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# ALIYAH AND YERIDA<sup>1</sup>

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According to the Declaration of Independence which was proclaimed on 14<sup>th</sup> May 1948 in Tel Aviv, Israel is home for all Jews, wherever they live in the world. It's not only a declaration, it's an obligation for the Jewish state. The population of Israel has been increasing since 1948; however, the country fears a demographic crisis, because of a) the growing Palestinian community, and b) the decreasing tendencies of Jewish immigration. According to the last year's data, the number of immigrants and emigrants is nearly the same, the net is almost zero, and the population grows only because of the relatively high birth rates. This paper would like to analyze these processes, to explain the migration policy of Israel and the special status of the Jewish immigrants, and to summarise a historical overview of immigration to and emigration from Israel.

## THE DEMOGRAPHICAL CHALLENGE

Besides the well-known violent happenings of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, there is a parallel process that can present a similar challenge for the Jewish state, to wit, the demographical tendencies. Compared with the developed Western countries, Israel has high rates in almost every demographic indicator (population growth index, number of new-born babies per woman, etc.). However these figures are clearly lower than the corresponding Palestinian indicators. Israel holds it necessary to stabilize the Jewish majority, because without that, Israel will only be an ordinary and not a Jewish state. This challenge and Palestinian terrorist activity have pressed the Israeli government to withdraw from Gaza and North Samaria. The more than 700-kilometer long security fence is therefore given a demographical role as well, not just to keep out the Palestinian terrorists, but also to separate the whole Palestinian community from Israel.

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<sup>1</sup> These are Hebrew words. When a Jew immigrates to Israel, he or she makes an aliyah: to "lift off" to the Holy Land. Emigration, Yerida is the opposite: to descend to the diaspora.

Table 1. Demographic tendencies in Israel and in the Palestinian Authority

Indicators	Israel	Palestinian A.
Population growth/year	1,18%	3,20%
Birth rates/1000 people	17,97	32,07
Death rates/ 1000 people	6,18	4,20
New-born babies/woman	2,41	4,78
Number of migrants/1000 people	0,10	1,99

## THE IMMIGRATION POLICY OF ISRAEL

The above quoted part of the Independence Declaration that guarantees that Israel is a home for all Jews was made concrete in the three times revised (1950, 1954, 1970) Law of Return. According to this law—with the exception of a small number of reasons for exclusion—every Jewish person can obtain Israeli citizenship in a special, relatively uncomplicated procedure. The question of who is a Jew divides the Israeli parties and also the whole of Jewish society. The religious hang on fanatically to the *Halacha* (the traditional Jewish law), saying that there are only two ways to be a Jew: a) to have a Jewish mother or b) to turn into a Jew according to specific rules. The Law of Return declares something else: a Jew is a person whose father or mother, or rather one of whose grandparents is a Jew.<sup>2</sup> According to the law, the close, non-Jewish relatives (wife, husband, son, daughter, father-in-law, mother-in-law, brother-in-law, sister-in-law) of a Jewish immigrant have the same rights to settle in Israel.<sup>3</sup>

After the exposition of the general regulations, it seems evident that the migration policy of Israel is ethnically preferential, it underlines the necessity of stabilizing the Jewish majority in Israel. Compared with the typical European mainstream, this declaration can be dismissable and unliberal, although several European governments would like to modify their immigration policy to a more controllable system.

In Israel, there are several establishments (ministry, commissions, specialised organisations) with national or international competency that would like to inspire the Jews in the diaspora to immigrate to the Holy Land. In the present government Ya'akov Edery, member of the Kadima party, is responsible for immigration and absorption. The Israeli parties often lead serious debates about immigration, previously because of the high number of Soviet migrants, and the problems of how to settle them, and now because of the decreasing tendencies. Some parties—especially the religious ones—would like to modify the Law of Return to keep out non-Jewish

<sup>2</sup> Every paper written by the rabbinate can be corresponsive for the verification.

<sup>3</sup> The religious rarely stand against this supplement, especially after the migration from the former Soviet Union.

people, while others—mostly the left-wing Meretz and the Arab parties—would like to create a generally liberal immigration system.

