

Influx of Jews Fleeing Russia



John McArthur/unsplash.com

LAST YEAR WAS A year of intense rescue operations to help the Jewish refugees from Ukraine get to Israel. It was heart wrenching to see the horror reflected in their eyes. Immigration to Israel (*aliyah*) was at a high level, with over 63,000 Jewish people arriving between September 2021 and September 2022. War creates chaos, death and misery, and the current armed conflict between Russia and Ukraine is showing the world that the horrors of war continue to ravage the innocent.

When Israel released the annual *aliyah* figures, no one was surprised to see the high numbers from Ukraine. However, even more Jewish people made *aliyah* from Russia! The *Jerusalem Post* wrote, "According to Ofek Israeli's numbers, 32,494 Russian citizens

have made *aliyah* to Israel in 2022 according to Israel's Law of Return. This compares with 7,800 in 2021. Additionally, 14,450 made *aliyah* from Ukraine, 3,280 from North America, 1,957 from France and 1,474 from Ethiopia." These figures are more than 200% higher than 2021.

There are 600,000 Jewish people in Russia, and at present, at least 40,000 of them are preparing to leave. Their reasons are different from those of the Ukrainian Jews. They are concerned about mass call-ups of men into the Russian military. Economically, they are struggling because of sanctions and bank restrictions. Some fear reprisals because they disagree with Russian President Vladimir Putin and the war. In one way or another, they all feel at risk.

Israeli officials are concerned. When I spoke with one of them in October, he told me that there were only two El Al (Israel's flag carrier) flights a week to Israel from Moscow. Thankfully, flights have now increased. However, many airlines are not flying to Russia or even flying over the country. In the aftermath of a 300,000-man draft into the Russian military, ticket prices soared and flights were sold out as many tried to flee the country to avoid the draft. For a time, ticket prices shot up to thousands of dollars each. Prices have thankfully leveled off since then.

The flight between Russia and Israel is relatively short, only four or five hours. Once immigrants get on the plane, the stress they felt in Russia is alleviated, only to be replaced by the fears of starting over in a new country with sparse personal resources.

Israel is asking her Christian friends for help. The costs of bringing and absorbing another 40,000 Jews in the coming



Eli Mandelbaum/The Jewish Agency

