themselves. The Ukrainian police and paramilitary organisations took part in these shootings. One of the biggest was the Babi Yar massacre of September 1941.

Survivors were confined in ghettos, soon to be liquidated. By the autumn of 1943, the *Einsatzgruppen*, German army and Ukrainian auxiliary police had murdered most of the Jewish population of Ukraine. Around 345,000 people, mainly Galician Jews, were deported to German death camps in the General Government where they perished.

A few hundred thousand Jews had made their way into the heartland of the Soviet Union before the outbreak of the German-Soviet war in 1941 and stayed there until the end of the war. Some Jews survived in German labour and concentration camps, some joined local partisan units, while others were rescued by individual Ukrainians who provided help despite risking severe punishment, including the death penalty.

It is estimated that between 20,000 and 26,000 Jews survived in Eastern Galicia, around 5,000 in Volhynia. A proportion of Jews hidden there by Poles fell victim to the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA) during the Volhynia Massacres and their ethnic cleansing of Poles in Eastern Galicia.

The Smolenskiy Brothers

After their trudge, two exhausted Jewish boys – fifteen-year-old Mikhail Smolenskiy and his five-year-old brother Grigoriy – reached the village of Belotserkovka, not far from Poltava. It was November 1941.

Over a month earlier, they had been caught during a German roundup and deported to Babi Yar, though they managed to escape. At Babi Yar, the Germans shot thousands of Jews, among them the boys' mother. Their father had been away fighting in the army since the summer of 1941. The brothers were alone. They returned home but could not stay there and had nowhere to go.

The villagers of Belotserkovka welcomed the boys and fed them, but only one woman offered them a place to sleep – Oksana Semerkey. In the morning, she suggested that the younger brother Grigoriy stay with her.

The neighbours knew that Oksana had accommodated the boy. Many were against it, fearful that this posed a threat for the whole village.

Someone denounced her and, as a result, Oksana's husband Nikita was arrested. In order for him to be released, the family had to provide evidence that the boy was not Jewish. Oksana had to collect 50 signatures. She went from door to door asking her neighbours to help her and she finally managed to obtain a sufficient number of declarations.

The boy stayed with the Semergeys, treated as their son. He finally reunited with his father and Mikhail at the end of 1943.

Oksana and Nikita Semerkey have been named Righteous Among the Nations.

We were roaming around hungry, weak and freezing, yet had to press on. No one knows whether we would have survived, had Oxana not taken us to her place. She washed us, gave us clothes and dressed our wounds.

Mikhail Smolenskiy, Holocaust survivor

The Glagolev Family

The Gestapo went from flat to flat for requisitions. When they found that my wife did not have a passport, they were going to arrest her. We begged and managed to persuade them to leave her alone – a few witnesses had confirmed her identity.

Aleksey Glagolev, Righteous Among the Nations

Throughout the occupation, the Orthodox priest Aleksey Glagolev was assigned to the Pokrov church on the outskirts of Kiev. He lived there with his wife Tatiana and their teenage children, Magdalena and Nikolai. In the autumn of 1941, Aleksey's sister-in-law Mariya Yegorycheva asked him to help Izabella Mirkina, her brother's Jewish wife, because she could not hide in her home any longer.

Tatiana gave Izabella her passport and baptism certificate. That favor nearly cost her her life. The Germans were carrying out an inspection and discovered that she did not have any identity papers.

A few weeks later, Izabella needed help again. She lived with the Glagolevs, who maintained that she was their cousin, and was soon joined by her daughter Irina. To stay safe, they both had to hide in the church bell tower for some time.

The Glagolevs also helped other Jews – they hid them at their home or referred them to trusted parishioners. They got them false baptism certificates. Aleksey, Tatiana, Magdalena and Nikolai are among the 2,500 Ukrainians who have been honoured as Righteous Among the Nations.

Since 1919, Hungary's political leader had been the authoritarian Admiral Miklós Horthy. The country was allied with the German Reich even before the outbreak of the Second World War. Already between 1938 and 1941, anti-Jewish legislation was enacted which excluded Jews from the economic life of the country and limited their freedoms.

In 1941, Hungary got involved in military operations on the side of the Axis Powers. At the time, about 860,000 Jews lived in Hungary and the territories it had annexed. They now became the target of the government's further discriminatory policies. In Hungary, the first mass action against Jews took place in 1941, when some 18,000 "alien" Jews were deported to occupied Soviet territories at Kamianets-Podilskyi and eventually murdered there by the Einsatzgruppe. Later, in 1942, Hungarian soldiers murdered about 700 Jews and over 2,500 Serbs in Novi Sad (in Hungarian-occupied northern Serbia). Nevertheless, Jews in Hungary were relatively safe at the time. In fact, the country had become a safe haven for Jewish refugees from many countries occupied by Nazi Germany. The situation changed dramatically in 1944 when the country came under German occupation. The Germanophile Döme Sztójay became Prime Minister and implemented harsh anti-Jewish policy.

