

# **Patterns of Immigration and Absorption**

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## 1. Introduction

Throughout the course of its modern history, Israel has been perceived as an immigration state. From the first days of the “new *Yishuv*,” at the end of the nineteenth century, the development of the Jewish society in Palestine has been dependent on immigration, first from Eastern European countries, later from Central Europe and, immediately after the establishment of the state in 1948, from the Middle East.

The centrality of immigration to the reality of Israel, to the nation, to the Israeli society, and to the Jews who came, can be appreciated from the Hebrew word coined to describe it, “*aliyah*,” which means ascending, but this is much more than just verbal symbolism. Immigration to Israel, that is, *aliyah*, in effect implies rising above one’s former status to assert one’s Jewish citizenship and identity. Jewish *ius sanguinis*<sup>1</sup> thus trumped all other issues of status and identity (Harper and Zubida, 2010). As such, *there are never “immigrants” to Israel, but only Jews returning home*, asserting their true identity and, as codified in Israel’s right of return and citizenship laws, their legitimate claim to residence and citizenship. Thus, by this logic, Israel is not an immigration state, but is rather the homeland of the Jewish People.

In this article we start with a survey of the major waves of immigration to Israel dating back to the pre-state era and review the characteristics of the various groups of immigrants based on earlier studies. We then look at the later major waves of immigration, the largest being the mass exodus from the former Soviet Union (FSU) and the new immigrants from Ethiopia, whose arrival introduced the issue of race into the Israeli state and society.

At the same time we revisit the following questions: is Israel still an immigration, *aliyah*, state and society? Does it still fulfill its role as the home of the Jewish people? Is it still attracting Jews to immigrate? And, finally, how do the recent arrivals to Israel feel about their immigration experience? We relate to these issues using data from the 2010 Jewish Agency–sponsored survey among immigrants in Israel.

## 2. **Immigration to Israel: Pre- and Post-State**

The story of immigration to Israel or *aliyah* began well before the state was declared. Thus, it is important to start with a historical overview of Jewish immigration to the Middle-East at the end of the nineteenth century. Clearly it is necessary to consider the impact of global events on the movement of Jews from Europe to Palestine. At least the first three waves of emigration came as a result of “push factors”<sup>2</sup> (Portes, 1995; Borjas, 1990) that came into play in Eastern Europe, primarily pogroms and virulent propaganda against the Jews (Bronner, 2000). However, most of the immigrants in those first three waves chose their destination *voluntarily*, that is, they immigrated to Palestine primarily owing to “pull factors”<sup>3</sup> (Portes, 1995; Borjas, 1990), the new Zionist ideology (Laqueur, 2003), and the belief that they were about to fulfill their destinies as Jews and as representatives of the Jewish people by ascending to this new pedestal, that is, by making *aliyah* (Horowitz and Lissak, 1989). On the other hand, the later waves of immigration pre- as well as post-state—primarily survivors of the Holocaust and fugitives from Arab countries—were based less on the pull factors and Zionist ideology and more on the push factors (Ya’ar and Shavit, 2001).

## **2.1 The Yemenite Immigration**

Yemenite Jews started to come to Palestine in 1881/1882, arriving shortly before the *Bilu* group<sup>4</sup>, *E'ela Be-Tamar*, left from Europe.<sup>5</sup> Although they were not officially added to the count of waves of immigrations, by 1914 there were some 5,000 Yemenite Jews in Palestine, about 8 percent of the total number of Jews in Yemen. Although there were and still are different opinions as to the nature of this immigration, whether it was Messianic<sup>6</sup> or Zionist inspired, factually by 1918 Yemenites made up about 7 percent of the entire *Yishuv* population. Moreover, because of the outbreak of pogroms in Aden in 1948, just before the State of Israeli was declared, many Jews fled from Yemen. Approximately 5,000 Yemenite Jews tried to reach Palestine, but were caught by the British and sent to a detention camp in Aden. Still, about 35,000 Yemenite Jews, 40 percent of the total population of Jews in Yemen, reached pre-state Israel, the highest proportion among any of the Jewish communities.

Notwithstanding the number of Yemenite Jews who immigrated to Palestine, their story was neglected by historians, most likely owing to the questionable Zionist nature of this immigration. Thus, although Yemenites were the first to immigrate, they were viewed as having a minimal role in the Zionist narrative and the story of the pre-state and state institutions, leaving other groups to receive most of the attention.

## **2.2 First Aliyah (1882–1903)<sup>7</sup>**

The First *Aliyah* followed in the wake of pogroms in Russia in 1881/1882. The pogroms were not the cause of the immigration, but were rather the catalyst for the emigration of trained young Zionist members of two major Jewish-Zionist movements: *Hibbat Zion*<sup>8</sup> (most of the immigrants were in this wave) and *Bilu*<sup>9</sup> (Ya'ar and Shavit, 2001).

The first group included some 30,000 individuals, only half of whom were still in Palestine by the end of this wave of immigration. More importantly, by that time some 5,000 of them lived in 25 new agricultural settlements known as *moshavot* (Eliav, 1981). The lands on which these *moshavot* were established were bought from Arab landowners by Jewish associations, and the Arab farmers that lived there moved elsewhere (Kimmerling, 1983; Mandel, 1976).

