

Emigration from Russia to Israel: flow dynamics and its components in 1990-2023

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Abstract: *The article analyses in detail the numerical dynamics and demographic structure of the largest migration flow to Israel, that of migrants from Russia in 1990-2023. The annual change in the number of migrants over this period is studied. Peaks in migration caused by the events that took place in Russia in 1990-1991 and 1999-2000 and a new peak in 2022 are identified. In order to analyse this recent spike, the dynamics of the number of migrants for individual months are considered and differentiated according to two groups: those who arrived in Israel with a repatriate visa ("direct aliyah") and those who first entered the country as tourists and later obtained repatriate status. The impact of negative net migration on the decline of the Jewish population in Russia between 1990 and 2022 is also assessed.*

The analysis shows that the current very old age structure of the Jewish population in Russia cannot lead to large-scale emigration. However, Israel's Law of Return applies to a much wider range of persons of Jewish descent and their spouses. According to annual Israeli statistics, the share of Jews among immigrants from Russia fell throughout the period under study. Until the end of the last decade, the age structure of migrants from Russia to Israel was close to the age composition of the urban population of the country of origin; according to the most recent data, it has become even younger. For most of the period, women were numerically dominant in the overall composition of migrants, but in the most recent wave of migration, according to the 2022 data, men began to dominate slightly.

Keywords: *emigration, Russia, Israel, Jews, repatriation, aliyah.*

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Introduction

Over the last third of a century, arrivals from Russia have constituted the largest group of immigrants to Israel. This flow has taken the form of several successive waves caused by changes in the situation in Russia, the last of which occurred in 2022-2023. Hence the importance of the present work in providing a detailed analysis of emigration from Russia to Israel since 1990, when it first became truly massive.

Israeli statistics

Materials from Israeli immigration statistics provide a unique opportunity for a detailed analysis of the flow of arrivals from Russia to Israel. The Israel Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) regularly produces data on immigrants from the states of the former USSR. These data provide not only annual arrival numbers, but also show their distribution by individual months. At the same time, for each month the total number of immigrants is divided into those who arrived with a repatriate visa (“direct aliyah”) and those who initially entered the country as tourists and subsequently received repatriate status. It should be noted that the materials of the Israel CBS contain such important structural characteristics for demographic analysis as the age-sex structure of immigrants and information about the proportion of Jews among the arrivals.

However, only some of the materials mentioned have been published. These are, above all, statistical characteristics of those arriving from Russia, in the past provided in special publications of the Israel CBS describing immigration to the country (Israel CBS 2007; 2009; 2012). After a long break, they were only recently supplemented with some data on immigration from Russia to Israel, which again appeared in a special publication (Israel CBS 2023). Previously, even the annual numbers of migrants were given only in general publications (Israel CBS 2011–2022). Certain indicators, for example, about the age structure of those arriving from Russia and the share of Jews among them, have appeared in the authors’ publications (Tofts 2020). All other data used in our work were specifically obtained from the Israel CBS.

The need to use Israeli statistics in the analysis of migration from Russia to Israel is dictated by the large underestimation of the scale of this flow in Russian statistics, since many who left the country are not deregistered at their place of residence before departure. The use of Israeli data in the analysis is only a special case of using materials from immigration countries to obtain a more complete picture of emigration from Russia (Denisenko 2020). At the same time, the advantage of Israeli data is their greater completeness, since repatriates receive citizenship and significant financial assistance, which means everyone is included in the register.¹ However, even Israeli statistics do not answer the important question about the return movement of immigrants from Israel to Russia².

¹ It should be noted that these data make it possible to estimate annually the total number of persons from the former USSR, as well as their children born in Israel, residing in the country (Konstantinov 2023). They do not provide a distribution by parts of the former USSR.

² The number of former Israelis in Russia - and these may be natives not only of Russia, but also of other parts of the former USSR - remains a controversial problem, as there is no reliable data to determine it (Khanin 2022).

Categories of the Jewish population

To determine the intensity of migration, it is important to estimate the size of the population in question. However, in the case of the Jewish population this is not an easy task. In Jewish demography, there are several categories to describe the size of this ethnic group. Soviet population censuses, conducted at a time when internal passports included a person's ethnicity, gave figures that corresponded to the "core" Jewish population (Schmelz, DellaPergola 1995), of those who, when asked about their ethnicity, identified themselves as Jews and, in the case of children, were identified as Jews by their parents (DellaPergola 2002). The "core" Jewish population did not include people of Jewish origin who indicated another ethnicity in the census, however, part of it may be among those whose ethnicity is unknown according to census data.

