The Moscow Times
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Putin Eases Restrictions on Political Asylum in Russia

December 20, 2018



Kremlin.ru

President Vladimir Putin has signed a decree removing 90's era restrictions on applicants seeking political asylum in Russia, including bans on individuals with a criminal record and applicants from developed democratic countries.

Russia's rules on granting political asylum are notoriously strict, with only 592 seekers granted refugee status in 2017, when the global number of refugees reached a post-World War II record of 25.4 million.

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In a new decree published Wednesday, Putin annulled limits that barred applicants from seeking political asylum in Russia since 1997.

“Recent world events, human rights violations and the harassment of journalists and public figures are forcing people to seek refuge outside their countries of residence,” the Kremlin said in a statement announcing the new measures.

The decree will make it possible for Russia to grant asylum to “people coming from a country with developed and well-established democratic institutions.”

Others now eligible for asylum include applicants who have been convicted of crimes that are also recognized as crimes in Russia.

The decree notes that future asylum applications will be reviewed on an individual basis "taking into account the national interests of the Russian Federation."

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