Jews from outside Budapest were confined to ghettos and deported to KL Auschwitz between April and July 1944 on the orders of the senior SS officer Adolf Eichmann. Most of the 437,000 deportees perished in the gas chambers immediately upon arrival at the camp. On 6 July 1944, Miklós Horthy suspended transports which were to leave Hungary. From October, on the orders of the new Prime Minister Ferenc Szálasi, Jewish workforce marched on foot to the German border and handed over, mainly to work on fortifications. In November 1944, some 70,000 Budapest Jews were confined to the ghetto, where many died of cold, hunger and disease. 30,000 Jews were enlisted in "labour brigades" and deported to Germany, whereas about 20,000 lived in designated houses outside the ghetto (known as "international ghetto") which embassies of neutral countries had labelled as enjoying immunity. It is estimated that about 250,000 Hungarian Jews survived the war, including about almost 35,000 using false papers or else hiding in Budapest. They were helped by diplomats, ordinary people – some connected to the ruling regime – and members of the clergy. International Jewish organisations also offered – indirect – assistance.

The Fisch Family

Zoltán and Irén Fisch, Jewish merchants, lived in Budapest. Their sons Róbert and Paul were taken care of by their nanny Anna Tátrai, a Catholic. Róbert would go with his parents to the synagogue and then on Sundays to church with his nanny.

I feel that all of us who were marked by the yellow star were tattooed inside.

Robert O. Fisch, Holocaust survivor

In June 1944, in German occupied Hungary, nineteen-year-old Róbert was forcibly drafted into the “labour brigades” in the town of Komárom. Anna sent him food and clothing. When he was transferred to another camp, she even managed to visit him, bribing a guard. She brought him some food and a warm blanket.

Róbert’s elder brother Paul, who lived in Zurich, tried to help his family escape from Hungary. He provided certificates of Salvadorian citizenship for them but eventually they could not be used. Zoltán had been drafted into the labour brigades, while Irén decided not to leave. She was helped by Anna, who hid her in her father’s home. She also buried the Fishes’ valuables, to be returned to them after the war.

In January 1945, Róbert and other prisoners were deported to Germany – where they had to go on foot and without food provisions – ending up in KL Mauthausen and then KL Gunskirchen. He returned to Hungary after the capitulation of Germany.

Anna Tátrai is among over 800 Hungarians named Righteous Among the Nations.

Gizella Csértán

A young girl named Gizella Csértán was working in a shop owned by a Jewish family in Budapest. When the German occupation of Hungary began in 1944, the family was forced to fire Gizella, as Jews were not allowed to hire Christians any more. Having no other option, the girl went back to Szentpéterúr, the village she came from.

Soon, the deportations of Jews from Hungary to ghettos and camps began. Realising the seriousness of the situation of her Jewish acquaintances, Gizella offered help to employers of her sister, the Forbát family, who she got along with while living in Budapest.

Magdolna Forbát, Gizella’s peer, came to Szentpéterúr with her baby girl Anna, mother and sister. “They were not wailing, they were not complaining, only their eyes spoke to us,” recalls Gizella.

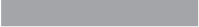
She had no conditions to host three women and a baby but she arranged a shelter at the place of her neighbour Salamon Lajos. Gizella often kept them company and helped in daily life. Some inhabitants of Szentpéterúr were aware of the women’s origins, which was dangerous but nobody betrayed them.

After several months, the Jewish family decided to go back to Budapest. Before the departure, Gizella offered them baptism certificates of her own family, therefore ensuring their safety throughout the Nazi Arrow Cross rule. The women soon reunited with Róbert, Magdolna’s husband who had escaped from a “labour brigade”. Their living conditions were really poor. The man had to hide in a cellar as he had no false papers. When the war ended, the Jewish family was welcomed warmly again by the community of Szentpéterúr and helped to recover. Magdolna and Gizella stayed best friends.


The destinies of those who help people in need are entangled with the destinies of the rescued.

Gizella Csértán is one of the over 850 Hungarians honoured with the title of Righteous Among the Nations.

Gizella Csértán, Righteous Among the Nations




The National Fascist Party led by Benito Mussolini rose to power in 1922. In October, he became Prime Minister and soon a dictator. Although anti-Semitism was not high on the fascist political agenda, Mussolini anonymously published anti-Semitic articles in his newspaper *Il Popolo d'Italia*.



In the following years, Italy was moving closer to Germany and the policy toward Jews gradually changed. The establishment of the Rome-Berlin Axis and an escalation of anti-Semitic ideology intensified this process. In 1938 the fascist regime enacted a series of laws against Italian Jews. They were stripped of their basic rights, banned from school, military and public service, later on forbidden to own a business or land and prevented from marrying 'Aryans'. Jews of foreign origin were ordered to leave the country.


