

AIRGRAM

Foreign Service of the
United States of America

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OUTGOING

US. MISSION BERLIN

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Status of West Berlin Red Cross Program
for Reuniting Families Separated by Wall

West Berlin press reported March 31 that since August 13, 1961, (West) German Red Cross (DRK) has managed to secure permission for 55 East German and East Berlin residents to travel legally to West Berlin to reside with relatives here. Overwhelming majority of emigrants were aged people, many in poor health. Although number of permissions thus far granted represents only small fraction of over 3,000 applications filed by West Berlin sponsors, Dr. Blos, President of DRK in West Berlin, expressed cautious hope that East German authorities, having accepted concept of reunification of families, might be willing to approve additional applications in near future.

Comment: Though Dr. Blos was understandably conservative in his public statements, other DRK officials in West Berlin have painted slightly more optimistic picture in off-the-record conversation with Mission's German refugee consultant. These sources said that West Berlin arrivals to date may actually total as many as 85, since sponsors often neglect to inform Red Cross when dependents have received permission to come and join them here. Furthermore, it is believed that an additional 200 persons have been allowed to leave East Germany in order to reside with relatives living in FedRep. Total number of applications received by West Berlin DRK from sponsors in both West Berlin and West Germany was said to be about 5,000.

West Berlin DRK customarily forwards applications to East German Red Cross Headquarters in Dresden. Latter's only function apparently is to redistribute applications to local police officials at beneficiary's place of residence in GDR. All decisions are supposedly made by local government authorities, and West Berlin DRK is unable to bring any influence to bear, either directly or through contacts with East German Red Cross officials. Processing time in approved cases has taken an average of six months in the past. In most cases, authorized emigrants are permitted to take all

214.1 RED CROSS

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their personal possessions, including furniture and art objects, with them. However, they must forfeit their rights to any pensions which they may have been receiving as residents of the GDR.

Since the Red Cross family reunification program offers the East German regime a convenient way to get rid of elderly invalids, pensioners, and other unemployables while at the same time appearing to be acting out of "humanitarian" motives, it is reasonable to expect that the number of such persons permitted to leave East Berlin and East Germany legally under Red Cross auspices may register a modest increase during the remainder of 1962. It is doubtful, however, whether the program will be of any direct benefit to Americans and other foreigners who have German relatives now living in the GDR. American citizens occasionally write or inquire at the U.S. Mission in Berlin concerning the possibility of securing permission for East German relatives to come and live with them in the United States. The Mission in all such cases has advised the American citizens concerned to communicate with the International Red Cross in Geneva through the American Red Cross in Washington, D. C.

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