Besides the ideological contrasts, immigration policy also induces explosive disputations because it takes a large part in the Israeli budget. The cost of the international network (*Sochnut*) and the reductions for the new migrants consume money from other national necessities (economical and health investments, recoveries, etc.). Although in the last decade several foundations and associations began to support the immigration policy of Israel, the money is still not enough. By way of summary, we can emphasise the following programs from the Israeli supply (these are only for Jews and their close relatives):

- “*Taglit/Birthright*” – A free ten-day trip around Israel for Jewish youths.
- “*Ulpan*” – A six-month intensive language course in a kibbutz or in any Israeli city.
- “*Naale*” – Three school years and graduation in secondary school for free (full board services in a student village).
- “*Masa*” – Scholarship at an Israeli university or college for those aged between 18-30 (studies are offered in several languages).
- “*Naale University*” – Three school years and university/college certificate for those aged between 18-24.
- “*Sela*” – Free studies in any Israeli university during settlement in the Holy Land.
- “*Stas*” – 2-6 month technical tutorial for students at university and graduates between the ages of 19 and 35.
- “*Nadav*” – Voluntary job with full board services in the Israeli health, social, civil or military sector.
- “*Sar-El*” – Voluntary job with full board services in the Israeli Defence Forces.
- “*Mada*” – Voluntary job with full board services with the Israeli ambulance service (age 18-25).
- “*Lehavot*” – Voluntary job with full board services with the Israeli fire services.

There are other benefits for those who would like to settle in Israel. If somebody decides to change his/her status to olim (new immigrants), these allocations of course are also available during the programmes enumerated above. What are these advantages? Cheap accommodation (*Merkaz Klita*), generally (*Sal Klita*) and special money allowances (for example in the case of a single parent with children), cheap “olim-loans” (for buying property or a car), other helpful opportunities (in finding a job, school, etc.), and free Hebrew language course (*Ulpan*).

## OVERVIEW OF IMMIGRATION INTO ISRAEL

Generally we can differentiate four groups among the new immigrants arriving in Israel. First, the Jews and their close relatives. As we can read above, these have special rights and possibilities, they are the preferred and naturally the most populous. Secondly, we can separate those immigrants with cultural objectives (mostly Christians who would like to live in the Holy Land). The third group consists of labour migrants. We can differentiate two sub-groups here: the highly qualified (from the European Union, North America and in lesser numbers from the Far East—all non-Jewish, only coming to Israel for high-status jobs) and the low-qualified ones (who compensate for the fall-out Palestinian labour force, most of them from Romania, Russia, the Philippines, China and Thailand). The last group consists of the neighbouring Palestinians, who obtain Israeli citizenship or residency with increasing difficulty as a result of a) the violent acts of the conflict, and b) the demographical problems of Jerusalem.

Focused on Jewish immigration to the Holy Land we can differentiate several aliyah periods. The first and longest period began after the first radically antisemitic pogroms in Western Europe <sup>4</sup> and went on until the formation of the Zionist movement. The pogroms of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century (the violent acts in Russia, antisemitism in France, etc.) caused Zionism to emerge, and this was also the starting point of the Zionist aliyah period (from 1880 to the formation of the State of Israel). This Zionist aliyah period had six larger waves: the first between 1882 and 1903<sup>5</sup>, the second from 1904 to the First World War<sup>6</sup>, the third between 1919 and 1923<sup>7</sup>, the fourth until the outbreak of the worldwide economic crisis, the fifth from 1930 to the Second World War<sup>8</sup>, and the last during the war and until the formation of the Jewish state. The last two were parts of Aliyah-Bét, which took place during the British restrictions (The White Book of Palestine about the prohibition of Jewish immigration into Palestine, 1939).

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<sup>4</sup> In 1290 the Jews fled -England, hundred of years later France and in the 15th century Spain. Most of them settled in Eastern Europe, Russia and North Africa, only small numbers of them moving to Palestine, which was under Byzantine and later Ottoman rule.

<sup>5</sup> Circa 35,000 Jews made aliyah during this period, mostly from Russia, Yemen and Eastern Europe.