This approach to the acquisition of land and the building of agricultural settlements was a social as well as a financial failure. Most of the new immigrants did not adapt to the conditions in the new location; they were not trained farmers and as a result could not sustain the new farms economically. Many of these newcomers left Palestine and the community fell apart. Consequently the remaining new immigrants turned to the banker and Jewish philanthropist Edmond de Rothschild, who took over the lands and the finances of the *moshavot* and established new settlements. The paternalistic attitude of his representatives, “the baron’s clerks,” created resentment, however, and led to discontent among the settlers. This state of affairs eventually caused Rothschild to hand the management of the *moshavot* over to the Jewish Colonization Association (JCA), which was founded in 1891 by the Baron Maurice de Hirsch (Goldstein, 1988).

Two more factors of the First *Aliyah* had a major impact on the immigrants and their environment: first, the traditional-religious character of the group (it was only the second wave that introduced secularization into Palestine) and, second, the revival of the Hebrew language (promoted especially by Eliezer Ben-Yehuda) and culture in print and theater (Berlovitz, 1996).

### 2.3 The Second Aliyah (1904–1914)

The second wave of immigration, which began in 1904 in the wake of pogroms in Czarist Russia, is identified primarily with the Socialist-Zionist movement. Most of these immigrants, who came from Russia and Poland, were significantly different from those in the First *Aliyah*. They were younger and secular, most were single, and they came without any financial resources. Yet, they were well-organized and politically savvy, as some of them took part in the events leading up to the failed 1905 revolution in Russia.

These newcomers had a socialist-nationalistic worldview and soon started organizing themselves into political parties, *Poalei Zion* (the Workers of Zion), which later became *Achdut Ha'Avoda*, and *Hapoel Ha'Tzair* (The Young Worker). These two groups eventually merged to form MAPAI – *Mifleget Poalei Eretz Yisrael* (the Party of the Workers of the Land of Israel), and before long had taken control of the *Yishuv* and begun the process of establishing the pre-state institutions. MAPAI remained the dominant party in Israel until the late 1970s.

Unlike the members of the First *Aliyah*, for most of these newer immigrants the *moshavot*, and the baron's clerks presented a problem due to their paternalist treatment and control over the *moshavot* and their inhabitants, so they decided to develop a new form of rural settlement—the *kibbutz*. The first such settlement, named Degania, was established 1909. Most of the new immigrants from the Second *Aliyah* had been involved in defense groups and revolutionary actions in Europe and went on to establish *Ha'Shomer*, the first Jewish self-defense organization in Palestine. They also founded the neighborhood *Ahuzat Bayit* as a suburb of Jaffa, which later developed into the first Hebrew city -- Tel Aviv.

Moreover, the new group made a significant contribution to the revival of the Hebrew language and the cultural life of the new settlements. The best known people from this period are David Ben-Gurion, Berel Katzenelson, and Yitzhak Tabenkin. Owing to perseverance, political astuteness, entrepreneurship, and hard work this group became the elite of the *Yishuv*.

A minority of the immigrants in the Second *Aliyah* were not Socialists, but rather adhered to a bourgeoisie worldview. They settled mostly in the towns and cities and joined the people who had come in the first wave of immigration. In all, 40,000 Jews immigrated during this period, but absorption difficulties and the absence of a stable economic base caused nearly half of them to emigrate.

#### **2.4 The Third Aliyah (1919–1923) – Halutzim**

This very short wave of *Aliyah* is considered a direct continuation of the Second *Aliyah*, the hiatus in immigration having been due to the exigencies of World War I. Most of the newcomers came from Russia (having left after the October revolution and the ensuing pogroms), Poland and Hungary, and they were trained in *Halutz* (Pioneer) movements, including *Ha'Halutz*, the Youth of Zion, and *Ha'Shomer Ha'Tzair*. The October revolution in Russia, World War I, and the ensuing new Polish state these immigrants turning them ideological radicals with aspirations for national-Jewish unity and joint action. Although they were not the first newcomers with the Zionist ideology, they were known as *Ha'Halutzim*, the Pioneers.

During this very short period, the British occupied Palestine, and issued the Balfour Declaration, by which the United Kingdom agreed to establish a Jewish homeland in Palestine (without prejudicing the rights of the indigenous Arabs). Although

the British imposed restrictions on Jewish immigration during the period of the Third *Aliyah*, in this short span of time the *Yishuv* absorbed almost 40,000 new immigrants.

The newcomers were disappointed and frustrated by the rivalries among the various Jewish-Zionist parties in Palestine and before long there was a rift between veteran and new immigrants. Nevertheless, the newcomers adhered to and further enhanced the Zionist ideology of the Second *Aliyah*. Most of them spread across the country, following the availability of land and work. They built roads and agricultural settlements, helped to construct the central British military base in *Tzrifin* and lived in workers' camps. The newcomers strengthened the *kibbutz* movement by founding many new *kibbutzim* and strengthening the *kibbutz* ideal of communal socialist life (Ben-Avraham and Near, 1995). The most important institution established during this era, which became the hallmark of the Third *Aliyah*, was the *Histadrut* (the General Federation of Laborers in the Land of Israel). Unlike previous waves, relatively few of the 40,000 immigrants that made up the Third *Aliyah* returned to their countries of origin.

### **2.5 The Fourth Aliyah (1924–1929)**

The Fourth *Aliyah* had the most significant impact on the size of the Jewish settlement in Palestine. This period saw the arrival of some 80,000 new immigrants, almost double the number of the third wave. Approximately 55,000 of these newcomers stayed in Palestine, almost doubling the population of the *Yishuv* (Giladi, 1973).

