One of Yad Vashem’s best-known projects, on behalf of the State of Israel, is the bestowing of the title of Righteous Among the Nations to non-Jews who were involved in the rescue of Jews. A decisive requirement for such recognition is that the person “endangered” his/her life. These dangers – for individuals, their families, and fellow-rescuers – were real but not always officially defined and definitely were not the same everywhere: in various places decrees, ordinances or proclamations were issued by the Germans, in other cases by local authorities on their own initiative, and in still other places the danger was the result of the existing atmosphere and activities of the local population. The attitudes of underground groups to the Jews, their murder, and to those who tried to help them are also significant to this subject. The dangers and punishments existed already in Germany and Austria in the 1930s and were not necessarily lethal. After the beginning of World War II, especially when the physical segregation of Jews tightened, unauthorized assistance became more dangerous. The riskiest stage was the period of the Final Solution when Jews looked for hiding places or tried to escape to neutral countries. A subject of particular interest is the punishments in occupied Poland, which are generally presented as more severe than in other places. Even in the post-war period, in various countries, having helped Jews was not always seen in a positive light, and rescuers often hid their wartime activities.

Up to now scholarship has not provided a comprehensive picture of punishment policies and how they influenced the rescue possibilities and the general atmosphere of rescue throughout the areas that were controlled by Nazi Germany, its allies, or its satellites. The goal of the workshop is to gain a more comprehensive understanding
of and deeper insight into the multi-faceted picture of this important aspect of the Shoah.

Among the possible topics:

- Legislation specifying punishments for aid and hiding;
- Comparison with policies regarding aiding partisans or other opponents to the Germans;
- Court cases involving hiders and helpers who were caught;
- Denunciations and their results;
- Reflections of the dangers as seen in ego-documents written by rescuers;
- The reflections of this topic in the stories of Righteous Among the Nations;
- Post-war attitudes and actions towards rescuers by the local population and by government authorities.

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