

Germany toughens immigration policy for ex-Soviet Jews

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Body

The German government and its Jewish community hammered out tighter immigration rules for **Jews** from the former **Soviet** Union Friday, ending the nearly unlimited settlement rights they enjoyed since 1990.

The new policy, which the Central Council of **Jews** in Germany described as a "fair compromise", will require candidates to prove they are **Jews**, able to speak German and capable of supporting themselves, said the interior minister of the northern state of Schleswig-Holstein, Ralf Stegner.

Only proof of Jewish ancestry had been required for the some 190,000 people who have headed west since the fall of the **Soviet** Union and the reunification of Germany, whose government sought to atone in some measure for the mass killing of **Jews** during the Nazi era.

But of those 190,000 immigrants, only about 80,000 have subsequently joined the Jewish community.

For several years German Jewish organizations have complained that some immigrants had doubtful ancestry, while others with liberal and secular traditions had difficulty settling among the more orthodox German **Jews**.

Israel, for its part, had watched Germany become the host to one of the fastest growing Jewish communities in the world and urged immigrants to move there to help the Jewish state deal with a growing demographic crunch.

Under the new rules, the main German Jewish charity charged with aiding the new arrivals will determine whether applicants are **Jews** themselves before allowing entry.

They will also be evaluated according to an "integration prognosis" that assesses work prospects and family situation.

A clause will allow exceptions for victims of Nazi persecution and to reunite families. Age restrictions, considered early on, were dropped.

The new scheme will affect those who applied to settle in Germany after December 31, 2004.

"The policy ensures the immigration of **Jews** from states from the former **Soviet** Union that is so important to the existence and future of the Jewish community," said Dieter Graumann, who led the negotiations for the Central Council of **Jews**.

The rules, which dated back to April 1990 in the dying days of communist East Germany, had to be overhauled due to a new immigration law that entered the books on January 1.

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It is the product of months of negotiations between the federal and state interior ministers and the Central Council.

Germany's Jewish community now counts some 100,000 members, the vast majority of whom are from the former **Soviet** bloc.

Before the Holocaust, some 600,000 **Jews** lived in Germany.

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