When Italy joined the war in June 1940 as an ally of the Third Reich, its Jewish population was over 46,000. These were mostly assimilated Jews in the centre and north of the country. Additionally, some 9,000 foreign Jews lived in Italy and in Italian-occupied zones.



In 1940, the Ministry of Interior ordered the arrest and internment of foreign Jews. At the same time, however, the fascist regime refused to deport those residing in the Italian-controlled parts of France, Greece and Croatia.

In June 1943, the Allies' landing in Sicily caused a political crisis in Italy, which put an end to Mussolini's rule. King of Italy, Victor Emmanuel III ousted him from the position and ordered to be interned.

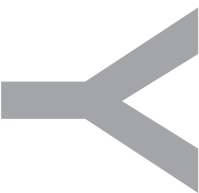
On 8 September 1943, the Kingdom of Italy signed a cease-fire with the Allies. The king fled to the south – a part of the country which was being gradually liberated. The northern and central regions went under control of Nazi Germany, which re-installed Mussolini as the head of a new puppet fascist regime called the Italian Social Republic.



Harsher measures against Jews were now taken. The fascist militia and German forces arrested and deported Jews to German concentration and death camps in Eastern Europe. The largest round-up took place in Rome on 16 October 1943. Soon, the Italian Ministry of Interior ordered the arrest of Jews and confiscation of their possessions. Until March 1945, over 8,000 Italian and foreign Jews were deported.

Many Italian and foreign Jews were able to find shelter with the local population. Some were supported by the DELASEM (Delegation for the Assistance of Jewish Emigrants), networks of anti-fascists and members of the clergy. In other cases, their rescue was possible thanks to various individuals. Nevertheless, there were many cases of denunciation as well.

An estimated 7,172 Italian Jews perished during the Holocaust.



The Candini Family

When people starve, you feed them.

Pio Candini, Righteous Among the Nations

Pio and Gina Candini ran a farm in Cinquanta of San Giorgio di Piano, a village not far from Bologna. They were parents to Romano and Irma. They were simple, well-meaning people, not belonging to any rescue network, who generously welcomed fugitives wanted by the German occupier.

Among those supported was the Cuomo family. After the beginning of the German occupation, Vittorio Cuomo, an officer in the Italian Army, refused to pledge loyalty to the fascist Italian Social Republic and risked to be arrested as a deserter. Likewise, his wife Luisa Lebedkin, a Latvian Jew, and their three-year-old son Eugenio, faced arrest and deportation to the Fossoli concentration camp and later to KL Auschwitz. Sensing danger, they moved from one village to another, ending up in Cinquanta, on the Candinis' farm.

With the help of Pio, Vittorio built a wooden hut heated by a stove in the yard. When it was too cold, they slept in the house, where other relatives and three antifascist refugees were also accommodated. Pio and Gina shared the little food they had, mainly maize porridge, bread and some ham. The little boys, Eugenio and Romano, were playmates.

The Cuomo family lived in the hut for about one year, until 1945. In the last days of the war, when a Wehrmacht battalion camped nearby, they felt they were in greater danger and moved to Bologna. In the 1960s, they emigrated to Israel.

The Cuomos kept alive the memory of the Candinis, but they did not keep in touch. After the death of his parents, Eugenio went back to Italy to learn about his saviours' fate. They met again in 1998 and Eugenio Cuomo started the process aimed at honouring Pio and Gina Candini with the title of Righteous Among the Nations, which they share with over 700 other Italians.

Villa Emma

In the summer of 1942, Villa Emma, a mansion in the village of Nonantola, became a shelter for 73 young Jewish refugees. Two groups of children and adolescents were brought there in July 1942 and April 1943 by their Zionist leaders from Zagreb and Split, respectively. The refugees came from Germany, Austria and former Yugoslavia. The house had been rented for them by the DELASEM, an Italian Jewish rescue organisation.

At that time, Villa Emma, formerly a lavish private mansion, had no furniture, no running water and no electricity. Soon, the group got organised. Thanks to the DELASEM and the adult leaders like Josef "Joshko" Indig, their basic needs were covered. As part of their Zionist education, a school was created offering also workshops and practical activities. Despite their language and cultural differences, the newcomers were all warmly welcomed by the Nonantola community.

On 8 September 1943, the situation changed drastically. With the German occupation of Italy, the group found itself in great danger. Afraid of being all arrested and deported, Josef Indig turned for help to the local medical doctor Giuseppe Moreali, with whom he had befriended over the past year. Moreali asked his friend Father Arrigo Beccari to help him shelter the group in the Nonantola seminary. Some of the children were sheltered also in private houses. By the end of the following day, Villa Emma was empty.

