

Soviet Jews in Germany



As the Soviet Union began its rapid disintegration in the late 1980s, Jews in cities like Minsk, Kyiv, Moscow, Lviv, Odessa and elsewhere began asking for permission to emigrate to Germany. Although Israeli authorities insisted that the Germans send them to the Israeli consulates, the Germans working in those embassies just could not turn these Jews away. In a ten period period, starting in 1989, some 120,000 Soviet Jews flooded into Germany, where they were hosted in all sixteen federal states. The tiny Jewish communities in those states were supplied with funding to resettle them. Here were communities of a few hundred elderly souls who now had to look after thousands of new arrivals — arrivals who had had no contact with their roots and religion since 1917. Above left, Ilja from Moscow is attending a Berlin Jewish school and I took that picture in 1995, the same year I photographed Svetlana, who was struggling to read the Passover Haggadah in German during a seder in the Jewish community of Halle.



There was much work to be done to help these new arrivals. On the left below, a volunteer in the Kassel Jewish community is giving a talk about the Jewish holidays. Below, a recently-arrived family from Moscow is settling into a former East German army barracks.



There were 28,000 Jews in Germany in 1985. Now there are more than 150,000, proving that the Soviet Jews gave this community something it didn't have before: a future.