<sup>6</sup> Nearly 40,000 Jews came to the territory of the Palestine Mandate during these years, especially from Russia. They created the foundation of the modern Israeli state, with new settlements, farms, roads, social and health care networks, schools and so on.

<sup>7</sup> During the third Zionist aliyah around another 40,000 people came (mostly from Russia again), most of them settling in the Jordan Valley. At this time it was becoming clear that the Arab and Jewish communities couldn't live together peacefully. The Arabs were afraid of losing their influence, and also their economical status.

<sup>8</sup> Parallel with the Nazi regime's coming into power, more than 170,000 Jews left Europe. During the well-known antisemitic pogroms and massacres the British authority in Palestine closed the border for the Jewish refugees. They indirectly killed thousands in Europe and also directly killed many others in Palestine in alliance with the Arabs (Hebron, Safed, Jerusalem). In answer to these actions several radical Jewish armed groups (Stern, Irgun) formed, which declared war against Britain and also against the Arabs.

On 14<sup>th</sup> May, 1948 David Ben Gurion proclaimed the establishment of Israel. With this declaration every British restriction was abolished and the new immigrants could set foot on the Jewish state. On the same day the neighbouring Arabic countries went to war against Israel, which managed to preserve her existence. During the one and a half years of fighting the new migrants continued to arrive in Israel. Most of the men went onward to the battlefields, while women and the elderly built the state. After the war the Arabic countries expelled their Jewish populations—the so-called *Sefards and Mizrahis*—which totalled nearly 800,000 people. Many of them were brought to Israel in organised rescue activities like the “Magic Carpet” (50,000 Jews from Yemen), “*Ezra*” and “*Nehemiah*” (in both, 115,000 people from Iraq). Because of the lack of money of the Israeli government, the new migrants had to live in tent camps (*ma’abarot*) for years.<sup>9</sup>

In the following years the number of immigrants reduced, with an average of 25,000-30,000 people arriving each year. Until 1990-1991, the time of the collapse of the Soviet Union, there were two larger immigration-waves: after the Islamic revolution in Iran in 1979 nearly 30,000 Jews left the country, and in 1985-1986 there were two great rescue actions from Ethiopia through Sudan (operations “*Moses*” and “*Solomon*”).

Table 2. Jewish immigration into Israel (1948-2006)<sup>10</sup>

1948	101,828	1963	64,489	1978	26,394	1993	77,860
1949	239,954	1964	55,036	1979	37,222	1994	80,810
1950	170,563	1965	31,115	1980	20,428	1995	77,660
1951	175,279	1966	15,957	1981	12,599	1996	72,180
1952	24,610	1967	14,469	1982	13,723	1997	67,990
1953	11,575	1968	20,703	1983	16,906	1998	58,500
1954	18,491	1969	38,111	1984	19,981	1999	78,400
1955	37,528	1970	36,750	1985	10,642	2000	61,542
1956	56,330	1971	41,930	1986	9,505	2001	44,633
1957	72,634	1972	55,888	1987	12,965	2002	35,168
1958	27,290	1973	54,886	1988	13,034	2003	24,652
1959	23,988	1974	31,981	1989	24,300	2004	22,500
1960	24,692	1975	20,028	1990	200,170	2005	22,818
1961	47,735	1976	19,754	1991	176,650	2006	19,900
1962	61,533	1977	21,429	1992	77,350	Total	3,033,038

Parallel with the collapse of the East European socialist regimes, the Soviet Union cancelled the quota, that limited Jewish emigration. After this change more than half a million Jewish (and non-Jewish<sup>11</sup>) people left the countries of the former Soviet Union.

<sup>9</sup> Golda Meir: My life, Suliker, Budapest, 2000.

<sup>10</sup> Composed from several data: The Ministry of Immigrant Absorption: Immigration Data 2004, February 2005.; Immigration Data 2003, February 2004.; Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics: Statistical abstract of Israel, 2006.

<sup>11</sup> One-third of the Soviet olim are non-Jewish, which has induced serious problems in Israeli society (like the not long ago discovered neo-nazi group in Israel, with members only from Russia).

