



## RESPONSES TO INFORMATION REQUESTS (RIRs)

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The Board		2 February 2007	
About the Board	<b>ISR102089.E</b>  Israel: Reports of ill-treatment of immigrant children from the former Soviet Union; government response; current status of the Ombudsman for Russian Immigrant Children; complaint procedures (2005 - 2006) Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa		
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Refugee Protection Division	<p>The Executive Director of the National Council of the Child (NCC), a Jerusalem-based independent non-governmental organization (NGO) founded in 1980 as "Israel's foremost advocate for all children's rights and well-being" (NCC 11 Dec. 2006b), portrayed the situation of immigrant children from the former Soviet Union (FSU) in Israel in correspondence to the Research Directorate. He says that while he is not aware of any trend or official policy that specifically discriminates against immigrant children from the FSU (ibid. 11 Dec. 2006a), such children nevertheless face challenges associated with their status as immigrants (ibid.). For instance, immigrant children tend to be disproportionately involved in delinquency, substance abuse and truancy (ibid.). Similarly, while he is not aware of any deliberate or systematic bullying or violence directed at immigrant youth from the FSU in Israeli schools, he admitted that in some cases the children from the FSU might have temporary difficulties fitting in (ibid.).</p> <p>The Executive Director identifies two groups of FSU immigrant children that experience more acute problems of integration than any others (ibid.). The first are immigrants from the Asian republics of the FSU (ibid.). He reports that these youth are "considered more problematic, [and] more isolated and closed, and their absorption process is often more difficult and longer" (ibid.). The second group includes children who are not eligible for Israeli citizenship because they do not qualify under the Law of Return (ibid.), which grants Jews, as well as certain relatives of Jews, the right to immigrate to Israel (Israel 5 July 1950).</p> <p>In 10 December 2006 correspondence, the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the Israeli Association for Immigrant Children (IAIC) also provided information about the status of FSU immigrant children. The IAIC is a non-profit organization, founded in April 2001, which advocates on behalf of and provides services to immigrant youth in areas that are not covered by the national or local governments (IAIC 10 Dec. 2006). According to the CEO,</p> <p>...immigrant children from the FSU are not at risk of "ill treatment" at the hands of the government or other social service bodies, nor are they suffering from special instances of violence. They are at risk as new immigrants in a new country while</p>		
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their parents are busy with their own absorption and the society does not know exactly how to deal with a large wave of immigration. ...

The government of Israel is cooperating with NGOs, including IAIC, to solve the issues specific to immigrant children. This year the Knesset has established a special parliamentary committee for immigrant children absorption at schools, as well as [a] Public Committee at the Ministry of Education for Immigrants' absorption in Education.... (ibid.)

The government has also added "special divisions [that] care for immigrant children" to the Ministry for Immigrant Absorption, the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Social Affairs, although the NCC Executive Director of the NCC pointed out that budget cuts may have recently had the effect of limiting the scope of these divisions (NCC 11 Dec. 2006a).

Citing a community leader of Israel's Russian immigrant population, *The Jerusalem Post* reported that some immigrant children from the FSU can be socially stigmatized because many were born to non-Jewish mothers, and are therefore not recognized as Jews by Jewish religious law (11 May 2005). The community leader stated that every year, many gentile Russian immigrants convert to Judaism "for the sake of their children's acceptance in Israeli society" (*The Jerusalem Post* 11 May 2005).

Immigrant youth from the FSU and Ethiopia make up 11 percent of Israel's population (NIF n.d.), but according to the New Israel Fund (NIF), a philanthropic organization, they account for 40 percent of cases of juvenile delinquency and 45 percent of juvenile drug abuse cases (NIF n.d.). The *New Statesman* magazine cited figures from the Mutagim Institute, an Israeli polling firm, showing that the crime rate among Russian-speaking teenagers and young adults was higher than average, paralleling the higher concentration of the Russian-speaking population in municipalities with high unemployment (31 Oct. 2005). However, *The Jerusalem Post* reported a 10 percent drop in crime among immigrant youth from the FSU between 2004 and 2005 (24 Nov. 2005). Efforts to combat youth delinquency in the immigrant community include several programs that are helping hundreds of youths who are at risk or who already have police records, turn away from crime and substance abuse (*The Jerusalem Post* 24 Nov. 2005).

