

HICEM

Organization established in 1927 whose goal was to help European Jews emigrate. HICEM was formed with the merger of three Jewish migration associations: HIAS (Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society), which was based in New York; ICA (Jewish Colonization Association), which was based in Paris but registered as a British charitable society; and Emigdirect, a migration organization based in Berlin. The name HICEM is an acronym of HIAS, ICA, and Emigdirect.

The agreement between the three organizations stipulated that all local branches outside the United States would merge into HICEM, while HIAS would still deal with Jewish immigration to the US. However, Emigdirect was forced to withdraw from the merger in 1934, and later on, British wartime regulations restricted the ICA from using its funds outside Britain. Thus, for a while, HICEM was funded exclusively by HIAS.

By the time WORLD WAR II broke out in September 1939, HICEM had offices all over Europe, South and Central America, and the Far East. Its employees advised and prepared European refugees for emigration, including helping them along during their departure and arrival.

HICEM's European headquarters were based in Paris. After Germany invaded and conquered France in mid-1940, HICEM decided to close its Paris offices and move them to Lisbon, Portugal. Portugal, a neutral country, was friendly with the Allies and had an officially recognized Jewish community. Thus, HICEM simply functioned as the immigration section of the Jewish community council. In addition, because Lisbon was a neutral port, by July 1940 it became the foremost route for Jews to escape Europe for North and South America. Other organizations also moved their European offices to Lisbon at that time, including the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (known as the JDC or Joint) and the American Friends Service Committee.

From 1940 on, HICEM's activities were partly supported by the Joint. Despite the friction between the two organizations, they worked together to provide refugees with tickets, information about visas, and transportation, and

helped them leave Lisbon on neutral Portuguese ships. In all, some 90,000 Jews managed to escape Europe during the Holocaust with HICEM's assistance.