The number of new immigrants surpassed 50,000 yearly until 2000, most of them coming from the former Soviet countries, as today.

*Table 3. Immigration to Israel and number of migrants from the former Soviet Union<sup>12</sup>*

1948	101,828	1,175	1963	64,489	314	1978	26,394	12,192	1993	77,860	66,145
1949	239,954	3,255	1964	55,036	541	1979	37,222	17,614	1994	80,810	68,079
1950	170,563	290	1965	31,115	895	1980	20,428	7,570	1995	77,660	64,848
1951	175,279	196	1966	15,957	2,054	1981	12,599	1,770	1996	72,180	59,048
1952	24,610	74	1967	14,469	1,403	1982	13,723	782	1997	67,990	54,621
1953	11,575	45	1968	20,703	224	1983	16,906	399	1998	58,500	46,032
1954	18,491	30	1969	38,111	3,019	1984	19,981	367	1999	78,400	66,848
1955	37,528	139	1970	36,750	992	1985	10,642	362	2000	61,542	50,817
1956	56,330	470	1971	41,930	12,839	1986	9,505	202	2001	44,633	33,601
1957	72,634	1,324	1972	55,888	31,652	1987	12,965	2,096	2002	35,168	18,508
1958	27,290	729	1973	54,886	33,477	1988	13,034	2,283	2003	24,652	12,383
1959	23,988	1,362	1974	31,979	16,816	1989	24,300	12,932	2004	22,500	10,127
1960	24,692	1,923	1975	20,028	8,531	1990	200,170	185,227	2005	22,818	9,378
1961	47,735	224	1976	19,754	7,279	1991	176,650	147,839	2006	17,474	6,643
1962	61,533	194	1977	21,429	8,348	1992	77,350	65,093	Total	303,303	115,697

Beside the great number of migrants from the former Soviet Union, in the 1990s—for different reasons—Jewish emigration also rose from Argentina (economical crisis), France (increasing antisemitism), Ethiopia (mostly family-unification), South Africa (the well-known changes of the regime) and also from the USA.

*Table 4. Immigrants in Israel by country of origin (1948-1995)<sup>13</sup>*

Country	Number of immigrants	Country	Number of immigrants
Former Soviet Union	813708*	Egypt and Sudan	37548
Western Maghreb	345753	Lybia	35865
Romania	273957	France	31172*
Poland	171753	Hungary	30316
Iraq	130302	India	26759
Iran	76000	United Kingdom	26236*
United States	71480*	Former Czechoslovakia	23984
Turkey	61354	Germany	17912
Yemen	51158	South Africa	16277*
Ethiopia	48624*	Former Yugoslavia	10141
Argentina	43990*	Syria	10078
Bulgaria	42703		

\* Between 1995 and 2005 361,363 immigrants came from the former Soviet Union, 18,905 from the USA, 26,898 from Ethiopia, 14,884 from Argentina, 17,377 from France and 1,820 from South Africa.

<sup>12</sup> Aliyah and Klita Department, Jewish Agency for Israel: Immigration to Israel by country, 2005.

<sup>13</sup> Own collection collated from several tables and data from the Jewish Virtual Library and other sites.

## THE PRESENT TENDENCIES—RISING LEVEL OF EMIGRATION

Before we start to analyze the present trends, we have to mention the Jewish communities in the world to see the potential number of new immigrants. It is necessary to notice that in the USA there are nearly as many Jews as in Israel. They are very important for Jerusalem because of their lobbying power, so the Israeli associations do not make really effectual emigration policy in the USA, contrary to Europe or in the former Soviet Union.

