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SUCCESSFUL REFUGEE CLAIMS FROM ISRAEL ARE WAY DOWN

By [Ron Csillag](#) - May 11, 2016



Canada continued to accept refugees from Israel last year, but the numbers slowed to a trickle WIKI COMMONS PHOTO

Figures obtained by *The CJN* from the Immigration and Refugee Board (IRB) show that of 60 claims from Israel finalized in 2015, only seven were approved — an acceptance rate of 12 per cent.

It's the lowest total number of accepted claims in recent memory. The rest of the claims were either abandoned or withdrawn.

The IRB's acceptance rate from Israel the year before was five per cent. There were 11 approvals based on 117 cases finalized in 2014.

Ottawa's acceptance rate for refugees from Israel has dropped steadily since 2005, when it was 29 per cent. In recent years, the largest number of refugees, 168, were admitted in 2003.

Since 1999, 857 claimants from Israel have been granted refugee status in Canada.

Gone are the days when the vast majority of refugee claims from Israel were made by immigrants from the former Soviet Union, who then springboarded to Canada, agreed Toronto immigration lawyer Guidy Mamann.

The IRB does not identify claimants or give reasons for acceptance or rejection of claims.

But in recent years, Mamann noted, successful claims in Canada have been made by Arab citizens of Israel, and they've generally fallen into three categories: individuals suspected of collaborating with Israel or who resist carrying out terrorist attacks against the Jewish state; women who brought dishonour on their families by refusing arranged marriages or engaging in certain behaviours; and gay men and women.

Refugees must prove a well-founded fear of persecution if they were to be returned to Israel, meaning that Israeli courts or police cannot protect them.

Arab villages within Israel "continue to be a place where the culture is a little bit different than the modern culture in the big cities," Mamann told *The CJNI*. "Very old ideas remain in those communities. If they discover one of their children is gay and is in a same-sex relationship, the roof will come off. That individual is going to be in tremendous danger no matter what the Israeli government does or does not offer in the way of protection."

One needs only to be suspected of collaborating with Israel or labelled a collaborator in error to be in danger, Mamann said. "Even somebody who sells his home to a Jewish family could be very easily targeted as a collaborator," he added.

Mamann noted that the low number of approvals from Israel in 2015 is remarkable. "In a country immersed in religious and political conflict, we should be seeing hundreds and hundreds of people seeking refuge from allegations of oppression."

He said the low acceptance rate is testament to Israel's ability to protect vulnerable minorities, but "also tells us something about the evolution of [the IRB]."

Canada's acceptance of refugees from Israel was once a sore point between the two countries.

Beginning in the early 1990s, Canada took in large numbers of refugees from Israel who had arrived from the former Soviet Union and then went to Canada, a favourite destination.

Typically, these claimants alleged that in Israel, they faced discrimination and were denied jobs, education and housing, and were even threatened and harassed, because of mixed marriages or questionable status as Jews. Israel countered that as a multicultural democracy, it did not produce refugees. It said such claims were spurious and designed simply to gain entry to other countries.

Mamann said the board was "suckered into approving those claims. They were being fed nonsense, and they bought it." He said some IRB members were antagonistic toward Israel.

But these days, the numbers, especially the rejection rate, show the board is confident that Israel has robust protections, Mamann said.

The IRB has a separate category for refugee claims from "Palestine." Last year, it finalized 107 cases from Palestine and approved 57 of them, for an approval rate of 53 per cent.

Since 1999, 850 refugee claimants from Palestine have been accepted into Canada.

Edward Corrigan, a London, Ont.-based immigration lawyer who has had Palestinian clients, said the IRB numbers refer to claimants from Gaza, the West Bank and perhaps east Jerusalem.

Because claims are made from the country of origin, they may also include stateless Palestinians in Lebanon, Syria, Iraq and the Gulf states, Corrigan said.

A "large number" of Palestinians from Gaza are suspected of supporting, spying for, or being members of the rival Fatah faction, he explained.

"All these would be serious risk factors for Palestinians in Gaza," which is controlled by Hamas, deemed a terrorist group by Canada.

Corrigan said that would account for most of the refugee claims from Gaza. Others might include religious disputes.

Claims from the West Bank are "much more complicated" because of the presence of Jewish settlers, the Israeli military and factional tensions between Hamas and Fatah.

"Most of the [IRB] would recognize that the ability of the Palestinian Authority to protect people is limited," Corrigan said.

The total includes "some" gay Palestinians. Corrigan said the IRB might also be hearing claims from Muslim women who married outside their faith or someone their family does not approve.