Major differences emerged between these immigrants and those who had come earlier. First, 50 percent came from Poland and only 20 percent from Russia (the other 30 percent came from central Europe). Second, the individuals in this new wave were older, on

average, and many of these immigrants came as families. Third, unlike the earlier waves, about half of the newcomers who arrived between 1924 and 1926 were “capitalists.” This changed in the years that followed, but it was nonetheless a significant deviation from previous immigrations and led the Fourth Aliyah to become known as the “bourgeoisie immigration” (Giladi, 1973). Finally, this wave of immigrants left their homes more out of necessity than ideology. The 1924 European economic crisis adversely affected middle-class Jews; the anti-Jewish policies in Poland exacerbated their fears, and the imposition of immigration quotas by the United States left these individuals with no choice but to come to Palestine (Giladi, 1973).

This wave of immigration had a significant impact on the Jewish economy. A sizable portion of the capital they brought with them was invested in construction, mainly in major cities, and there were substantial investments in Jewish industry. The *Yishuv* economy received an enormous boost, especially in Tel Aviv, which became the central city.

### **2.6 The Fifth Aliyah (1929–1939)**

The Fifth *Aliyah* was a continuation of the Fourth, but there is some scholarly disagreement as to the end date of this wave. As World War II and the British White Paper brought immigration to almost a complete halt, it is problematic to include the immigrants of post-1939 within the fourth wave.

The Fifth *Aliyah* was divided into two waves, from 1929 until 1931, and from 1932 until about 1936. In this latter four-year period approximately 180,000 Jews arrived. The first period was a time of heightened tensions between Jews and Arabs, and, in 1929,

there were serious violent incidents (these are known as the Western Wall Uprising, and the 1929 Massacres) culminating in the Hebron events in which 67 Jews were killed. However, as many of the immigrants that arrived during this time were young, members of youth movements and had undergone intensive training to prepare them for the life of pioneers and settlers, they were not discouraged. The Jews that arrived in the second mini-wave had several reasons to immigrate, among them the Nazis' rise to power in Germany and the cancellation of the first of the White Papers.<sup>10</sup> Although most of the newcomers were from Poland, German immigrants figured prominently in this wave, The German Jews differed from all the earlier newcomers because they came from the upper middle class of central Europe, and most of them were not Zionists.

In comparison with the earlier waves of immigration, the numbers during this period were enormous and, by 1939, nearly 250,000 Jews arrived, of which only 20,000 left. This brought the Jewish population of the *Yishuv* to approximately 450,000. The newcomers came with much needed capital and professional expertise in various areas. Industry grew significantly, trade became a substantial source of income, and export became an important element in the *Yishuv* economy. Members of this group also took their places in the academic, social, and cultural life of the emerging society.

The Fifth *Aliyah* brought a substantial middle-class population into the *Yishuv*, further strengthening the trend that had begun in the fourth wave of immigration. Moreover, Arab-instigated violence between 1936 and 1939 served to end any semblance of economic cooperation between Jews and Arabs. Finally, the Fifth *Aliyah* was the last to be enumerated; following this period there are no official counts of waves of arrivals pre- or post-state.

### **2.7 Aliyah during and Immediately after World War II (1939–1948)**

The period from 1939 to 1948 was characterized by world-shaking international events that had major impacts on the *Yishuv* and the Zionist movement. The outbreak of World War II and the Nazi occupation of Europe, first restricting the movement of Jews on the continent and then imprisoning and murdering them, combined with the new restrictive British White Paper, significantly reduced *aliyah* and seriously interfered with the Jews' ability to purchase land. In effect, most of the immigration during this period was illegal and organized by *Ha'Irgun* and named *Aliyah Bet*.

The main focus of *Aliyah Bet* was rescuing Jews from Nazi-occupied Europe. The years from 1945 to 1948 saw the arrival of some 80,000 illegal immigrants. Most of the newcomers did not have any particular Zionist ideology, they sought only refuge from the Nazis; nevertheless, this immigration reflected the Zionist goal of turning Israel into the National Home of all the Jews.

By the end of the British mandate in 1948, the various waves of legal and illegal immigration had brought roughly 480,000 Jews to the land of Israel, almost 90 percent of them from Europe. This influx was crucial to populating and developing the State of Israel, which had a Jewish population of 650,000 by the time it declared independence on May 14, 1948.

### **2.8 Mass Immigration from 1948 to the Present Day**

Following its declaration of independence, Israel immediately opened its gates to encourage Jews from all over the world to return to their homeland. The first post-state wave of mass immigration brought 687,000 Jews to Israel's shores and, by 1951, the Jewish population more than doubled. The immigrants included survivors of the

Holocaust from DP (displaced persons) camps in Germany, Austria, and Italy; a majority of the Jewish communities of Bulgaria and Poland; a third of the Jews of Romania, and nearly all of the Jewish communities of Libya, Yemen (Operation Magic Carpet), and Iraq (Operations Ezra and Nehemiah) (see Table 3). More mass immigrations followed in the late 1950s and early 1960s, when immigrants arrived from the newly independent countries of North Africa—Morocco and Tunisia—and during these years many also came from Poland, Hungary and Egypt.

These two massive *aliyot* changed the socio-economic characteristics of the country in very significant ways. For the first time in the short history of the new state and the Zionist movement, large numbers of Mizrachi,<sup>11</sup> non-Ashkenazi<sup>12</sup> Jews, inhabited the country. Most of them were non-Zionists who came from traditionalist-religious backgrounds, whereas the composition of the country's elite was predominantly Ashkenazi, secular-Socialist and Zionist. Over the years the Mizrachi population has adopted the Zionist ideology, but they remain a minority among the country's elites (Kimmerling, 2001, 2004). The divide of mass and elite strongly influenced the ways that the various groups were absorbed in the new state.