With the disappearance of ethnicity from Russian internal passports, in post-Soviet censuses the number of people not indicating ethnicity grew, and estimates of the size of the "core" Jewish population began to differ significantly from census data. In 2002, our estimate at the time of the census was higher than the number of enumerated Jews by about 20,000, in 2010 by more than 40,000, and in 2021 by more than 60,000. We estimated the "core" Jewish population in Russia for the entire post-Soviet period (Table 1)³.

In Jewish demography, a broader category is also used - the "enlarged" Jewish population. It includes all members of households in which at least one person is part of the "core" Jewish population (DellaPergola 2002). The size of this category of the Jewish population, determined on the basis of census data, was significantly larger than the size of the "core" Jewish population in Russia: 910,000 in 1989, 720,000 in 1994 and 472,000 in 2002 (Tolts 2006: 16). Based on the dynamics of the ratio of these two categories⁴, the "enlarged" Jewish population in Russia at the beginning of 2022 was estimated at 290,000.

The range of persons entitled to obtain permission to immigrate to Israel (aliyah) in accordance with the Israeli Law of Return is even wider. The right to repatriation under this law is granted to Jews, their children and grandchildren - all with their legal spouses. Thus, the size of this category of population is significantly higher than that of the "enlarged" Jewish population, but determining it poses great difficulties – which doesn't stop some authors from trying. Published estimates include: 1,376,000 for 1989, 850,000 for 2003 (Kupovetsky 2005: 91) and 590,000 for 2022 (DellaPergola 2023: 373). All mentioned estimates of the size of various categories of the Jewish population are used further in the analysis of the dynamics of the intensity of migration from Russia to Israel (Table 7).

³ These estimates are based on the "effectively Jewish" fertility, which includes children with both Jewish parents, as well as those born in mixed marriages who accept the ethnicity of a Jewish parent (Tolts 1996); on the estimation of net migration, see below, when its contribution to the dynamics of the "core" Jewish population will be discussed. Note that for 1990-2003 our estimates are slightly higher than those of the author who made an alternative attempt to make such an estimation for this period (cf.: (Kupovetsky 2005)), while our figure, as of the 2010 census date, differs slightly from that of another author, obtained by another alternative method (cf.: (Sinelnikov 2018)). Unfortunately, representatives of Jewish community organizations ignore the estimates of demographers and often hold simply fantastic ideas about the number of Jews in Russia (see, for example, a set of such figures in: (Khanin 2023)).

⁴ The number of the "enlarged" Jewish population was estimated to be 1.6 times higher than its "core" in 1989, 1.8 times higher in 1994 and 1.9 times higher in 2002. When estimating the number of the "enlarged" Jewish population at the beginning of 2022, this excess was accordingly taken to be 2.2 times.

Table 1. The “core” Jewish population in Russia, 1989–2023, thousands*

Year	Number	Year	Number
1989**	570***	2007	221
1990	548	2008	215
1991	508	2009	210
1992	466	2010	205
1993	435	2011	200
1994	406	2012	195
1995	383	2013	190
1996	362	2014	185
1997	341	2015	180
1998	324	2016	175
1999	310	2017	170
2000	290	2018	165
2001	275	2019	159
2002	262	2020	152
2003	252	2021	147
2004	243	2022	142
2005	235	2023	132
2006	228	2023 as % of 1989	23.2

Sources: Estimates based on the 1989 Soviet census, 1994 Russian microcensus, post-Soviet censuses, vital and migration statistics.

Note: * – At the beginning of the year within the boundaries of the 1989 census. ** – Census data.

*** – Including Mountain Jews who called themselves “Tats” in the census.

Finally, it should be noted that there is a traditional definition in accordance with Jewish religious law (*Halakha*), on which Israeli statistics are based. According to it, Jews are considered to be those immigrants who had a Jewish mother or converted to Judaism. Maternal inheritance of Jewish affiliation significantly enlarges the number of persons registered as Jews. In order to be officially considered a Jew, in Israel it is enough to have a Jewish grandmother on the maternal side (however, a great-grandmother may be enough). Under the definition of ethnicity/religion adopted in the Israeli Law of Return, only conversion to another religion can interrupt the inheritance of Jewishness.

In Soviet and then Russian migration statistics, ethnicity was recorded according to the corresponding entry in internal passports, and therefore was close to the category of the “core” Jewish population, since it is known that in Soviet censuses the answers of Jews usually coincided with the entry in the passport (Altshuler 1987). In 1997, when new passports were introduced that did not contain such an entry, the Russian State Statistics Committee recommended that, when filling out primary documents for statistical registration of migrants, ethnicity be indicated “as reported by citizen himself.” For children who did not have a passport, ethnicity was determined by the ethnicity of the parents, and it was stated that “if the parents of the minor belong to different ethnic groups, then one registers the ethnic identity [of the child] as that of one of the parents, preference being given to the mother’s ethnicity” (Tolts 2002).

