

Dear HIAS Chicago,

I came to the US as a refugee almost 10 years ago, and I know it was made possible due to Lautenberg Amendment. I still have close relatives in the former Soviet Union who would like to immigrate into the United States. Is it still possible for the people from the former Soviet Union to come here as refugee? Does this program still exist? Can you write more about it?

- Boris -

Dear Boris, we are glad to inform you that the Continuing Resolution funding bill that passed the Senate and the House of Representatives includes the extension of the Lautenberg Amendment for refugees through the end of Fiscal year 2014.

Lautenberg Amendment was first introduced in 1990 and it provided a mechanism for hundreds of Soviet Jews to exit their country and immigrate to freedom in the United States. It originally provided a presumption of eligibility for refugee status for certain categories of people from the former Soviet Union and Southeast Asia. The amendment was designed to open up an avenue for emigration for Soviet Jews who did not qualify for refugee status which is in the United States requires proof of a risk to life or freedom for an applicant. Instead, the Lautenberg Amendment requires proof that a member of a designated minority is subject to discrimination, for instance in hiring practices or educational institutions. Since 2004, it has served a life line for religious minorities in Iran fleeing the Islamic theocracy.

The Amendment was in danger of closing as it was subject to sunset clause-meaning that funding had to be renewed every five years – and with the sequesters across-the-board programming cuts did not have a lot of chance for renewal. However, with the backing of two influential senators, Lautenberg himself and Mark Kirk from Illinois, the bill survived.

National HIAS and the Chicago Jewish Federation involved for years in acceptance Jewish and other refugees, has been a lead group in lobbying for Lautenberg renewal.

Without the Lautenberg Amendment US refugee processing of Iranian religious minorities, Soviet Jews, Evangelical Christians, Ukrainian Catholics would be limited or even terminated.

In case you have relatives in the former Soviet Union who you think may qualify for refugee status, you should contact HIAS Chicago as quickly as possible as all the documents have to be filed and submitted to National HIAS before September of this year. The anchor relative in the United States needs to fill out an Affidavit of Relationship (AOR) which must be notarized and include copy of his/her proof of legal status in the USA. Affidavit of Relationship can be filled out only by one of the local affiliates of the US Resettlement Agencies, such as HIAS Chicago.

All applicants for the program residing in the republics of the former Soviet Union must fill out and sign a preliminary questionnaire (PQ). They should fill out PQs for each family member 13 years of age and older. Each PQ must be filled out completely and signed by the person it is intended for. All applicants, including children, should also attach a copy of their travel passport's biographic page. There should also be copies of all the applicant's legal documents, such as birth certificates, marriage certificate, name change certificates, etc. The documentation will need to prove relationship to US anchor.

The local agency will forward your Affidavit of Relationship together with supporting documentation to the agency headquarter. The agency headquarter should forward all the documents to Refugee Service Center (RSC) EURASIA in Moscow.

Under present guidelines only specific categories of applicants are eligible for refugee status processing and interviews.

These categories include citizens of the Former Soviet Union presently residing in the Territory of the Former Soviet Union who have been identified by the US Congress as likely targets of persecution during Soviet era. These categories include Jews, Evangelical Christians, Ukrainian Catholics, and members of the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church who have immediate relatives in the United States.

Immediate relatives include spouses, parents, children, siblings, grandparents and grandchildren of legal US residents. Aunts, uncles, nieces, nephews and cousins are not considered immediate relatives. Refugee status interviews are scheduled according to these priorities which have been outlined by the State Department and the US Citizenship and Immigration services. Only those applicants who belong to these categories will be scheduled for a refugee status interview. All applicants who are scheduled for an interview will receive an interview notification letter from RSC EURASIA, Moscow.

**With all question regarding refugee processing and other immigration issues,
please contact HIAS Chicago at (312) 357-4666.**