Unlike Ashkenazi Jews, Mizrachi Jews did not have the same social capital as the veteran Israelis. This was a major component in explaining the different absorption patterns. Mizrachi Jews were sent mostly to the periphery, disconnected from the center, residing next to the kibbutzim but unable to enjoy their facilities (Shohat, 1999). Ashkenazi Jews were sent to transition camps – known as Ma'abarot – but moved on to live in mainstream society on average after two years. The Mizrachi Jews were also sent to the Ma'abarot, but many never found their way out of the camps (Swirski, 1981). The

inequality between the two groups in terms of education, economic and social status, dwelling, social welfare and more is still evident today (Cohen, Haberfeld and Kristal, 2007).

The 1970s were characterized by a sizable immigration from the Soviet Union, and the years between 1969 and 1973 saw some 165,000 Russian-Jewish immigrants arrive in Israel. Others came from Eastern Europe and Muslim countries. There was relatively little *aliyah* in the 1980s except for the first group of about 8,000 immigrants from Ethiopia in 1984 (Operation Moses; see Table 2).

This period was followed by what is considered the most significant decade for immigration in the history of the country. The 1990s saw approximately one million immigrants arriving in Israel, the overwhelming majority from the various republics of the former Soviet Union, as well as some 35,000 from Ethiopia (Operation Shlomo; see Table 2). These two waves of immigration were perceived in a significantly different way by the Israeli society and the elite (see, for example, Leshem (1994) Leshem and Lissak (2001) and Kaplan and Salamon (2004)).

During the first decade of the twenty-first century two trends became clear:

1. World Jewry is now split almost evenly in half: one half in Israel and the other in North America, mostly in the United States. (40 percent in Israel, 40 percent in the United State, and 20 percent in rest of the world (see Table 1).
2. Since 2003 the average number of immigrants has stabilized at about 20,000 a year and the prospect for more large-scale waves is unlikely unless a catastrophe – economic or anti-Semitic – occurs to stimulate large numbers of

people to flee the few remaining cities with substantial Jewish populations such as Paris, London, or Buenos Aires or parts of North America.

After reviewing the various waves of immigration to Israel, we would like to offer some data pertaining to the absorption process of the various immigration waves, concentrating mostly on the last waves that arrived during the 1990's.

**Table 1**  
**World Jewish Population, 2010<sup>13</sup>**

Continent and Region	2010 Number	2010 %
<i>World – total</i>	<i>13,428,300</i>	<i>100.0</i>
<b>Diaspora</b>	7,724,600	57.5
<b>Israel*</b>	5,703,700	42.5
<i>America – total</i>	<i>6,039,600</i>	<i>45.0</i>
<b>North**</b>	5,650,000	42.1
<b>Central</b>	54,500	0.4
<b>South</b>	335,100	2.5
<i>Europe – total</i>	<i>1,455,900</i>	<i>10.8</i>
<b>European Union</b>	1,118,000	8.3
FSU	297,100	2.2
<b>Other West</b>	19,400	0.1
<b>Balkans</b>	21,400	0.2
<i>Asia – total</i>	<i>5,741,500</i>	<i>42.8</i>
<b>Israel</b>	5,703,700	42.5
<b>FSU</b>	18,600	0.1
<b>Other Asia</b>	19,200	0.1
<i>Africa – total</i>	<i>76,200</i>	<i>0.6</i>
<b>Northern***</b>	3,900	0.0
<b>Sub-Saharan****</b>	72,300	0.5
<i>Oceania – total*****</i>	<i>115,100</i>	<i>0.9</i>

\*Israel's Jewish population includes residents in East Jerusalem, the West Bank, and the Golan Heights.

\*\* United States and Canada

\*\*\* Including Ethiopia

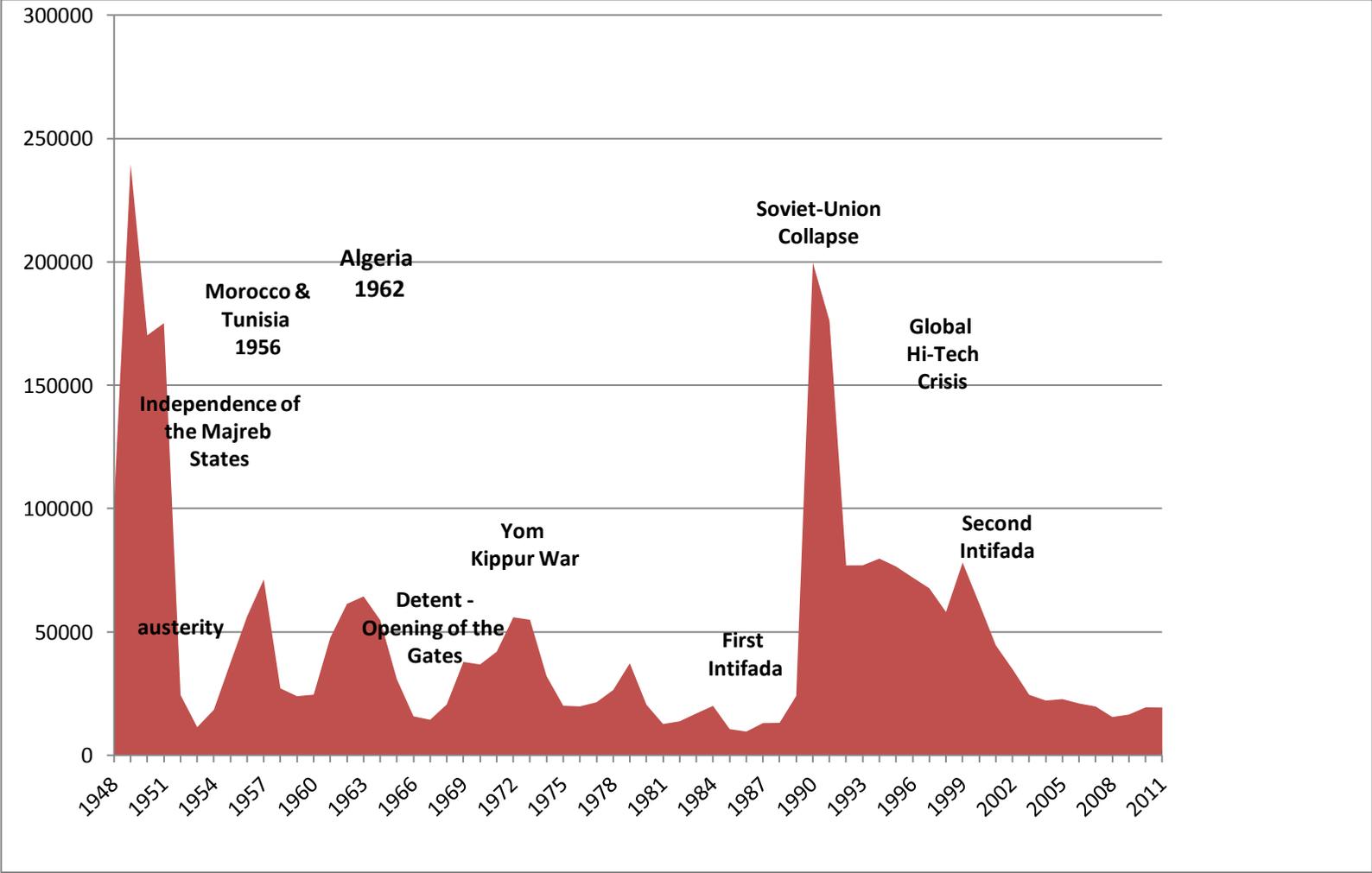
\*\*\*\* Including South Africa and Zimbabwe