In October, all of the refugees, divided into three groups, were taken to Switzerland. During their journey, the girls wore the same type of coats, to make them look as if they belonged to a Catholic boarding school. The making of the coats was a joint effort of the Nonantola community: Father Beccari provided the fabric, a local shop buttons and lining, and a crew of young local seamstresses worked round-the-clock in order to have the forty coats ready in time.

In 1945, after over a year in Switzerland, the survivors emigrated to Palestine. Father Arrigo Beccari and Dr Giuseppe Moreali were honored as Righteous Among the Nations.

We were woken up suddenly and told that the Germans had reached Nonantola. We had to leave Villa Emma immediately without taking anything with us, only the clothes we were wearing.

Gerda Tuchner, Holocaust survivor

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Following the outbreak of the Second World War, pursuant to the provisions of the secret protocol to the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, Estonia found itself within the Soviet sphere of influence. In the summer of 1940, after rigged parliamentary elections, the country was annexed by the USSR. All government institutions as well as the Estonian army were disbanded.

Approximately 4,400 Jews lived in Estonia at the beginning of the war. Half of them resided in Tallinn, the rest in other cities, e.g. Tartu, Valga, Pärnu, Narva. They were engaged in trade and crafts, worked in industry and performed free professions. During the Soviet occupation, civilians, including Jews, were subjected to repression. They were deprived of their property and businesses, and many people were deported deep inside the USSR.

In the summer of 1941, following the outbreak of the German-Soviet war, Estonia found itself under the German occupation and was incorporated into the Reichskommissariat Ostland as General Commissariat Estonia. Most of Estonian Jews managed to escape to the Soviet Union. It is estimated that in the summer of 1941 there were approximately 1,000 Jews left in Estonia.

In the summer of 1941, following the German army as it invaded the USSR, Einsatzgruppe A began operating in Estonia. The purpose of this so-called mobile killing unit, was to 'eliminate' communists, Jews and Roma. The extermination of Jews living in Estonian cities was carried out by SS units, the German Security Police (SD) and units of the Estonian volunteer armed organisation Omakaitse.

In September 1941, the Germans subjected Estonian Jews to harsh measures including confiscation of property and forcing them to wear yellow badges with the Star of David. No ghettos were created in Estonia. By the end of 1941, almost all Estonian Jews remaining in the occupied territory of the country were exterminated. Only a dozen or so Estonian Jews survived the war in the country.

Starting in August 1942, about 20 concentration camps were established in Estonia for Jews brought there from other German occupied territories i.e. Theresienstadt, the Third Reich and occupied France. The largest of them was the Klooga camp.

In March 1943, Hermann Göring issued a secret decree regarding the renewal of the shale industry in Estonia. Jewish forced labourers were brought to the Vaivara camp system in the north-east of Estonia to work in the shale industry and build military defence infrastructure for the German army. In 1943–1944, about 10,000 people were sent there, mostly Jews from occupied Latvia, Lithuania and Poland. More than half of them died.

With the advance of the Soviet army in the autumn of 1944, the Nazis started to evacuate prisoners of the camps built in Estonia. About 4,600 were transferred to other German camps, where many of them perished. About 2,000 Jews were executed in the Klooga camp in September 1944. Approximately 7,500–7,800 Jews died or were executed in Estonia during the Holocaust. Out of the 12,500 Jews brought to Estonia from other countries about 100 people remained in the country when the German forces left.

Jaagup Alaots

Viktor Alaots and Riva Drui were married since 1937. He was Estonian and she was Jewish, they both came from Tartu and were musicians. Viktor played the cello and Riva accompanied him on the piano. Riva's brother and sisters acted in the Jewish theatre of Tartu. In mid-1940 Viktor and Riva's son Jaagup was born. However, the family idyll lasted only until the German occupation began.

All my life I have thought about these tragic events from the past. It was no longer a war. Killing innocent people, women and children - such crimes never expire.

Jaagup Alaots

In the summer of 1941, after the German invasion, Riva's parents and siblings escaped to the Soviet Union, but Riva stayed in Tartu. A small child made the long trip difficult, and the confidence to stay in the country was also boosted by her marriage to an Estonian man. Unfortunately, everything turned out differently.

The family lived in a tenement in Tartu at Kastani Street. A young man who collaborated with the Germans resided at the same building. He reported to the occupiers that a Jewish woman was staying in the house. On 17 November 1941, Riva was arrested with her child. Viktor was at work at the time and did not know anything.

Arrested, the Jewish woman with her child were kept in custody in the former Jewish school on Aleksandri Street. Viktor brought milk and food there for his son and wife. After the arrest, Viktor was required to divorce his wife. He replied that due to her detention they already separated, so no formal divorce was needed.

Riva Alaots was soon shot in one of Tartu's anti-tank ditch. Fortunately, one-year-old Jaagup survived. After the war, he recalled: 'From my father I know that I was saved by an Italian driver named Tacella. I will never forget that name' The boy was taken out of the camp and thanks to his father hidden in different places near Tartu until the end of the war.

