

**Topic:** International Migration and Migrant Populations

**Post-Soviet Jewish Population in the Contemporary World:**

**A Study of Demographic Transformation in the Course of Mass Migration**

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According to our estimates, between 1970 and 2006 about 1.9 million (ex-) Soviet Jews and their relatives emigrated to countries outside the former Soviet Union (FSU). Most of this movement (1.15 million, or approximately 60 percent) was directed toward Israel, whereas the rest was divided mostly between the USA and Germany. Migration has been a positive factor in their demographic dynamics.

*Numerical Dynamics and Resettlement.* The 1970 Soviet census, taken about the time that the mass Jewish emigration began, showed that there were about 2.15 million “core” Jews (by self-identification) in the Soviet Union. To evaluate their subsequent dynamics we must estimate the respective balance of births and deaths, and additions to the “core” Jewish population as a result of ethnic re-identification in the process of migration. All other possible dynamic factors are not as influential as these two, including ethnic re-affiliation of people of mixed origin remaining in the FSU. There is probably only one large group of people of mixed origin interested in ethnic affiliation with the Jews, namely those who made the decision to emigrate, particularly to Israel. These people have been leaving the FSU very rapidly, especially to Israel.

For the 25 year period of 1970-2003 the negative vital balance of this population may be tentatively guesstimated at about -0.7 million. However, vital decrease was partially offset by inclusions in the “core” Jewish population as a result of ethnic re-identification in the process of migration. This may be tentatively figured based on the discrepancy between the percentages of Jews among the immigrants to Israel according to the Russian/FSU and Israeli definitions. Obviously some of the immigrants, who were considered Jews according to their former Soviet internal passports (as well as in population censuses), that is, the offspring of a Jewish male and non-Jewish female, are counted as non-Jews by Israeli statistics, which are based on *halakhic* (religious Jewish) criteria. Nonetheless, many more immigrants are counted as Jews in Israel than were registered as such in the FSU, and many of these had never identified themselves as Jews

before. The number of such immigrants may be tentatively guesstimated at about 150,000, or even more. This recognition of Judaism/Jewish ethnicity of some individuals who had previously neither identified themselves, nor were they seen by FSU authorities, as Jews somewhat slowed the decline of the “core” Jewish population originating from the FSU, and contributed some gains to the Jewish population in Israel.

The estimates (which use the 1970 Soviet census as a baseline) show that, by the beginning of 2004, worldwide there were about 1.6 million “core” Jews (by self-identification) who originated in the FSU, of whom about one-tenth, mostly in Israel, had become part of the “core” Jewish population as a result of migration (Table 1).

**Table 1. Distribution of the “Core” Jewish Population Originating from the FSU, by Country, 2004, Millions**

| Country | Number             |
|---------|--------------------|
| Israel  | 0.8                |
| FSU     | less than 0.4      |
| USA     | 0.3                |
| Germany | less than 0.1      |
| Total   | 1.6 <sup>(a)</sup> |

(a) Including other unlisted much smaller ex-Soviet Jewish immigrant communities.

About one-half of these “core” Jews were living in Israel, less than one-quarter remained in the FSU, and the rest were mostly in the USA and Germany. In Israel there were about 0.8 million Jews who had arrived since 1970 from the FSU and their descendants. Perhaps a fifth of them had previously not identified themselves, nor were they seen by FSU authorities, as Jews.

**Demographic Transformation.** Jews who emigrated to Israel not only escaped the dramatic fertility reduction characteristic of the FSU population as a whole and Jews in particular, but also their life expectancy rose considerably. In 1999-2004 the total fertility rate among FSU Jewish immigrants was 1.7-1.8; that is, it was double the post-Soviet level of Jewish fertility in the FSU (about 0.9) and approached the level of the total fertility rate of Israeli non-religious Jews. At the same time, according to our estimate, this indicator for FSU non-Jewish immigrants in 2002-2003 was as low as approximately 1.3, and even lower in 2004 – about 1.2; thus, it remained similar to the low level of post-

Soviet Slavic populations in their home countries. However, 73 percent of FSU immigrants who arrived in Israel since 1990 and were still living here by the end of 2004 are Jews. Therefore, the vital balance of FSU immigrants in Israel as a whole is decisively positive.

An estimate shows that if in 1999 the total fertility rate among this immigrant group had been as low as that found for Jews in the FSU as a whole in the period of the mid-1990s and onwards (0.9) the number of births among them would have been lower by 4,100. Moreover, if in 1999 the life expectancy at birth among this immigrant group had been as low as that found for Jews in the FSU (70.1 years for males and 73.7 years for females as in the life tables for the Soviet Jewish population in 1988-1989) the number of deaths among them would have been higher by 4,000. Thus, they would have had a decisively negative balance of births and deaths (Table 2).

**Table 2. Actual and Guesstimated Births and Deaths for FSU Migrants to Israel,<sup>(a)</sup> 1999, Thousands**

|  | Births             | Deaths              | Balance |
|--|--------------------|---------------------|---------|
| 1. Actually registered in Israel                                 | 9.3 <sup>(b)</sup> | 6.3 <sup>(c)</sup>  | +3.0    |
| 2. Guesstimated according to indicators of contemporary FSU Jews | 5.2 <sup>(d)</sup> | 10.3 <sup>(e)</sup> | -5.1    |
| 3. Discrepancy [(3)=(2)-(1)]                                     | -4.1               | +4.0                | X       |

(a) Since 1990.

(b) According to Israel CBS registered data (total fertility rate for all FSU immigrants [Jewish and non-Jewish] at 1.63).

(c) According to Israel CBS registered data (life expectancy at birth of the immigrant population is close to that of the Israeli Jewish population as a whole which was 77.1 years for males and 80.7 years for females in 1999).

(d) Total fertility rate at 0.9.

(e) Life expectancy at birth 70.1 years for males and 73.7 years for females as in life tables for Soviet Jewish population in 1988-1989.

At the same time, in the USA and Germany, FSU immigrants had negative balances of births and deaths, although the precise size of these balances is unknown. However, it

is clear that they are surely much lower than the negative balance of Jewish births and deaths in the FSU.

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Summing up, since 1970 most of the Jews whose provenance was the Soviet Union changed their country of residence. The post-Soviet exodus led to both tens of thousands of additional births among those Jews who emigrated, most of which occurred in Israel, and to the postponed deaths of many migrants wherever they settled.

[sources, methodology and detailed analysis will be presented in the complete paper]

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