\*\*\*\*\* Including Australia and New-Zealand

**Table 2**  
**Post-Statehood Immigration to Israel by Global Region<sup>14</sup>**

<b>Years</b>	<b>Soviet Union and Former Soviet Union<sup>15</sup></b>	<b>Western Europe<sup>16</sup></b>	<b>Eastern Europe<sup>17</sup></b>	<b>America, South Africa &amp; Oceania<sup>18</sup></b>	<b>Turkey and the Middle East<sup>19</sup></b>	<b>Rest of Asia and Africa</b>	<b>Other<sup>20</sup></b>	<b>Ethiopia</b>	<b>Total</b>
1948–1951 <sup>21</sup>	8,163	22,242	302,397	4,488	287,505	42,808	19,129	7	<b>686,739</b>
1952–1960	13,743	6,988	84,682	7,695	171,000	8,774	657	57	<b>294,448</b>
1961–1970	14,742	26,033	99,599	41,281	182,081	18,447	270	125	<b>383,937</b>
1971–1980	156,318	34,732	20,695	80,739	29,857	5,461	692	572	<b>329,938</b>
1981–1989	21,240	23,936	14,356	43,515	10,702	1,882	393	1,389	<b>133,351</b>
1990–1994	532,357	11,979	9,126	18,829	5,444	1,169	425	29,816	<b>609,264</b>
1995–1999	291,566	16,001	4,477	24,390	4,191	1,417	305	9,791	<b>352,269</b>
2000–2011	176,565	38,116	3,791	63,508	4,402	1,586	836	31,758	<b>321,321</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,214,694</b>	<b>180,037</b>	<b>539,123</b>	<b>284,445</b>	<b>695,182</b>	<b>81,544</b>	<b>22,707</b>	<b>88,786</b>	<b>3,111,307</b>

**Figure 1**  
**Post-Statehood Waves of Immigration to Israel by Year<sup>22</sup>**



### **3. “Israel Likes *Aliyah*, Not *Olim*?”**

One of the great challenges Israel has faced from its earliest days is how to absorb the tens of thousands of newcomers who arrive speaking different languages, with divergent political, religious and cultural traditions, and with varying social, educational and occupational capital.

As more than three million people have immigrated to Israel since 1948, the country can definitely be classified as an immigrant society (see Table 2 and Figure 1). Today, 65 percent of the Jewish citizens of Israel are immigrants or children of immigrants. Unlike immigrants to many countries, such as the United States, where they are largely expected to learn on their own to adapt to their new homes, Israel established from its earliest days a state-run absorption process (*klitah*) to help newcomers assimilate into Israeli society. While there is much to commend the absorption process, many immigrants, from diverse backgrounds, share a common dissatisfaction with how they were treated.

The immigration literature argues that there are two principal variables in any survey of the absorption process: origin and year/wave of immigration. In this section, we review the latest wave of *aliyah* and *klitah* as perceived by the new immigrants themselves.

Toward this end we used survey data collected by the Jewish Agency from 502 new immigrants from the Former Soviet Union (FSU) who arrived during the first half of 2010, and immigrants from other countries who came between July 2009 and May 2010.

The sample is representative of the total number of new *olim* by country of origin; the data were collected via phone-survey between June 5 and July 13, 2010.

