

Sweden

Scandinavian country. Sweden had been neutral since the mid-nineteenth century, and wanted to remain neutral during World War II. In fact, it successfully avoided entering the war. However, depending on the course of the war, the Swedes sometimes tended to act more pro-German, while at other times they supported the policies of the Allies. This affected their attitude towards Jewish refugees.

At the beginning of the war, Sweden's neutrality swayed in Germany's favor. After the Germans invaded Norway and Denmark in April 1940, Sweden was surrounded by Germans. Furthermore, the British sea blockade cut Sweden off from the rest of the world. As a result, the Swedish government was forced to depend on Germany for necessary materials, while they gave Germany iron ore, a vital war industry product. Throughout 1940 Sweden allowed Germany the use of its railroads and coastal waters to move soldiers and war materials to Norway; in exchange, Germany did not try to directly influence Swedish rule. By the spring of 1941, because of their plans to invade the Soviet Union, Germany tightened its rein on Sweden. After the German attack on the Soviet Union in June, the Swedes felt compelled to give in to German demands to let them transport soldiers and materials through Sweden to Germany's ally, Finland.

By the winter of 1942--1943, the Allies defeated Germany in battles at North Africa and Stalingrad. This empowered Sweden to tip their policy away from Germany, in favor of the Allies. In May 1943 Sweden reopened trade relations with the Allies, and in July, the Swedish government announced that it would no longer permit Germany to transfer soldiers or war materials across their country. By 1944 Sweden was clearly favoring the Allies, without halting their trade with Germany.

Before World War II, there were 7,000 Jews in Sweden, most of them living in the capital, Stockholm. However, when Jewish refugees wanted to enter the country, Swedish authorities limited immigration. Thousands of Jewish refugees asked to be allowed to enter on a temporary basis, but most were refused. The Swedish Jewish community tried to help these Jewish refugees

by establishing several refugee relief committees, some in conjunction with non-Jews.

As Sweden's attitude towards the Germans changed during the war, so did their attitude towards refugees. Sweden took in tens of thousands of Norwegians and Finns, including 20,000 Finnish children. When the Nazis began to persecute Norwegian Jews in 1942, the Swedes were shocked into action. About 900 Norwegian Jews, more than half of Norway's Jewish community, fled Nazi deportations and were taken in by Sweden. The Swedish foreign ministry accepted Jews and non-Jews who had Swedish relatives.

In the fall of 1943 Georg Duckwitz, a German official in Copenhagen, met with the Swedish prime minister regarding the rescue of Danish Jewry. The Swedish government announced that it was ready to accept all Danish Jewish refugees. About 7,000 Danish Jews and 9,000 Danish Christians entered Sweden and were thus rescued from the Germans.

The Swedish government also initiated an operation to rescue Hungarian Jewry. In 1944 Swedish diplomat Raoul Wallenberg was sent to Budapest to save Jews on their way to deportation. He and his staff, along with the Swedish Red Cross, rescued thousands of Hungarian Jews.

Near the end of the war, Sweden sent food packages to Jews in concentration camps, such as Bergen-Belsen. Additionally, Count Folk Bernadotte of the Swedish Red Cross managed to transfer the last 14,000 women in the Ravensbrueck camp, including 2,000 Jews, to Sweden.

After the war, Sweden absorbed thousands of survivors and did everything possible to help them start new lives. By the late 1950s, half the Jewish refugees had been integrated into the Swedish community; the rest emigrated to the United States, Canada, and Israel.

In the late 1990s the Swedish government came to the realization that many young people knew little about the Holocaust and that others did not believe it had even happened. Led by Prime Minister Goren Perssons, Sweden organized a campaign to foster education about the Holocaust within its own borders and throughout the world. This initiative resulted in a special international task force on Holocaust education.