*Table 5. Jewish communities in the World<sup>14</sup>*

Jews in the European Union			Jews in other countries		
Country	2002	2006	Country	2002	2006
Austria	9000	9000	Argentina	195000	184500
Belgium	31400	31200	Australia	99000	103000
Bulgaria	2300	2000	Azerbaijan	7900	6800
Cyprus	>100	>100	Brazil	97500	96500
Czech Rep.	2800	4000	Belarus	24300	18200
Denmark	6400	6400	Chile	21000	20700
Estonia	1900	1900	South Africa	78000	72000
Finland	1100	1100	USA	cca. 5400000	cca. 5350000
France	519000	491500	Georgia	5000	3500
Grecce	4500	4500	Croatia	1300	1700
Netherland	28000	30000	Canada	364000	373500
Ireland	1000	1200	Kazakhstan	4500	3700
Poland	3500	3200	India	5300	5000
Latvia	9600	9800	Iran	11200	10800
Lithuania	3700	3200	Morocco	5600	3000
Luxembourg	600	600	Mexico	40500	39800
Hungary	51300	49700	Moldova	5500	4600
Malta	>100	>100	Norway	1700	1200
U. Kingdom	273500	297000	Russia	265000	228000
Germany	103000	118000	Switzerland	17700	17900
Italy	29500	28600	Serbia	1700	1500
Portugal	500	500	Turkey	17000	17800
Romania	10800	10100	New Zealand	5100	7000
Spain	12000	12000	Ukraine	100000	80000
Sweden	15000	15000	Uruguay	22500	18000
Slovakia	3300	2700	Uzbekistan	6000	4800
Sovenia	100	100	Venezuela	16000	15400

The migration rate of the 1990s has radically decreased in the last four years. The opposition parties use these tendencies to remind Israeli society that the government is

<sup>14</sup> Sergio Della Pergola: World Jewish population, American Jewish Yearbook, New York, 2002. and 2006. It is necessary to notice that cca. 2,200 Jews live in Peru, nearly 3,100 in Colombia, and officially 5,000 in Panama.

impotent to stabilize the level of necessary Jewish immigration, although everybody knows that the great migration wave of the 1990s happened for geopolitical reasons, and not because of a perfect immigration policy. The present increasing tendency of emigration is mostly because of economical changes: it is not only the Palestinians, but also a number of Israelis who have lost their jobs after the policy of separation (withdrawal from Gaza and North Samaria, the security fence), and so, since the neighbouring Arab countries are not an option, they move to Europe, North America or Australia. Israeli companies support this economic emigration to substitute their lost market. Between 2000 and 2003, during an active stage of Palestinian terrorism, nearly 170,000 new migrants arrived into Israel. After 2004 this had dropped to 83,000, although the Israeli Defence Forces managed to reduce terrorist acts. During this period emigration increased from a yearly 10,000-11,000 to 14,000-15,000.

In April 2007 an Israeli association made a survey about social satisfaction in Israel. Nearly 70% of the Russian-migrant Israeli-born children said that they would like to be reborn abroad (19% in Russia, 15% in the USA). 62% of the Sabres (Israeli-born) with more than average salary answered the above question by stating that to be foreign might be better (18-18% would like to be American or Canadian, 8% to be Swedish and 6% Swiss). 60% senior citizens and 58% of poor people would like to be reborn abroad (they also prefer the USA, Canada, Australia, Sweden and New Zealand). However, 80% of the religious and kibbutz-dwellers feel that they can't be anything other than Israeli. Also 80% of the new immigrants are satisfied with their new homeland, and just 7% of them feel that emigration was a mistake. 70% of the migrants from the former Soviet Union said they are Israelis (it represents the rate of the Jews among them), and 72% feel that immigration was a good choice.<sup>15</sup>

This survey tells us that most of the new immigrants are satisfied with Israel; however, this opinion is not shared by the Israeli-born. They are not unpatriotic, they just feel that living abroad would be easier (do not need to do the long military service, no religious involvement in everyday life, etc.). Many of those who emigrate move back in two or three years, and during the time of living abroad, they support Israel through associations and foundations (the above mentioned lobby-power), although such emigration is not appreciated in the Jewish state. With the above analysed demographic and political circumstances and conditions, Israel continues its efforts to bring home the Jews from the diaspora.

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<sup>15</sup> Shelly Paz - Haviv Retig: Israel's population reaches 7,150,000, Jerusalem Post, 23. April 2007.



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## **CHAPTER 4**

### **LIFELONG LEARNING: OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES**