**Table 3**  
**Immigrants by Country of Origin**

<b>Country of Origin</b>	
Russia and Belarus	26%
Ukraine and Moldova	13%
South Caucasia	7%
<i>Total from FSU</i>	<i>46%</i>
North America	26%
Other English-speaking countries	7%
Europe	15%
Latin America	7%
<b><i>Total</i></b>	<b><i>502</i></b>

The main findings of the survey were as follows:

- Most of the immigrants are highly educated, with 68 percent having 13 years or more of education;
- 88 percent have families in Israel;
- 62 percent came to Israel to be united with their families; this trend being significantly higher among the FSU immigrants;
- 45% reported that they immigrated to Israel because they wanted to live as Jews in a Jewish state (the figure is significantly higher among the non-FSU immigrants - see Table 5);
- 94 percent of the immigrants indicated that if asked today they would make the same decision to come;
- 87 percent said that they would recommend that family members immigrate;
- 43 percent noted that immigration has strengthened their sense of Jewish identity;

- 78 percent say they are not comfortable with the Hebrew language;
- 77 percent doubt whether they will find employment commensurate with their skills;
- a minority (2 percent) indicated that they have Israeli friends;
- And a majority (28 percent) reported they are in an “inconvenient” economic situation.

Respondents were also asked to compare reality with the perception of the absorption process: 21 percent indicate that the reality is much more difficult; 54 percent report that reality matches perception, and, for 25 percent, the reality is easier than the perception (Table 4).

**Table 4**  
**Absorption Process: Reality vs. Perception**

<b>Reality vs. perception</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>FSU population</b>	<b>North American population</b>	<b>Immigrants from other countries</b>
Reality is much harder	21%	14%	28%	24%
Reality matches perception	54%	74%	40%	37%
Reality is much easier than perception	25%	12%	32%	39%

Most immigrants (94 percent) display overall confidence in their decision to immigrate, and this confidence is highly correlated with the strengthening of their sense of Jewish identity ( $r=0.385$ ), their sense of belonging ( $r=0.308$ ), and having Israeli friends ( $r=0.267$ ).

**Table 5**  
**Reason for Immigration**

<b>Reason for immigration</b>	<b>Mentioned as first reason</b>	<b>Mentioned as second reason</b>	<b>Mentioned as third reason</b>	<b>Total mentioned</b>
Family unification	49%	11%	2%	62%
The desire to live as a Jew in the Jewish state	27%	13%	5%	45%
The desire for a fresh start	14%	12%	4%	30%
The economic situation in country of origin	5%	18%	2%	25%
Professional and economic opportunity in Israel	4%	7%	5%	16%
Sense of personal safety in country of origin	1%	3%	2%	6%

When trying to get to the bottom of the reasons for immigration to Israel we found that the most dominant factor for immigration is family unification (Table 5), although there are variations relating to country of origin (see Table 6).

**Table 6**  
**Reason for Immigration by Region of Origin**

<b>Reason for immigration / Region of Origin</b>	<b>FSU</b>	<b>North America</b>	<b>Other</b>
Family unification	84%	38%	51%
The desire to live as a Jew in the Jewish state	17%	72%	64%
The desire for a fresh start	9%	55%	40%
The economic situation in country of origin	44%	9%	7%
Professional and economic opportunity in Israel	19%	16%	12%
Sense of personal safety in country of origin	4%	6%	10%

Family unification is the most important pull factor for FSU immigrants, whereas for the North American immigrants it is the wish to live as a Jew in the Jewish state. For the remaining respondents, the reasons given for immigrating are roughly equally divided.

Next we turn to the most significant features of absorption: economic, language, and employment. As indicated in Table 7, only two categories were mentioned as an overwhelming “success” -- suitable employment and Israeli friends -- and these were only for North American immigrants. The rest of the table suggests a very problematic absorption process, especially for FSU immigrants, particularly when it comes to language and Israeli friends. Almost all other absorption indicators are ranked very low.

To put this in a comparative perspective, we introduce the Ruppin Index (Kushnirovich, 2007; see Figure 2), which used data pertaining to immigrants from as early as the pre-state era, looking at the different waves of immigration and adding the country of origin. Hence, it offers the ability to compare respondents from various immigration waves. The index is based on four different facets of integration: social integration, economic and employment integration, standard of living and a subjective measure of satisfaction and identification with the Israeli society.

The findings are not very complimentary. The comparison group - the "zero group" - is the one that had the best absorption experience in Israel. This group is the elite, the Ashkenazim (‘veterans’ in Figure 2 refers to the first five waves of pre-state immigration – see section 2.2 to 2.6 in this paper) (Kimmerling, 2001; Zubida and Mekelberg, 2008). When we compare the integration index of other groups, taking into account their standard of living, the magnitude of inequality among different groups in Israeli society emerges.

Three large groups arrived from the 1990s until the present: immigrants from the FSU, those that came from other countries post-1989, mostly from Central and Western Europe and the United States, and Ethiopians. In this index, immigrants from the FSU

were divided into two groups, European and Asian FSU republics, and the two had different absorption paths (Kushnirovich, 2007). The immigrants from Central and Western European and the United States experienced the superior absorption (−2.1 on the index), and although this might not be a surprise, the next finding is less expected. Whereas some may not understand the differences between the FSU groups, the index clearly shows the reason for the division: the European FSU immigrants had much more success (−2.4 on the index) in their absorption process than the Asian FSU immigrants (−3.4 on the index), and did almost as well as the Central and Western European and U.S. immigrants. This can be attributed to the social-capital each group possesses and its compatibility with the elite social-capital (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1973).

