

## Refugees served by RSC Eurasia, IOM Moscow

### Background

IOM Moscow provides Cultural Orientation to U.S.-bound refugees throughout various countries in Europe and Central Asia. Students are from a variety of ethnic backgrounds (most often Azeri, Armenian, Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Uzbek, Moldovan, Uygur, Afghan, Iranian, Iraqi, Angolan, Ethiopian, Eritrean, Sudanese, Congolese, Somali, Cuban, or Chinese) and are located in numerous countries in the region, requiring IOM trainers to travel widely to deliver CO courses.

### Groups served

The program serves two large groups of refugees (defined by category rather than by ethnicity or nationality).

“Lautenberg refugees” have a refugee claim based on persecution for their religious beliefs or their Jewish ethnicity by the authorities in their home countries during the Soviet era. Lautenberg refugees have immediate relatives in the U.S. and, as a rule, they still reside in their countries of origin. Lautenberg refugees may receive 6-7 hours of CO in Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan.

The program also serves individually-referred refugees, displaced individuals whose claim could be based on any of a plethora of reasons and who were referred to the program by UNHCR, U.S. embassies, or non-governmental organizations. These refugees generally have no ties to the U.S. They are offered 3-day CO sessions of 15-18 hours in Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, Malta, Romania and Slovakia.

### Delivery

Delivery at these sites is triggered by the accumulation of approximately 20 refugees eligible for CO. In Ukraine, for example, the Lautenberg caseload is almost evenly spread between the four regions of the country, warranting CO delivery in each region on a rotating basis.

Under this “mobile mission” structure, CO is carried out for approximately 600 individuals at a location close to their home (with the remaining 200 or so members of IOM Central Asia and Europe’s caseload having received CO in Moscow). Mobile missions are generally planned on a quarterly basis, with five locations being served. This gives the Lautenberg caseload the opportunity to travel only a few hours, if at all, to reach the training venue (rather than a time-consuming and costly overnight trip to Moscow). Another advantage is that refugees can participate in CO at a date closer to departure, thereby increasing the effectiveness and retention of the information received. In addition, the attendance rate of these mobile missions is quite high, and the response received from the refugees to this approach is extremely positive.

### Curriculum

The program's curriculum is based on the contents of *Welcome to the United States: A Guidebook for Refugees* and its accompanying video, as well as on feedback from students, trainers, and resettlement colleagues. It is also aligned with the “Objectives and Indicators” document endorsed by PRM. The courses are based on experiential and active learning, with the majority of training conducted through group activities, questions, discussions, debates, and dialogue with the students.

Participants note that the *Welcome* film is very helpful to show them a window on life in the United States.

### **Characteristics and Concerns**

Student concerns vary widely according to location as well as by status as Lautenberg refugees or those without U.S. ties.

Thus, in **Moldova and Ukraine (Lautenberg Refugees)** most questions are specifically related to benefits and other types of assistance for refugees, education for children and adults, their rights and responsibilities as refugees, and employment prospects in the US.

The participants also seek advice on how to access the job market as soon as possible. The refugees express their concern about the initial months in the US, because most of them do not speak English. However, most refugees are ready to accept any job available and later to get re-certified and find a job in their previous field of employment. The elderly refugees often ask questions about what kind of benefits people of their age would be entitled to and if it is possible at all for them to work in the US. Since child care in the United States is very expensive, the elderly people often intend to take care of their grandchildren, so that working-age members of the family can work.

The participants ask many questions regarding the procedure of becoming a U.S. citizen. There has also been a lot of debate among the participants about the U.S. health care system. Many participants express anxiety about the short term limited availability of Medicaid and high costs of medical services in the United States.

Some people admit that a lot of what is discussed during the training was inconsistent with what relatives in the United States had told them. This is the most difficult part for a trainer in working with this group of refugees.

In contrast, **the Iraqi, Somali and Afghan refugees at the Emergency Transit Centers in Timisoara (Romania) and Humenne (Slovakia)** are far less familiar with the U.S., and share many questions regarding family reunification issues. One of participants' prevailing concerns is related to their lack of formal education: almost all the participants express their hopes and wishes to finish secondary school and even continue their education at universities in the US. The trainers discuss the importance of setting long term goals while focusing at first on early employment and simultaneous study, with a focus on language learning as a priority.

**In Floriana (Malta) the majority of the refugees are Somalis and Eritreans.** Although most participants can understand English, CO sessions are assisted through the interpretation into Somali, Tigrinya, or Arabic when necessary. The atmosphere during the trainings tends to be very lively, with many questions on luggage allowance and the date of departure, health insurance, education, their rights and responsibilities in the US, family re-unification and the steps they should take in order to become US citizens. The participants also want to know as much as possible about employment in the United States.

***If you would like to share your agency's experience of resettling clients that received CO from IOM Central Asia and Europe, please [click here](#).***