Uku and Eha Masing

We try to find words and we know that words are a shadow of the real being.

Uku Masing

Born in Lipa village in Estonia as Hugo Albert Masingas, Uku Masing grew up in a peasant family. Soon it turned out that he was a very gifted person. By the end of secondary school, Uku was able to speak four languages. In 1926, he started to study theology at the University of Tartu. He also published numerous poems, translations and essays. Before the war, Uku lectured at the University of Tartu and was also recognisable for his humanist and anti-fascist opinions. Students perceived him as a brilliant teacher of theology and Semitic languages.

During the Nazi occupation, due to the circumstances and Nazi legislation, Masing refused to teach at the university and started to work to salvage Jewish cultural and religious artifacts. Isidor Levin, a Latvian Jew, was Masing's student and neighbour. Isidor was born in Daugavpils, Latvia in September 1919. In 1937, he started his studies at the University of Tartu in the area of Judaic and Semitic studies at the Faculty of Philosophy and Jewish Studies. Later he studied Comparative Folklore, graduating in 1941.

Seeing what is happening to the Jews, Uku decided to support Levin and hide him from the occupiers. Thanks to the fact that Eha Masing – Uku's wife – obtained a document from the church in which the information of another person was entered instead of Isidor Levin, Uku Masing helped to prepare a reliable new biography for him. The couple provided Levin with food as well as shelter at their own house. They both risk their lives by maintaining contact with a Jew. Levin survived, although he was arrested several times and even put in a concentration camp.

On 4 April 1969, Yad Vashem recognised Uku Masing as Righteous Among the Nations. His wife's contribution was acknowledged on 29 December 1996.

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From 1933 onward, following Adolf Hitler's rise to power and the implementation of antisemitic laws, many Jews fled Nazi-controlled territories. The United Kingdom became one of several destinations for them. Refugees arrived through various routes: some on transit visas, others by securing employment or sponsors. A notable exception was the *Kindertransport*, which brought around 10,000 unaccompanied Jewish children to Britain before the war.

Despite rising antisemitism in 1930s Britain, public opposition to fascism showed grassroots support for Jews. Still, at the 1938 Evian Conference, Britain—like most nations—refused to raise its refugee quota. By the war's outbreak on 1 September 1939, about 70,000 Jewish refugees had been admitted, with 10,000 more arriving during the war.

On 3 September 1939, the United Kingdom and France declared war on Germany in response to its invasion of Poland, fulfilling their alliance obligations. However, neither country launched significant military operations against the Third Reich.

This period lasted until spring 1940, with minimal fighting on the Western Front.

At the start of World War II, the Jewish population in the UK was around 370,000–390,000. Except for the Channel Islands, the UK resisted Nazi invasion, so Jewish property was largely spared from looting or seizure. The German-occupied Channel Islands—though part of British territory—saw the enforcement of antisemitic policies. Between October 1940 and August 1942, nine discriminatory laws were introduced in Jersey and Guernsey, including forced registration, seizure of Jewish businesses, curfews, and bans from public spaces. Some Jews were deported to camps like Auschwitz, while others managed to hide or remained on the islands.

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During the dramatic summer of 1940, Great Britain managed to defend itself against the German air offensive. By September, the daytime attacks had largely subsided and shifted to nighttime bombing raids. A frantic effort began to improve the air defense system in order to more effectively counter the Luftwaffe's actions.

After mid-1940, Jewish refugees from Germany, Austria, and Italy were labeled "enemy aliens" and interned alongside Nazi sympathizers over espionage fears. Around 30,000 were held in camps, including on the Isle of Man, and about 8,000 were deported to Australia and Canada. Most were later released, and some returned to Britain.

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Britain, first to declare war on Germany, played an important role in the early stages of the conflict and later became a strategic partner in the alliance with the United States and the Soviet Union. The Atlantic Charter, signed by Churchill and Roosevelt on August 14, 1941, set out shared wartime goals and postwar principles.

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As reports of mass killings in Nazi-occupied Europe emerged in late 1941, the Allies began to grasp the scale of the Holocaust. On 17 December 1942, Britain and the U.S. issued a joint declaration condemning the atrocities, but concrete action was limited. The 1943 Bermuda Conference, held to consider rescue options, produced no meaningful results. British officials believed a swift victory was the best way to help the persecuted. As a result, efforts to save Jews were minimal, and active support was rare despite widespread sympathy. Nevertheless, Britain was home to Western Europe's largest Jewish community—around 450,000 individuals, including both citizens and refugees from other countries—who survived the war on its soil.

Ida and Louise Cook

Ida Cook, born in 1902, and her sister Louise, born in 1904, were two ordinary civil service clerks from London whose shared love for opera led them to perform extraordinary acts of courage. Their passion brought them frequently to Europe, where they formed friendships within the musical world. Over time, their visits exposed them to the terrifying reality facing Jewish people under Nazi rule. In the years before World War II, especially after November Pogrom in 1938, the sisters helped 29 Jews escape persecution in Germany and Austria.