Table 2. Share of Jews among migrants from Russia to Israel according to two different statistical sources, 1990-2022, %

Year	Rosstat data*	Israel CBS data	Year	Rosstat data*	Israel CBS data
1990		94	2007	(22)	48
1991		87	2008	...	44
1992	64**	82	2009	...	43
1993	60	82	2010	...	43
1994	58	77	2011	...	45
1995	53	73	2012	...	43
1996	49	67	2013	...	41
1997	36	59	2014	...	41
1998	31	54	2015	...	42
1999	31	49	2016	...	40
2000	27	47	2017	...	34
2001	25	44	2018	...	33
2002	24	43	2019	...	32
2003	(24)	45	2020	...	28
2004	(22)	45	2021	...	27***
2005	(21)	46	2022	...	27***
2006	(20)	46	1990-2022	...	60

Sources: Rosstat data and Israel CBS data.

Note: * – Of the total number of emigrants to Israel whose ethnicity was known; for 1990-1991 and 2008-2022 Rosstat has not processed the corresponding data. In 2003-2007 the recorded number of Jews among emigrants was lower than the number of those whose ethnicity is unknown, which makes the calculated figures less reliable (they are shown in parentheses in this table).

** – Data for the second half of the year. *** - Preliminary data.

As a result of the noted differences in the two sources of information (Israeli and Russian) on the composition of migrants, the share of Jews was significantly higher according to Israeli statistics, and in 2004-2007 was even approximately 2 times higher than according to the latest Russian data for the same period (Table 2). However, even according to Israeli data, the share of Jews among immigrants from Russia was only 27% in 2021-2022⁵, although in general for the entire period under review, 1990-2022, it was 60%. It is clear that in the most recent years the proportion among them of those who were part of the “core” Jewish population in the country they left hardly exceeded 15%.

Waves of migration

In the last two years of the existence of the USSR, the final crisis of the Soviet system caused for the first time ever a large wave of emigration from Russia to Israel: 45,500 in 1990, with an even slightly higher number the next year of 47,300. This flow was only part of the mass emigration from the entire USSR to Israel, which amounted to 185,200 in 1990 and 147,800 in 1991. Over the next seven years, the number of migrants from Russia to Israel gradually decreased from 24,800 in 1992 to 14,500 in 1998 (Table 3).

A new increase in the emigration flow from Russia to Israel occurred after the financial crash in Russia in August 1998. In 1999, this flow doubled, reaching 31,100 and remaining more significant in 2000 than annually in 1995-1998. The subsequent decline in emigration to Israel was due to the resumption of economic growth in Russia in the early 2000s. In 2008, the total number of emigrants from this country to Israel reached a new low – 2,600. However,

⁵ This has led to calls for the amendment of the Israeli Law of Return by some religious groups, see for example: Greenwood H. (2023). 'Non-Jewish' aliyah reaches new high amid Ukraine war. *Israel Hayom*, 1 March.

the following year, 2009, the global economic crisis caused significant damage to the Russian economy, as well as to many other countries. As a result, the long-term trend towards a decrease in emigration from Russia to Israel was replaced by a growth: in 2009 it increased by 25%. In subsequent years, rather steady growth continued and in 2014, the number of emigrants from Russia to Israel was already 76% higher than in 2008.

Table 3. Immigration from Russia and the entire former USSR to Israel, 1990-2022, thousands

Year	Russia	Entire former USSR	Russian share, %	Year	Russia	Entire former USSR	Russian share, %
1990	45.5	185.2	25	2007	3.3	6.5	50
1991	47.3	147.8	32	2008	2.6	5.6	46
1992	24.8	65.1	38	2009	3.2	6.8	48
1993	23.1	66.1	35	2010	3.4	7.0	49
1994	24.6	68.1	36	2011	3.7	7.2	51
1995	15.7	64.8	24	2012	3.5	7.2	49
1996	16.5	59.0	28	2013	4.0	7.3	55
1997	15.3	54.6	28	2014	4.6	11.6	40
1998	14.5	46.0	31	2015	6.6	14.7	45
1999	31.1	66.8	47	2016	7.0	14.5	48
2000	18.8	50.8	37	2017	7.1	16.2	44
2001	10.9	33.6	32	2018	10.5	18.8	56
2002	6.5	18.5	35	2019	15.8	24.3	65
2003	4.8	12.4	39	2020	6.6	11.0	60
2004	4.0	10.1	39	2021	7.6	12.7	60
2005	4.2	9.4	44	2022	45.5	63.9	71
2006	3.6	7.5	48	1990–2022	446.3*	1201.2*	37

Source: Israel CBS data.