The NIF states that in 2006, a majority of FSU youths were not graduating from high school (NIF n.d.). The NIF indicates that it has worked with hundreds of Russian-speaking counsellors to reduce youth drop-out rates in the community and "inappropriate referrals to special education" (ibid.). In 2005, the NIF also provided grants to organizations such as the Israeli Association for Immigrant Children, which helps children through the educational system, and the One Plus One: Association of Immigrant Youth, which provides leadership programs to youth from the FSU (ibid. 2005, 13). Similarly, the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC) funds AMEN (a Hebrew acronym for "Youth Volunteer City"), a volunteer program targeting immigrant teens from the FSU (American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee Sept. 2005).

Children from the Caucasus Mountain region of the FSU (*Kavkazim*) reportedly encounter increased difficulties in Israeli schools (ibid. n.d.). For example, there is an "inordinately high" drop-out rate from schools among *Kavkazi* teenagers, due to such factors as the need to support their family financially or the lack of an adequate education before arriving in Israel (ibid.). To help counter this problem, the JDC funds programs specifically targeting *Kavkazi* youth (ibid.). In 2005, the NIF gave 32,000 US dollars (USD) to the Absorption of Immigrants from the Caucasus Region organization to help *Kavkazi* immigrant children in the Israeli educational system (NIF 2005, 12).

### **Ombudsman for Russian Immigrant Children**

According to the Executive Director of the NCC, the NCC Ombudsman for Children and Youth has been operating since 1990 and fields about 10,000 requests for assistance on an annual basis (11 Dec. 2006a). A special Ombudsman unit for immigrant children from the FSU was established several years ago and is coordinated by a person from the FSU who speaks Russian and is familiar with the unique problems faced by the community (NCC 11 Dec. 2006a). The Executive Director explains how the Ombudsman deals with complaints from immigrant youth from the FSU:

The treatment of the requests is carried out on an individual level (ranging from providing advice to intervention with the school[s], the municipalities, government offices, and others) and on the macro level through policy. When there is a call or an accumulation of calls that indicate a wider phenomenon, the other Centers of the NCC are utilized to treat the problem. These include the Center for the Child and the Law (from legal advice to submitting a petition to the courts) or the Knesset Lobby for Children (from a discussion in Knesset committees to change in legislation). (ibid.)

The Executive Director states that many problems are solved, sometimes by accessing the Ombudsman's numerous connections to other agencies, although in some complex cases the Ombudsman fails to find a solution (ibid.). However, the Executive Director explains that "it is very rare to find cases for which the source of the problem is the targeted prejudice of the authorities against a child or his family only because of his origin from one country or another" (ibid.).

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of additional sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

#### References

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*New Statesman* [London]. 31 October 2005. Gideon Lichfield. "Russia Invades the Middle East." (Factiva)

Additional Sources Consulted

**Oral sources, including:** Aid Fund for the Absorption of New Immigrants from the Soviet Union (Keren Klita) [Jerusalem], Israeli Association for Child Protection [Tel Aviv], Israel Religious Action Center, Legal Advocacy Center for Olim [Jerusalem], Jaffa Institute, Orr Shalom [Tzfone Yehuda].

**Internet sites, including:** Amnesty International (AI), Association for Civil Rights in Israel (ACRI) [Jerusalem], British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), ecoi.net, Freedom House, *Haaretz* [Tel Aviv], Human Rights Watch (HRW), Jewish Agency for Israel (JAFI) [Jerusalem], Matan - Your Way to Give [Tel Aviv], United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, United States Department of State.

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