Using their opera trips as a cover, the sisters launched a secret rescue operation. They financed the efforts themselves—Ida supplemented their income by writing romance novels under the pen name Mary Burchell—and worked alone, organizing, funding, and carrying out each mission. Their efforts included smuggling valuables such as jewelry and money out of Germany to help the refugees rebuild their lives in Britain.

Once the refugees arrived in London, the sisters continued their support, even renting an apartment specifically to house them. Ida also traveled across England to speak in churches, raising funds and awareness for those still in need. Among those they rescued were Friedl Orlando, a journalist from Frankfurt who escaped on a student permit, and Jerzy Maliniak, a Polish assistant conductor at the Vienna Opera, along with his non-Jewish wife Gerda and their daughter.

On July 28, 1964, Yad Vashem in Jerusalem recognized Ida and Louise Cook as Righteous Among the Nations—a fitting tribute to two women whose bravery and quiet determination saved lives and left a legacy of humanity in the face of inhumanity.

Until the day war broke out, we lived with an ever-deepening sense of responsibility to do the little bit we could to alleviate the growing horror and misery which we had, by a curious combination of circumstances, come to understand.

Ida Cook

Eva Paddock

Eva Paddock (née Fleischmannová) was born on New Year's Eve in 1935 in Proseč, a small town in Czechoslovakia. When she was nearly three years old, her family moved to Prague. There, her father, Rudolf Fleischmann, was an active politician committed to democratic values and international solidarity. One of his most notable actions was helping the renowned German writer Thomas Mann obtain honorary, and later, Czechoslovak citizenship—an act of moral courage that drew the ire of the Nazi regime.

As war loomed and Rudolf realized that his political profile made him a target, the family began making plans to escape. As the situation for Jewish families became more perilous, Eva's mother, Sonya, learned of a rescue initiative that would transport Jewish children to safety in Britain. These efforts would later be known as the "Winton trains," after their organizer, British humanitarian Nicholas Winton.

In 1939, Eva and her older sister Milena were placed on one of these trains. They arrived safely in the United Kingdom, where the Radcliffe family took them in. A year later, their mother managed to reach England via Norway, as did their father. Reunited, the family survived the war. However, Czechoslovakia had changed. The 1948 communist coup made returning home impossible. The Fleischmanns remained in Britain and eventually became British citizens.

For decades, Eva did not know who had organized her escape. It was not until 1988, when she saw a BBC documentary, that she learned the name Nicholas Winton. Her sister met him soon afterward, and Eva met Sir Nicholas a few years later.

It wasn't until I was older that I realized how dramatic it could be and what a huge sacrifice it was for my mother to put us both on a train without knowing if she would ever see us again

Eva Paddock

Five European nations remained neutral during the Second World War: Ireland, Portugal, Sweden, Switzerland, and Spain. A long struggle for independence was followed by the Anglo Irish Treaty (1921) which partitioned the island into two states, the 26-county Irish Free State, (later the Republic of Ireland) and Northern Ireland with 6 counties which remained part of the Great Britain and engaged in the war.

Éamon de Valera, Taoiseach (Prime Minister) of Ireland during World War II, maintained a resolute stance on Irish neutrality throughout the entire war. This position had widespread support among the Irish population and was considered the most prudent military and political course. There was also concern that taking sides could reignite internal tensions from Ireland's recent bitter civil war conflict.

While Ireland officially remained neutral, an estimated 50,000 Irishmen voluntarily joined the British armed forces. This neutrality was quietly breached at times – for example, by allowing Allied aircraft to use the Donegal Corridor and through cooperation with Allied intelligence. Crucial Atlantic weather reports, including one from Blacksod Bay, helped inform the timing of the D-Day landings.

In 1941, Irish neutrality was tested when German bombs hit Irish territory. On 1–2 January, bombs fell near Drogheda, Carlow, Wexford, and Dublin, injuring over 20 and leaving 40 homeless. On May, the North Strand in Dublin was bombed, killing 28, injuring hundreds, and destroying 300 homes. More than 980 were killed in Belfast city (Northern Ireland). Despite this, the Republic of Ireland resolved to stay neutral.

During World War II – known in Ireland as “the Emergency” – daily life was marked by censorship, shortages, rationing, and economic hardship. Poverty and emigration shaped the era, and some began to question whether neutrality offered real protection or benefits. After the bombing of Pearl Harbor, de Valera gave a speech reaffirming ties with the U.S., while still refusing to abandon Ireland's neutral stance.

