

A Symposium on the Soviet Immigrant*

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Today's Jewish Immigrant: An Overview

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While there are Iranian, Tunisian, Polish and other Jews being assisted to migrate, Soviet Jews are in the current Jewish migration stream in overwhelming numbers. Indeed, in recent months, there has been a number of important developments regarding Soviet Jews, and the issues relating to them continue to be a principal item on the agenda of the world, and particularly of the American and Israeli Jewish communities.

Some 9,000 Soviet Jews are presently in Rome and its environs undergoing processing and/or awaiting visas to move to countries in the West, primarily to the U.S. Most are waiting for acceptances from American Jewish communities and for transportation facilities.

One of the reasons for the backlog is that the immigration numbers which would have facilitated the continuing flow of these transmigrants to their respective American Jewish communities of initial settlement have been exhausted. The invocation by the Attorney General of the parole provision of the U.S. Immigration Law unblocked the congestion of Soviet Jews in Italy. Now we anticipate that they will be moving fairly rapidly. However, the movement of these transmigrants from Italy continues, over 4,000 additional Jews are reaching Vienna from the USSR each month. This number compares with the over 16,000 letters of invitation that are sent from Israel to Soviet Jews each month. Of the 4,000 Vienna arrivals each month, more than 2,500 are transferred by the Jewish Agency to HIAS. These "breakoffs"

are then sent to Rome for necessary processing. The 2,500 thus increase pressure upon the limited housing and other facilities in Italy.

Approximately 50,000 Jews are expected to leave the USSR in 1979. Of these, some 30,000 are expected to arrive in the U.S. However, as the crack in the iron curtain widens, the number emboldened to request permission to leave will also increase.

To place the current Soviet Jewish exodus into perspective, during the last decade more than 200,000 Jews were permitted to leave the USSR. Of these, about 150,000 have gone to Israel, about 45,000 to the U.S., and about 5,000 to Canada, Australia and other Western countries.

We continue our overview with several observations about some characteristics of Soviet Jews in the U.S. Most of the arrivals in this country come from the Ukraine (69%) and the RSFSR (17%). By and large they are young and possess a high degree of secular education. About one-half of the newcomers are highly trained and/or university graduates. Significantly, there are twice as many women as men in the professional category.

Thus, in 1978 for example, when 12,265 Soviet Jews were assisted to the U.S., women were conspicuously noteworthy in medicine (74% women and 26% men), in humanities (83%—17%) and in social sciences (71%—29%). The proportion of men exceeded that of

* Selected Papers Delivered at the Annual Meeting of the Conference of Jewish Communal Service, Toronto, Canada, June 4-5, 1979.

IMMIGRANT

women in arts and entertainment (63%—37%), and in sciences (54%—46%). Women predominated in the white collar category with 1,003 as against 197 men. But the reverse was the case in the blue collar category where there were only 155 women as against 1,099 men.

In effect, we might say that these are the “raw materials” with which the Jewish agencies in 88 communities use their expertise and compassion in helping arriving Soviet immigrants to adjust to a new life of human dignity and Jewish values.