Note: * – The figure for the entire period is greater than the sum of the annual figures due to rounding.

Research has shown a fairly close correlation between the dynamics of emigration from Russia to Israel and fluctuations in oil prices (DellaPergola 2020). Thus, the fall in the price of oil, a product which plays a very important role in Russia's exports, led in 2015 to a significant recession in the country's economy, which was accompanied by a strong devaluation of the ruble. As a result, the number of emigrants from Russia to Israel increased this year by 44% and became 2.5 times more than in 2008. The absolute increase in their number in 2015 was the same as in general over the previous six years. The number of emigrants this year slightly exceeded what it was in 2002. The growth in the flow from Russia to Israel continued until 2019, when the registered number of immigrants reached a new maximum (15,800) and was already higher than in 1995. In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, which was accompanied by very significant restrictions on movement, the number of emigrants from Russia to Israel sharply decreased to 6,600 in 2020 and 7,600 in 2021.

In 2022, events in Russia caused a new wave of emigration to Israel (see this in detail in the next section). This year the number of migrants returned to what it was in 1990 – 45,500. When assessing its value, it should be taken into account that in the previous two years, emigration from Russia to Israel, as already noted, fell sharply due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and therefore the growth in 2022 was to a certain extent due to the carrying out of delayed emigration intentions. The new outflow was not driven by a rise of anti-Semitism in Russia (Gudkov 2023; Levinson 2023) or problems in Jewish community life there (Khanin 2023). Moreover, Jews constituted a clear minority in the flow (Table 2).

Table 4. Share of Russia and the entire former USSR among all immigrants to Israel, 1990-2022, %

Year	Russia	Entire former USSR	Year	Russia	Entire former USSR
1990	23	93	2007	18	36
1991	27	84	2008	19	41
1992	32	84	2009	22	47
1993	30	86	2010	20	42
1994	31	85	2011	22	43
1995	21	85	2012	21	44
1996	23	83	2013	24	43
1997	23	82	2014	19	48
1998	25	81	2015	24	53
1999	41	87	2016	27	55
2000	31	84	2017	27	61
2001	25	77	2018	37	67
2002	19	55	2019	48	73
2003	21	53	2020	34	56
2004	19	48	2021	30	50
2005	20	45	2022	61	86
2006	19	39	1990-2022	28	76

Source: Israel CBS data.

It should be noted that since 2017, a certain ambiguity in the understanding of the given figures has been introduced by the possibility of immediately obtaining an Israeli passport (*Darkon*) upon acquiring citizenship of Israel without the intention of residing in it. An unknown number of people have taken advantage of this in order to obtain the freedom of movement around the world given by the *Darkon*. However, in 2022 an also unknown number of such immigrants from Russia nonetheless settled in Israel without being taken into account by statistics, which included only new repatriates, thus to a certain extent numerically offset for the noted phenomenon. In July 2023, the possibility of immediately obtaining an Israeli passport was abolished.

Over a third of a century, from 1990 to 2022, more than 446,000 Jews and their relatives migrated from Russia to Israel, which amounted to 37% of the total number of arrivals from the former USSR, 1.2 million (Table 3). The number of migrants from Russia to Israel significantly exceeded their number from Ukraine, which amounted to less than 385,000. Among all immigrants to Israel during this period, the share of immigrants from Russia was the most significant - 28% (Table 4)⁶. In 2022, it rose to 61%, which emphasizes the importance of the new migration wave from this country.

⁶ For comparison of migration from Russia to Israel with that of other countries see, for example: (DellaPergola 2020; Staetsky 2023b).

Monthly dynamics of the new wave of migration and its components

As already noted, the materials of Israel’s Central Bureau of Statistics provide not only the annual numbers of arrivals, but also their distribution by individual months. This allows us to analyze in detail the dynamics of the latest wave of migration from Russia in 2022–2023. For comparisons, it is natural to use 2019 data, since in 2020–2021 migration intensity temporarily decreased sharply due to the COVID-19 pandemic. As these data show, monthly dynamics were affected not only by events in Russia (the announcement on February 24, 2022 of the start of a special military operation in Ukraine, and then partial mobilization on September 21 of the same year), but also the peculiarities of the Israeli working calendar.