By mid-1945, images and reports from Nazi concentration camps began to emerge. The true extent of the Holocaust shocked the public, far surpassing earlier fears. Though European leaders had received intelligence by 1942, ordinary citizens, including Ireland, had little understanding of the scale of the atrocities, due to wartime censorship and disbelief. Even after censorship was lifted, newspapers were hesitant to print what had long seemed unimaginable.

However, the state's refugee policy was widely seen as ungenerous and restrictive, shaped more by fears of social unrest than by humanitarian concern. After the war, the Irish government agreed that, having been spared the destruction and horrors of war, Ireland had a duty to help those less fortunate, including civilians in Germany. The Dáil voted through donations for food to alleviate post-war starvation in Europe.

Robert (Bob) Collis

Dr. Robert (Bob) Collis (born 1900) was an Irish pediatrician, humanitarian, and writer. He studied at Trinity College Dublin and later worked at the Rotunda Hospital in Dublin. After World War II, he volunteered with the Red Cross in the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp. He was joined by a Dutch woman Han Hogerzeil, a lawyer, who spoke five different languages which proved invaluable to their work. She later became his partner and wife.

Belsen had some way cured us of all hate, at least all hate of any human creature. We had learned what evil there is in the world or beyond the world, what happens to a man or a group of men—call them a nation if you will—when they have given themselves over to the powers of evil, when they have denied the Christ.

Robert (Bob) Collis

When Bergen Belsen was liberated on the 15th of April, the soldiers found more than 50,000 human beings alive under appalling conditions. Inmates perished in their thousands from starvation and disease. Their malnutrition was exacerbated by an epidemic of typhoid fever carried by lice, and which spread like wildfire. Seeing an unspeakable tragedy unfolding before them, Robert Collis started work. He took over one of the blocks where over five hundred orphaned children were recovering from malnutrition. Another block was transformed into a children's hospital. It from here that he later brought child survivors back to Ireland to be fostered and receive medical care.

A vocal advocate for the suffering he had witnessed, he spoke and wrote about what he had seen publicly. Bob and Han collaborated in writing *Straight On* (1947) with Jan Kaminski, a Polish Jewish boy he had rescued from Bergen Belsen which recounted the boy's experiences there. It was one of the earliest first-person accounts of the Holocaust published in English. Collis remained involved in helping child refugees, continuing to advocate for displaced children in postwar Europe.

Bob Collis died in 1975.

Edit Terry
Egon Suzi
Zolton Eveline
Zigmund

During the Second World War, some Jews and Jewish refugees from German-occupied territories owed their lives to international organisations as well as foreign diplomats residing in different countries. They worked in neutral states, such as Portugal, Spain, Turkey, Sweden or Switzerland, but also in the Third Reich and other countries which became the Axis powers, i.e. Hungary, Italy, Romania and Japan. Some of them worked in diplomatic missions of countries allied in the anti-Nazi coalition led by the United Kingdom, the United States and later joined by the Soviet Union.

The measures taken by the diplomats were not implemented on a large scale. They mainly involved issuing passports or visas of their respective countries. Thanks to them, the endangered Jews could emigrate to i.e. Palestine, the Far East or Latin American countries. Some diplomats also offered the persecuted Jews shelter in properties with diplomatic immunity.

Sometimes the diplomats acted in an organised manner, according to the instructions of their governments and with their financial support, but many made those efforts against the official policy of their countries.

The success of that activity rested on the ingenuity and courage of the diplomats and other people who supported them. It is not possible to indicate how many Jews survived thanks to support of the diplomats. It is estimated that it could have been as many as 100,000 people. Over 30 diplomats from all over the world, among them some mentioned in this exhibition, were honoured with the title of Righteous Among the Nations.

Aleksander Ładoś and the Bernese Group

In 1941, Polish diplomats based in Bern embarked on informal cooperation with representatives of Jewish organisations in Switzerland. They came to be known as the Bernese group although some resided in other cities. Today the wartime employees of the Polish Legation in Bern are often referred to as the Ładoś Group. Their purpose was to help Jews, mostly Polish, Dutch and German, to survive in the German-occupied Europe as citizens of the third countries.

The network included: Aleksander Ładoś, the Polish envoy to Switzerland who had authorized and defended the scheme, his deputy Stefan Ryniewicz, the Polish vice-consul in Bern Konstanty Rokicki, Juliusz Kühl, a young Polish-Jewish employee of the Polish consulate in Bern, as well as representatives of Jewish organisations: Abraham Silberschein of the Relief Committee for the Warstricken Jewish Population in Geneva and Chaim Eiss of the Agudat Israel party in Zurich. Recha and Icchak Sternbuch also worked closely with them, mostly as the network's contact with the Dutch Jews.

The Polish diplomats acquired blank forms of Latin American passports, filled them in and handed over to Jewish organizations to be distributed. The documents – passports and citizenship confirmations – were arranged in cooperation, usually paid, with diplomatic representatives of Paraguay, Honduras, Haiti and Peru.

