

[Home](#)[Issues & Press](#)[Travel & Business](#)[Countries](#)[Youth & Education](#)[Careers](#)[About State](#)

You are in: [Under Secretary for Democracy and Global Affairs](#) > [Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration](#) > [What We Are Saying](#) > [Fact Sheets and Newsletters](#) > [2004](#)

Fact Sheet

Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration
Washington, DC
January 16, 2004

Refugee Admissions Program for Europe and Central Asia

Background

Since 1989, the U.S. refugee admissions program has been interviewing residents of the nations that made up the former Soviet Union in Europe and Central Asia who qualify under the Lautenberg Amendment. Resettlement of Bosnians began in the region in 1997.

According to the Lautenberg Amendment, individuals within specified categories (Jews, Evangelicals, and certain members of the Ukrainian Catholic or Ukrainian Orthodox Churches), with qualifying relatives in the U.S., have had access to the refugee program within the former Soviet Union. Nearly 470,000 individuals have entered the United States as refugees under this program, over 35% of all the refugees admitted since 1989. In addition to those eligible under the Lautenberg Amendment, all nationalities are eligible for the Priority 1 (P-1) refugee category in the region.

Between 1993 and 2003, the United States resettled over 143,000 Bosnian refugees. In 1997, the United States established a P-2 category for Bosnians who were former detainees, targets of torture or violence based on ethnic or religious identity, surviving spouses of these groups, or partners in mixed marriages. Registration was closed for this P-2 category in 2001 because conditions on the ground in the Balkans had improved and the U.S. was encouraging repatriation of ethnic minorities. New registration for the U.S. admissions program for refugees from the former Yugoslavia is now limited to P-1 UNHCR-referred persons.

The refugee population requiring resettlement in FY 2003 decreased due to the continued changing political landscape in the Balkans. Because of the substantially decreased number of refugees from the region, The State Department's Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration closed its overseas processing entity (OPE) in Zagreb. Our OPE in Belgrade now handles processing for the entire region.

In FY 2003, the U.S. refugee admissions program admitted a total of 11,269 refugees from Europe, Central Asia, and the Baltics, with the majority processed under the Lautenberg Amendment in-country processing program. This number represented a significant decline from the 30,000 admitted during FY 2001, and reflects the continued delays in processing and new security requirements in the aftermath of September 11. Additionally, the number of applicants for the U.S. refugee admissions program from this region declined, and many of those who were admitted to the program chose not to travel. Finally, the number of Baku-Armenians we hoped to resettle has been far fewer than we anticipated because only a small percentage of those who applied were eligible for our P-2 program.

FY 2004 Admissions Program

The FY 2004 ceiling for this region is 13,000. In addition to continued processing of Lautenberg Amendment cases, we expect to resettle a small number of refugees from the Balkans. We will continue circuit rides to the Caucasus and Central Asia to consider cases of applicants for whom travel to Moscow is difficult, as well as P-1 referrals from UNHCR throughout the region. We will also maintain the requirement initiated in FY 2000 that all refugees travel to the United States within 1 year of approval by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). We hope also to begin processing some number of eligible and interested Meskhetian Turks in Krasnodar Krai, Russia. This minority group has been unable to obtain Russian citizenship even though they were citizens of the U.S.S.R. and have lived in Russia for over 10 years.

 [BACK TO TOP](#)

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