Table 5. Monthly dynamics of immigration from Russia to Israel, 2019 and 2022-2023*

Month	Thousands			2022 as % of 2019	2023 as % of 2022
	2019	2022	2023		
January	1.0	0.7	6.3	72	869
February	0.9	0.7	4.9	80	679
March	1.4	3.3	4.5	227	136
April	1.4	3.5	2.3	256	67
May	1.7	4.5	3.0	260	67
June	1.4	4.5	2.8	324	62
July	1.2	3.5	2.5	301	71
August	1.2	3.5	2.6	293	74
September	1.25	2.6	1.4	210	53
October	1.3	4.7	...	360	...
November	1.8	7.1	...	397	...
December	1.2	6.6	...	552	...

Source: Israel CBS data.

Note: * – Month of arrival is unknown for about 50 immigrants in 2019 and 300 in 2022.

In each of the first two months of 2022, the number of migrants arriving from Russia (about 700) was less than in the same period of 2019. The growth began in March, and it was significant: in this month the number of migrants in 2022 became 2.3 times higher compared to 2019. This growth continued until May and June of 2022, in each month of which the number of arrivals reached 4,500. In July and August, the number of arrivals was down to 3,500, as earlier in April. The decline continued until September, when the number of migrants dropped to 2,600. In October, it again sharply increased to 4,700 and reached a maximum in November of 7,100, after which it began to decline again, amounting to 6,600 in December. However, it was in December 2022 that it was the highest compared to the same month in 2019 - 5.5 times (Table 5).

In 2023, the decline continued. The number of arrivals this year decreased from 6,300 in January to 2,500–2,600 in July and August. At the same time, in August it was the same as for the entire 2008 (2,600; table 3). It is worth noting that the number of immigrants was noticeably lower in April 2023 (2,300; Table 5), which coincided with the spring Jewish holidays, when the work of Israeli government agencies involved in processing immigrants was temporarily interrupted. However, even in September of this year, the number of immigrants (1,400), despite the fact that the second half of the year coincided with the autumn Jewish holidays, was higher than in the same month of 2019 (1,250).

Since for each month Israeli statistics breaks the total number of immigrants down into those who arrived with a repatriate visa (“direct aliyah”) and those who initially entered the

country as tourists and subsequently received repatriate status, it is possible to analyze the features of these two components of migration from Russia to Israel. Until 2022, the “direct aliyah” was the main part of the migration flow; for example, in 2019 as a whole, its share in it was 94.5%. In no month of this year did it fall below 90% (Table 6).

Table 6. Monthly dynamics of “direct aliyah”* from Russia to Israel, 2019, 2022-2023

Month	Thousands			Share of “direct aliyah” in total immigration, %		
	2019	2022	2023	2019	2022	2023
January	0.95	0.66	2.3	95	92	37
February	0.85	0.65	2.2	95	91	45
March	1.33	2.0	2.1	93	61	47
April	1.23	1.5	1.5	90	43	63
May	1.57	1.85	2.2	90	41	74
June	1.24	1.7	2.3	90	38	81
July	1.12	1.8	2.3	95	50	91
August	1.16	1.9	2.3	97	54	91
September	1.20	1.55	1.3	97	60	90
October	1.29	2.5	...	98	54	...
November	1.77	2.9	...	98	40	...
December	1.14	2.3	...	96	35	...

Source: Israel CBS data.

*Note: * – Arrivals with repatriate visas.*

Already in March 2022, with the beginning of a new large wave of migration from Russia to Israel, the share of “direct aliyah” dropped sharply to 61%, and in April–June this group of migrants found itself in the minority. Those who entered the country as tourists and subsequently received repatriate status began to dominate the statistics. An accelerated “emergency repatriation” procedure was introduced for them to obtain citizenship status in Israel, but even with it, unlike those who arrived as part of “direct aliyah,” the actual date of the start of their stay in the country and the date of inclusion in the statistics differed, and sometimes by several months.

In July 2022, the share of the “direct aliya” began to rise again and came to half of the total. In the next three months, August - October, it was predominant. However, in November it dropped to 40%, and in December reached a minimum of 35%, with 65% of registered immigrants being those who entered the country as tourists and subsequently received repatriate status. This latter group dominated the statistics until March 2023, making up 56% of all arrivals from Russia in the year before this month. The gradual abolition of the “emergency repatriation” procedure for obtaining citizenship status in Israel for those who entered the country as tourists, which began in April 2023, again led to the predominance in statistics of those arriving as part of the “direct aliyah”, whose share in July-September 2023 rose to 90-91%, i.e. returned to the indicators that were typical for some months of 2019.