In 1943 Swiss authorities began investigating the case. In 1944 Germany demanded Latin American countries to confirm that the holders of those documents were indeed their citizens. Consequently, many people could not benefit from using them and ultimately perished.

The research by historians on the activities of the network was undertaken recently and it is still a work in progress. According to the newest findings, 8,000 to 10,000 documents protecting people from immediate deportation to death camps were produced. So far, some 800 of their holders have been identified as rescued, but the exact number of survivors is still not known and is estimated to be significantly higher.

The Bernese network also offered material support to Jews living or interned in Switzerland as well as helped Jewish refugees in Shanghai and Polish Jews remaining in France. Finally, throughout 1941–1945 the group used clandestine radio station to transmit secret reports on situation of Jews in German-occupied Poland to Polish Government in Exile in London. Then the information were passed on to Allied authorities and Jewish organizations.

The point of the action is to obtain South-American passports from consuls friendly to our cause [...] this saves people from being doomed.

Adolf Silberschein to the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the World Jewish Congress

The Wertans Family

As a seven-year-old girl, Nina Admoni née Wertans was about to start school in Warsaw when the war broke out. She came from a wealthy Jewish family with traditions in Warsaw and Vilnius.

In September 1939, Nina's parents, Judith and Jakub, decided to leave Warsaw and join their close family in Vilnius. Eleven people – the Wertans, their relatives and other acquaintances – squeezed into one car and left the firebombed city.

Since the mid-1940, Vilnius was occupied by the Soviets. "Soldiers began making midnight searches in our flat in order to catch the 'capitalists' and we were under constant surveillance", Nina recalled. Some members of the family were arrested and deported to Siberia. Looking for a way to escape, Judith learned about Chiune Sugihara, a Japanese consul in Kaunas, who was issuing visas to Jewish refugees.

Acting against the official policy of the country he represented, Sugihara provided thousands of Jews with transit visas to Japan. The documents allowed them not only to enter the country but also to stay there briefly. Still, they needed a proof that it was not their final destination. The Dutch diplomat Jan Zwartendijk provided the Wertans family with one – an official declaration that they may go to Curaçao.

Via Moscow and Vladivostok, the Wertans went to Japan. The cruise was not easy but for Nina it was an exciting adventure. The family was placed in the city of Kobe and supported by the Jewish community. Nina enjoyed the country, its culture and nature and made friends at school.

After a few months, the Wertans family left for Shanghai where visas were not required. They lived there as stateless refugees. In 1947, they went to the USA and settled in New York City.

Chiune Sugihara and Jan Zwartendijk were recognised as Righteous Among the Nations.

It was my parents' brave decision to leave the place they belonged to and escape. I am deeply thankful to them. Then we met Sugihara who helped us. We were really lucky.

Nina Admoni née Wertans, Holocaust survivor

Stories of Rescue **B E T W E E N** **Life and Death** During the Holocaust

The Holocaust claimed the lives of nearly six million European Jews. Some of the survivors encountered people who helped them. For both those rendering help and those seeking to survive that was a risky undertaking that could cost one's own life. The aid assumed many forms depending on wartime conditions in a given region of Europe, awareness of the tragic fate of Jews as well as other individual factors.

Stories of rescue are an important if regrettably small part of Holocaust history. Accounts of help that are known to us are exceptional because they concern a limited number of people on both sides: of the survivors and the rescuers. Both groups had to secretly make a tremendous effort that did not always guarantee a happy end. The physical appearance of rescuees, degree of their assimilation as well as their financial status and endurance in hiding or under an assumed identity was vital. Much depended on sheer luck, too. Oftentimes, a number of helpers had to be involved to rescue a single individual. On the other hand, the hostile attitude of single person could lead to a tragic end, a failed rescue attempt.

Testimonies of given and received help tell us a lot about human relations in extreme conditions: under the threat of punishment and fear of betrayal in one's immediate surrounding, frequently facing poverty and hunger. These stories are therefore far from simple, unambiguous and black and white. They include informers among neighbours or exploitation of the tragic situation of Jews as well as stories of boundless dedication and empathy together with long-standing friendships and even deeper relationships. Nevertheless, the paths of many rescuers and survivors diverged after the war. In many cases, however, they re-established contact so that the rescuers could be honoured with the title of Righteous Among the Nations.

Stories of assistance rendered to Jews during the Holocaust are continuously documented thanks to the efforts of many individuals and institutions throughout the world. Although they relate to unprecedented historical events, they can have a universal meaning. These stories are our heritage through which we can learn more about human beings, their attitudes and behavioural mechanisms in the face of tragedy as well as the strength to oppose discrimination and the human will to survive.

Today, the memory of help offered to those standing in the shadow of the Holocaust, between life and death, is a moral imperative for us. It serves not only to pass on knowledge about heroes of those days but, above all, to make their humanity and integrity our guiding light.