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Israel Says it Plans to Open Transit Camps for Russian Jews in Azerbaijan

By Heydar Isayev

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The Jewish Agency headquarters in Jerusalem. **Yagasi (CC BY-SA 3.0)**

The Israeli government has said it intends to open temporary camps in Azerbaijan for Russian Jews seeking to move to Israel in the wake of the war in Ukraine.

On Oct. 2, the government of Israel approved a proposal to facilitate the immigration of Russian Jews to Israel, amid the largest wave of Russian emigration in two decades, the Jerusalem Post reported.

Among the programs envisaged in that proposal was the creation of temporary camps in Azerbaijan and Finland for Russian Jews seeking to move to Israel. The camps would be established by the Jewish Agency, an international nonprofit that works with the Israeli government to help Jews from around the world resettle in Israel.

Few details about the Azerbaijani camps were available. The Israeli embassy in Baku told

Eurasianet that it had no information on the opening of camps in Azerbaijan, and that the Jewish Agency would be in charge of the issue. The Baku office of the Jewish Agency declined to comment to Eurasianet. Local media have reported little on the issue, though the pro-government site AzerNews reported on it relying solely on the Jerusalem Post report.

While Russians have been fleeing by the hundreds of thousands since the beginning of the war in February, Azerbaijan has received comparatively few of them. Many of those who have come to Azerbaijan have been ethnic Azerbaijanis, though there are no official statistics.

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From January through August about 263,000 people had come to Azerbaijan from Russia, a 70% increase from the year before, the State Border Service reported. It did not report how many of them had left. By comparison, there were roughly 780,000 Russian entries to Armenia from January through September, and 800,000 to Georgia from March through August.

The late September mobilization announcement spurred a new wave of emigres from Russia. "Azerbaijanis who are Russian citizens are trying to save their lives. People are panicked and confused, they don't know what to do," one of them told BBC Azerbaijani.

According to Israel's Aliyah and Integration Ministry, which drafted the government proposal along with the Finance Ministry, over 40,000 immigrants have arrived in Israel since the beginning of the war, approximately 24,000 of them from Russia. "This is the most significant wave in two decades," the Jerusalem Post reported.

The Russian government has sought to shut down the Jewish Agency's operations in Russia; a lawsuit by the Justice Ministry to that effect is currently in court.

The head of the Jewish Agency said that there is a shortage of hotel rooms in Israel in the wake of the large influx from Russia and so the agency may reopen absorption centers in Israel, which are aimed at acclimatizing and integrating new immigrants.

Azerbaijan has long had warm, wide-ranging relations with Israel. Azerbaijan has bought some of its most advanced weaponry, including Harop drones, from Israel. Israeli companies also have been among those favored for reconstruction contracts in the territories in Karabakh that Azerbaijan retook in the 2020 war with Armenia.

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