Migration intensity

In order to assess the intensity of any migration, it is important to correctly identify the relevant population group that generates it. It would be a big mistake to compare the number of migrants from Russia to Israel with the number of the “core” Jewish population in Russia, since the number of persons subject to the Israeli Law of Return is significantly larger than this category (see above). Thus, for 2022, the indicator calculated in this way (344 per 1000; Table 7) gives a completely incorrect idea of the intensity of the migration movement in question. It creates the misconception that more than a third of Russia’s Jews headed to Israel during that year⁷.

Table 7. Emigration from Russia to Israel, per 1000 people of designated category*

Category on which estimate is based	1990	1999	2022
“Core” Jewish population	83	100	344
“Enlarged” Jewish population	52	53	157
Persons subject to the Israeli Law of Return	34	33	77

Sources: Computations based on tables 1 and 3 of this article; (Kupovetsky 2001: 126; 2005: 91; Tolts 2006: 16; DellaPergola 2023: 373).

*Note: * – In Russia at the beginning of the year for which the estimate is given.*

For the period when the flow from Russia to Israel was largely limited to those from the “core” Jewish population and their immediate relatives, the indicator based on the “enlarged” Jewish population provided a good approximation of the intensity of migration. This indicator for the first two peaks of migration was almost the same: in 1990, 52 and in 1999, 53 per 1000. Its adequacy for these years is confirmed by the fact that the rate based on the total number of persons subject to the Israeli Law of Return was also almost equal for these peak years: in 1990, 34 and in 1999, 33 per 1000. However, after more peripheral strata of persons subject to the Israeli Law of Return were included in migration, the indicator based on the “enlarged” Jewish population gave an inflated idea of the phenomenon for 2022. It was 3 times higher than in 1990 and 1999, while the rate based on the total number of persons subject to the Israeli Law of Return for 2022 was 2.3 times higher.

Thus, the intensity of emigration from Russia to Israel in 2022 was undoubtedly the highest compared to other peaks of this migration. At the same time, this conclusion does not yet answer the question of what impact migration had on the dynamics of the “core” Jewish population in Russia in different years of the period under review. When solving this difficult problem, it is necessary to take into account the emigration of this category of the Jewish population not only to Israel, but also to all other destinations, as well as immigration to Russia, including return migration.

However, only for 1990–1998 are there direct data that make it possible to calculate the volume of net migration of Jews based on Russian statistics. For the following period, 1999–2002, a methodology was developed that made it possible to estimate the necessary figures from incomplete data (Tolts 2002). However, in 2003–2007 the reported number of Jews among emigrants to Israel was lower than the number of those whose ethnicity is unknown, and in 2008–2022 Rosstat has not processed the corresponding data at all. It is known that

⁷ Unfortunately, such inappropriate comparisons are sometimes used by some journalists when writing about the “mass exodus” of Jews from Russia in 2022. (see for example: Israel D. (2022). Report: 12% of Russian Jews Have Left Since Start of Ukraine War in March. *JewishPress.com*, 17 August.

<https://www.jewishpress.com/news/israel/report-12-of-russian-jews-have-left-since-start-of-ukraine-war-in-march/2022/08/17/>)

recording of the migration movement to and from Russia for individual countries up to the present day gives very problematic results (Chudinovskikh, Stepanova 2020; Denisenko 2020). Therefore, in estimating net migration figures since 2003, it was necessary under certain assumptions to rely mainly on data from the Israel CBS, as well as the American Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS) and the German Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF)⁸.

The obtained estimates show that, in general, for the entire period under consideration (1990–2022) negative net migration caused half the decline in the size of the “core” Jewish population in Russia (Table 8). The second half of the decline was caused by a significant excess of deaths over births. This factor was dominant for most of the period under review - 22 out of 33 years - not only in 2020-2021, which was the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic, but also in 1997-1998 and 2001-2018, when the sizable negative vital balance, due to the long-standing low fertility of the Jewish population, played a decisive role. According to census data, Jews had the lowest fertility among all ethnic groups in Russia (Bogoyavlensky 2014).

The greatest contribution of negative net migration to the decline in the size of the “core” Jewish population was observed in 1990-1991 (73%) and in 2022 (66%). During these years, the net migration rate reached peak values of 59 and 48 per 1000, respectively. The smallest contribution of negative net migration to the decline in the size of the “core” Jewish population was during the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic (21% in 2020–2021), when the Russian population as a whole suffered some of the highest losses in the world from this infectious disease and its consequences (see, for example: (Timonin et al. 2022)).