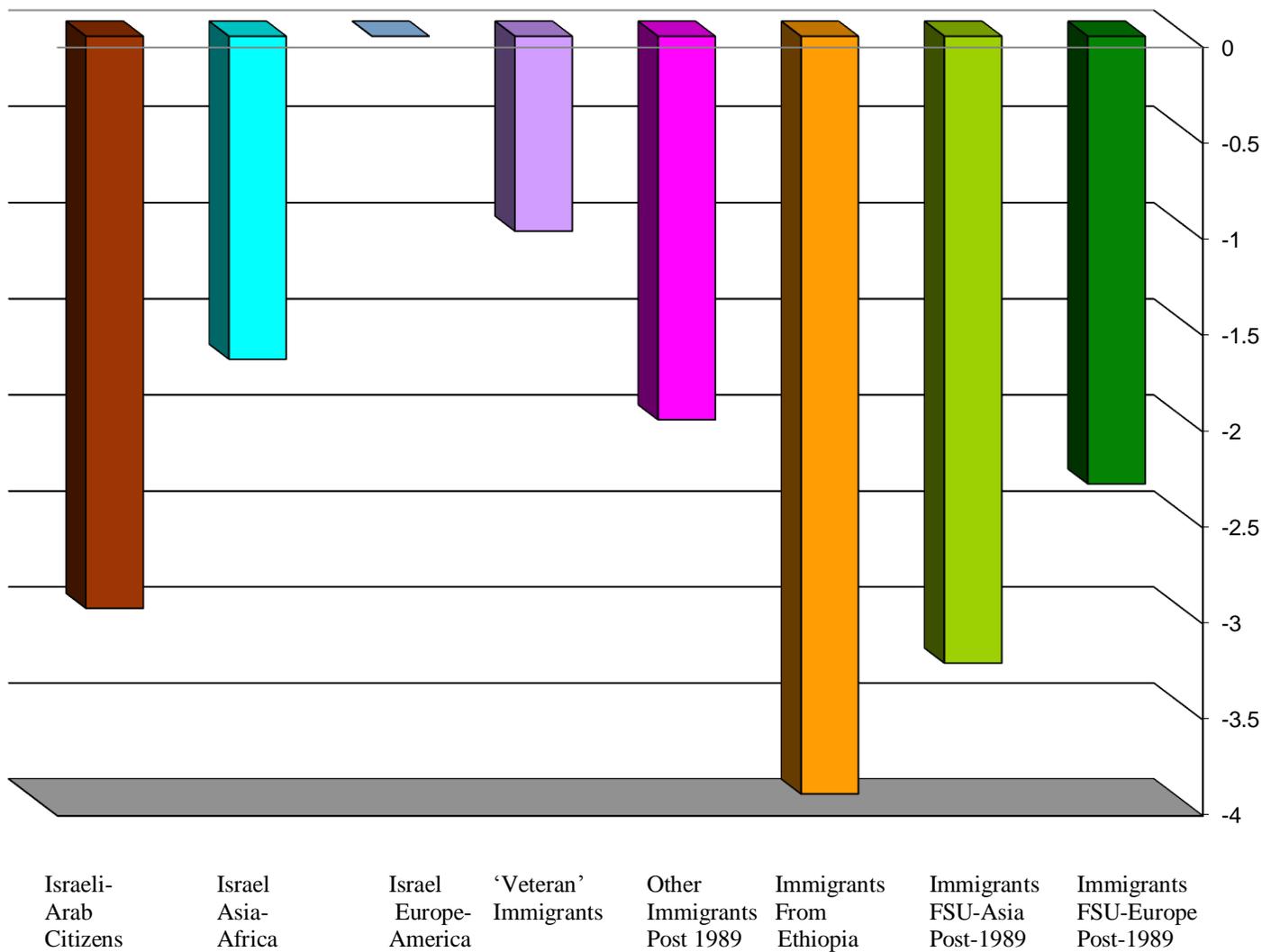
A further look at the Figure 2 shows some other interesting findings. The Ethiopian immigrants have experienced the most difficult absorption process (−4 on the index); their ranking being even lower than Israeli-Arab citizens (−3.1 on the index), aka 'the natives'. Another significant finding is that it took the Western immigrants who came after 1989 (−2.1 on the index) less than two decades to almost catch-up on all the indices with the veteran Mizrahi 1950s immigrants (−1.8 on the index). This pattern is clear when we compare the group of veteran immigrants, which includes those from the 1970s mostly from Eastern and Central Europe; their score on the integration index is −1.1, and when we compare this score to the Mizrachim who arrived two decades earlier, −1.7, it is clear that some immigrant groups are better absorbed than others. Moreover, it is estimated that it will take one more decade for the newest immigrants from Central and Western Europe and the United States to surpass the Mizrachim on the integration index.

Various explanations were offered in an attempt to explain these gaps. During the early years of the Israeli state, most of the explanations were related to the elite's view of society and the belief that the new Mizrahi immigrants were not equipped as well as the Ashkenazi (Horowitz and Lissak, 1989). However, since the mid-80's a new school stepped forward, mostly Israeli critical sociologists, who offered a new set of explanations, arguing that these gaps are the result of institutional discrimination and lack of the right kind of social capital. According to this argument, discrimination has not ceased and it continues to fuel the inequality between the various groups of immigrants (Kimmierling, 1983; 2001; 2004; Shohat, 1999; Swirski, 1981; Cohen, Haberfeld and Kristal, 2007).

