

Russian Asylum Requests Spike in Israel, Officials Say

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Anton Kardashov / Moskva News Agency

A growing number of Russians are reportedly requesting asylum in Israel, where officials say they are gaming the system to obtain work permits.

Russian citizens enjoy 90-day visa-free entry into Israel and [represent](#) the second-largest group of visitors in 2017. Meanwhile, Russia [provided](#) the biggest number of immigrants last year under Israel's repatriation program.

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According to the Haaretz newspaper, 1,344 Russians [filed](#) for political asylum between January and June 2018, up from 635 in 2017 and 395 in 2016. Only 17 requests were filed in 2009-2015.

“We have noticed a new phenomenon of Russians, who arrive mainly for economic reasons, seeking asylum that worries us and sets off warning lights,” the Israeli Population and Immigration Authority’s Yossi Edelstein was quoted as saying Tuesday.

“The wage gaps are enormous and motivate people to come work in Israel,” the authority’s head of enforcement said.

The number of Russian citizens who have been refused entry into Israel has also reportedly tripled alongside the surge in asylum requests.

In comparison, asylum requests among Ukrainians and Georgians have dropped in the past year after the authorities tightened the rejection process.

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