Table 8. Negative net migration of Russia’s “core” Jews, 1990-2022

Years	Thousands	Average annual rate, per 1,000 “core” Jews	Contribution of negative net migration to the decrease in the size of the “core” Jewish population, %
1990-1991	60	59	73
1992-1996	72	36	58
1997-1998	14	21	44
1999-2000	19	33	54
2001-2008	19	10	29
2009-2018	14	8	27
2019	3.9	25	56
2020-2021	2.1	7	21
2022	6.6	48	66
1990-2022	210*	25	50

Sources: Estimates based on the 1989 Soviet census, 1994 Russian microcensus, post-Soviet censuses, vital and migration statistics.

*Note: * – The indicator for the entire period differs from the sum of figures for individual periods due to rounding.*

It is known from the material of some other countries that the Jewish population, primarily due to the peculiarities of the age structure - the high proportion of older people in it - experienced significant losses from this epidemic (Staetsky 2023a). Since in the “core” Jewish population in Russia there was also a very significant proportion of older people (see below), this circumstance should have caused similar consequences. At the same time, the noted decrease in the contribution of negative net migration was, of course, caused by a sharp drop in

⁸ The United States and Germany were the most significant post-Soviet Jewish destinations after Israel (Tolts 2020).

the flow from Russia to Israel due to restrictions on air travel: the rate characterizing its intensity, which was 25 in 2019, fell to 7 per 1000 in 2020-2021. Prior to this, in 2019, the contribution of negative net migration to the decline in the size of the “core” Jewish population was again predominant for the first time in many years - 56%. This fact further highlights the enormous impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on demographic processes among Russia’s Jews.

Features of the age-sex structure of migrants

Even at the end of the Soviet period, before the subsequent mass emigration, the Jewish population in Russia was characterized by a high level of aging, primarily due to the low fertility. According to the 1989 census, its median age was 52.3 years, and the proportion of those aged 65 or older reached almost 27%. In the post-Soviet period, aging accelerated and, according to the 2010 census, already about 40% of Jews were aged 65 years or older and their median age increased to 60.3 years (Table 9).

Table 9. Age distribution of Jews and the entire urban population in Russia and immigrants from Russia to Israel, 1989/1990-2021/1922, %

Years	All ages	0-14	15-29	30-44	45-64	65+	Median age
Jews in Russia*							
1989	100.0	8.4	11.4	19.5	33.8	26.9	52.3
2002	100.0	4.9	10.7	14.2	33.6	36.6	57.5
2010	100.0	5.2	10.0	13.7	31.5	39.6	60.3
2021	100.0	7.7	11.6	18.1	28.1	34.5	54.2
Whole urban population in Russia**							
1989	100.0	22.4	22.8	23.3	22.7	8.8	32.7
2010	100.0	14.3	23.3	21.8	28.1	12.5	37.9
2015	100.0	15.9	20.1	23.5	27.1	13.4	38.4
2019	100.0	17.4	15.3	25.4	26.2	15.7	39.7
2021	100.0	15.2	16.0	25.9	26.6	16.3	40.6
Immigrants from Russia to Israel***							
1990-2001	100.0	20.9	25.0	23.1	19.9	11.1	32.4
2010	100.0	12.5	26.0	20.7	25.8	15.0	38.0
2015	100.0	16.6	19.1	24.8	24.8	14.7	38.1
2019	100.0	18.8	16.1	25.6	27.3	12.2	37.9
2022	100.0	21.4	17.6	30.7	22.3	8.0	35.1

Sources: Listed in notes.

Note: * – Census data. ** – Census data and Rosstat estimates. *** – Israel CBS data.

The current very old age structure of the “core” Jewish population in Russia cannot support large-scale emigration, which, despite this, as noted, increased significantly after 2008. The data presented show that the age structure of emigrants from Russia to Israel was, until the end of the last decade, close to the age structure of the entire urban population of the country of origin. For example, in 2010 and 2015, the median age was about 38 years for both groups. It was lower by about 22 years compared to the figure for the “core” Jewish population in Russia according to the 2010 census. This corresponds to the fact that, for example, in 2010 only 43% of those arriving from Russia were counted as Jews by the Israel CBS, based on the Jewish religious definition (*Halakha*). In Rosstat statistics, which show almost only those who belong to the “core” Jewish population, the share of Jews after 2000 was even smaller - 25% or lower (Table 2).

However, by 2019, the median age of immigrants, while remaining almost the same, about 38 years, became almost 2 years less than the increased figure for the entire urban population in Russia (Table 9). This gap has increased noticeably in the new wave of emigration.