**Table 7**  
**Significant Characteristics of Absorption**

Absorption characteristic	Economic welfare			Suitable employment			Language			Israeli friends			Homesick		
<b>Region/Level</b>	Very good	Good	Bad	Very good	Good	Bad	Very good	Good	Bad	Many	Medium	Not at all/few	Not at all	Medium	A lot
FSU	17%	55%	28%	19%	26%	55%	2%	5%	93%	1%	1%	98%	8%	57%	35%
North America	38%	25%	37%	57%	23%	20%	49%	18%	33%	49%	18%	33%	25%	25%	50%
Other	27%	38%	35%	36%	13%	51%	31%	13%	56%	39%	15%	46%	28%	23%	49%
<b>Total</b>	23%	42%	33%	33%	22%	45%	22%	11%	67%	24%	9%	67%	18%	39%	33%

**Figure 2**  
**The Ruppin Index of Assimilation by Standard of Living**



#### **4. Concluding Remarks**

Israel was and still is an immigrant society, as more than three million immigrants have come to the country, including more than one million in the 1990s alone, and these numbers are significant. For a comparative measure, in relative terms, the United States, which currently has about 320 million residents, would have had to absorb sixty-four million new immigrants in a single decade.

However, the immigration process does not end when the newcomers arrive. Some might argue that it only starts at this crucial time. From the various datasets we presented, it seems that the saying, “Israel likes *aliyah* and not *olim*,” which pertains to the attitude of Israel to the immigrants as they arrive, is not completely accurate.

The absorption process varies among the different immigrant groups, being very dependent on the country of origin and the social-capital the newcomers bring with them and its compatibility to the Ashkenazi-political-economic-intellectual elites’ social-capital. Moreover, the findings show a clear pattern of preferable absorption processes to groups coming from Europe and North America. It can be described as a scale, where at the top we find the immigrants from North America and Central and Western Europe, regardless of when they arrived, then the new immigrants from the FSU European republics, then the immigrants from countries in Asia and North Africa that arrived in the 1950s. Next are the new immigrants from FSU Asian republics and finally immigrants from Ethiopia.

Scholars have already noted that absorption is not a unilateral process, but rather a bilateral one in which the role of the absorbing society is as important as that of the newly arrived immigrants (Gans, 1997; Portes and Zhou, 1993; Braddock and

McPartland, 1987). This has not happened in Israel: veteran immigrants are not fulfilling their part. Thus, we recommend taking a dual approach to the absorption process. On the one hand, there is work to be done to help immigrants integrate into the new society, a process that involves language, social, and many other skills, but we also recommend simultaneously beginning to educate the society and improve the attitudes and absorption skills of veteran immigrants and native-born Israelis.

Finally, today, the Jewish world population is almost evenly divided between Israel and North America, notwithstanding the fact that there are some Jews in other parts of the world. This raises many questions as to the future of *aliyah* and the relationships between Israel and the Diaspora.

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<sup>1</sup> *Ius sanguinis* is a social policy by which citizenship is not determined by place of birth, but by having a parent(s) who is a citizen of the nation.

<sup>2</sup> When dealing with immigration 'push factors' refer to factors that are driving local community out of their origin country. For example, the first pogroms in east Europe between the years 1881 and 1884 are considered as push factors.

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- <sup>3</sup> Pull factors are reasons for local communities to immigrate to new places not as a result of distress in their country of origin, but owing to attraction to different aspects of the intended destination.
- <sup>4</sup> A group of East European Jews whose goal was the agricultural settlement of the Land of Israel
- <sup>5</sup> In Hebrew: “עליית אעלה בתמר”
- <sup>6</sup> Messianism is the idea that Israel will be re-built only after all the Jews keep the Jewish commandments, which will bring about the arrival of the Messiah, which will in turn lead to the resurrection of all the Jewish dead, starting in Jerusalem.
- <sup>7</sup> The various dates that are presented in this paper are not set in stone, since it is very hard to set the timeline borders between various waves of immigration; we give the commonly accepted dates for each *aliyah*.
- <sup>8</sup> Love of Zion, חיבת ציון, *Hibbat Zion*, was a movement based on the return to Zion and the restoration of national life in Palestine. It was founded in the second half of the 19th century in the large communities of Eastern Europe, especially Romania, Poland and Russia.
- <sup>9</sup> בני יעקב לכו ונלכה -- The Sons of Jacob Go
- <sup>10</sup> The first White Paper was issued on October 20, 1930, by the colonial secretary in Palestine, Lord Passfield.
- <sup>11</sup> Mizrachim are Jews who ethnically derive from Asia or Africa.
- <sup>12</sup> Ashkenazim are Jews who derive from European or North American descent.
- <sup>13</sup> This table was issued by Sergio DellaPergola, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem
- <sup>14</sup> The data were provided by the research unit at the Jewish Agency and refer to the absolute numbers of immigrants to Israel by global region.
- <sup>15</sup> This category includes detailed numbers for the following countries: Russia, Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova, South Caucasia; and totals for the following regions: Central Asia and the rest of the Former Soviet Union.
- <sup>16</sup> This category includes detailed numbers for the following countries: Germany, Great Britain, France, Belgium, Italy, Switzerland, Netherlands, Spain, and Portugal; and totals for the following regions: Scandinavia and the rest of Western Europe.
- <sup>17</sup> This category includes detailed numbers for the following countries: Bulgaria, Poland, Hungary, Romania; and totals for the rest of Eastern Europe.
- <sup>18</sup> This category includes detailed numbers for the following countries: United States, Canada, South Africa, Oceania, Mexico, Uruguay, Argentina, Brazil, Venezuela, Peru, Chili, Colombia; and totals for the rest of South and Central America.
- <sup>19</sup> This category includes detailed numbers for Turkey and totals for rest of the Middle East.
- <sup>20</sup> This category is composed of people for whom the country of origin is unknown.
- <sup>21</sup> 1948–1951 includes 24,000 immigrants whose last continent of residence is unknown; in later years it includes a small number of such immigrants.
- <sup>22</sup> The data were provided by the research unit at the Jewish Agency and refer to the absolute numbers of immigrants to Israel by year.