In 2022, the median age of immigrants fell to approximately 35 years and was 5.5 years younger than the figure for the entire urban population in Russia according to the 2021 census. The proportion of those aged 65 and older among immigrants also decreased significantly: from more than 12% in 2019 to 8% in 2022. At the same time, the proportion of those who were under 45 years of age increased, with the largest increase occurring in the group between 30 and 45 years old, from 25.6% in 2019 to 30.7% in 2022.⁹

The 2021 census yielded unexpected results: a drop in the median age of enumerated Jews to 54.2 years old (compared to 60.3 in 2010) and a reduction among them in the proportion of those aged 65 years and older to 34.5%. Of course, this census was only able to cover a much smaller part of the “core” Jewish population (see above), which could have affected its results. Moreover, recording of the age-sex structure of the entire population had its own special features (Andreev, Churilova 2023). However, the results of this census for Jews should not be simply ignored, as they are to some extent consistent with changes in the age-sex composition of migrants, especially at the oldest ages (see below), which may be a consequence of significant losses in these ages during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Table 10. Number of men per 100 women among immigrants from Russia to Israel, 2015-2017, 2019 and 2022

Age, years	2015-2017	2019	2022
0-4	108	109	105
5-9	105	109	106
10-14	101	119	106
15-19	111	99	113
20-24	63	76	138
25-29	71	85	114
30-34	80	91	97
35-39	82	84	104
40-44	91	90	100
45-49	97	100	102
50-54	92	107	106
55-59	87	91	99
60-64	79	97	86
65-69	95	94	87
70-74	96	82	89
75+	88	93	65
Total	88	95	103

Source: Israel CBS data.

The new peak of migration from Russia to Israel was characterized not only by a change in the age structure in 2022, but also by large shifts in the sex composition of those arriving. This year, men began to predominate in all ages under 55, with the exception of those aged 30–34 (Table 10). The most significant male preponderance was at the age of 20–24 years, with 138 men for every 100 women. In contrast, previously it was in this age group that the most significant shortage of men was observed: in 2015–2017 only 63 men, and in 2019 76 per 100 women. The overall sex composition of migrants also changed, coming to be slightly dominated by men, whereas previously there were more women in it. In 2015-2017 there were 88 men per 100 women, and in 2019 – 95, while in 2022 there were 103.

⁹ A detailed age-sex structure of migrants in 2015-2017, 2019 and 2022 is presented in the Appendix.

Noteworthy is the sharp decline in the relative number of men in the oldest age group for which data are available—75 years and older. In 2022, there were only 65 men per 100 women among migrants in this age group, whereas in 2015–2017 there were 88, and in 2019 even 93 men per 100 women. Here, we can probably assume a consequence of sex-differentiated losses in the Jewish population in Russia during the pandemic, since it was at the oldest ages that the proportion of Jews was always the highest among immigrants from Russia to Israel.

Conclusion

The analysis showed that over the past three decades the flow from Russia has been the largest among all migrants to Israel. Thanks to the peculiarities of the Israeli Law of Return, Jews themselves, who have a very old age structure in Russia, made up only three-fifths of this stream. However, this is precisely what led to the fact that the age structure of immigrants was much younger. During most of the period under review, there was a slight predominance of women in their composition.

In the first decade, the flow from Russia to Israel had two pronounced peaks, occurring in 1990–1991 and 1999–2000, due to crisis phenomena in the country of origin of migrants. The beginning of a new large wave occurred in 2022 and was also caused by events in Russia. The intensity of emigration this year in relation to the total number of persons in Russia subject to the Israeli Law of Return was the highest over the entire last third of the century. In 2022, noticeable changes occurred in the age-sex structure of these migrants: the proportion of older people among them decreased and men, especially young men, began to slightly predominate. After October 7, 2023, the internal situation in Israel changed dramatically with mass mobilization and the outbreak of large-scale military operations, which is likely to have an impact on migration processes in this country, but this is beyond the time frame of our analysis.

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Appendix

Number of men and women among immigrants from Russia to Israel, 2015-2017, 2019 and 2022

Age, years	2015-2017		2019		2022	
	men	women	men	women	men	women
0-4	643	593	488	448	1536	1456
5-9	653	624	605	554	1894	1790
10-14	453	448	479	403	1576	1493
15-19	549	494	391	396	1188	1049
20-24	408	644	303	398	1289	933
25-29	799	1131	486	572	1878	1648
30-34	899	1125	721	795	2429	2502
35-39	738	904	611	724	2642	2545
40-44	693	761	572	637	1920	1924
45-49	672	694	633	635	1666	1630
50-54	590	639	553	515	1468	1381
55-59	579	668	505	558	1041	1052
60-64	592	753	451	466	878	1019
65-69	654	688	379	402	705	812
70-74	354	367	294	359	483	543
75+	466	530	237	255	433	669
Total	9742	11063	7708	8117	23026	22446

Source: Israel CBS data.