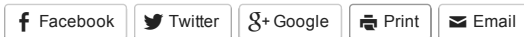


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Welfare Policy and Social Security in Post-Communist Jewish Communities: The Case of Ukraine

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The development and functioning of the welfare system in Ukraine is an important condition for Jewish communal survival in post-Soviet countries. Social welfare must be based on demographics and the needs of local communities. The Joint as well as local Jewish communities must work together in order to solve current problems, especially in the area of financing the various projects. This essay outlines the problems currently facing the Jewish social welfare organizations in Ukraine and offers some solutions.

The creation of a developed public welfare system in Jewish communities was one of the consequences of Jewish rebirth in the USSR/CIS (the Commonwealth of Independent States) over the past 10 years. Its formation came from various sources, both internal and predominately external. The current social and demographic situation of the Jewish population in Eastern Europe and the CIS makes it clear that the development and functioning of welfare systems is an important condition for Jewish communal survival in post-Soviet countries.

This article attempts to discuss, using Ukraine as an example, the societal situation in post-Soviet Jewish communities. Pointing out the basic problems in this sphere, as well as possible solutions, the following aspects will be analyzed:

1. The demographic situation in the Ukrainian Jewish community.
2. The welfare needs of local communities.
3. These needs must be addressed by improving the existing welfare services.
4. Mistakes made in the development of Jewish communal services in Ukraine, as well as in the CIS in general, need to be corrected.

The Demographic Situation

A general population census in Ukraine, planned for 1999, was delayed due to budgetary difficulties. Thus, this article will use the results of the last population census conducted in Ukraine in early 1989, together with estimations of various experts in Jewish demography. According to this census, there were 487,300 people in Ukraine who referred to themselves as Jews.¹ As a rule, these were people with two Jewish parents, and whose internal passport designated them as Jews. Besides these people, who are usually regarded as the core Jewish population of Ukraine, the local Jewish community also includes those who are not ethnically Jewish but who meet the criteria of the Israeli Law of Return.²

It is the opinion of many Jewish communal leaders in post-Communist states, including this author, that the right for membership in the Jewish community (including the right to welfare aid), should be allocated to the same circle of people – that is, those who are eligible to make *aliya* to Israel. According to this idea, demographers suggest using the 1.5 to 2.5 extension coefficients while talking about the overall Jewish population in Ukraine. Thus, the enlarged Jewish population of Ukraine in 1989 was between one to 1.2 million persons,³ but not all representatives of the enlarged Jewish population possessed a Jewish identity card. However, with the collapse of the Soviet empire and the ensuing socioeconomic crisis, together with the rebirth of nationalism including Jewish nationalism, the issue of identity is not a static or stable phenomenon. Difficult social and economic conditions stimulated many to search for their ethnic and religious roots, resulting not only in emigration or receiving welfare, but also in more favorable psychological conditions for leaving, through the reconstruction and renewal of traditional values long suppressed under the Communist regime.

Other basic factors affecting the demographic situation in the Jewish community are migrations, assimilation, and birth and death rates. The number of Jews and their family members decreased in Ukraine between 1989 and 1999 due to the mass emigration of about 500,000 people. Approximately 270,000 immigrated to Israel, around 120,000 to the U.S., about 60,000 to Germany, and almost 50,000 to other countries.

The ethnic Jewish component of Jewish emigration from the CIS differed during the late Soviet and post-Soviet decade, and varied from being predominant in the late 1980s and early 1990s to being the minority in the late 1990s. For

example, according to official Ukrainian statistics, among 20,753 people who left Ukraine for permanent residency in Israel in 1997, only 8,115 were declared ethnic Jews. Since Israel does not have open immigration policies, practically all of these 20,753 persons were permitted to settle in Israel as members of Jewish families. Thus, the extension coefficient for Jewish emigration from Ukraine for Israel in 1997 was more than 2.5.

The Armenian case is even more impressive. According to a 1989 census, there were approximately 500 people who referred to themselves as Jews. During 10 years (1989-1999), no less than 2,000 persons used the Jewish channel to emigrate from Armenia, including 1,587 to Israel.⁴ Thus the coefficient of extension in Armenia for these years was about 5. Taking all this into account, one can say that although the Jewish core population in the CIS did decrease dramatically due to mass emigration during the last decade, this did not necessarily occur in the same negative proportion as the enlarged Jewish population.

In Ukraine, it is estimated that if the current trend continues, around 250,000 people, or about half of the "extended" population, may emigrate in the next ten years. Among those who stay, about 100,000 ethnic Jews will compose the Jewish core.

As was mentioned, emigration is not the only reason for Jewish population decline in Ukraine. Another factor is the low fertility of Jewish women, which is, according to official Ukrainian data, much lower than the average birth rate in the country and even lower than the death rate in the Jewish community. Thus, the natural depopulation of Ukrainian Jewry during 1989-1999 was more than 70,000. The current number of people living in Ukraine, who can be considered as both potential for aliya as well as potential for the Jewish community, is still estimated at 600,000. The core Jewish population among them is estimated at 170,000.⁵

According to official data, the number of Jews who are members of mixed marriages is growing from year to year. In 1996, 82 percent of married Jewish males and 74 percent of Jewish females had non-Jewish spouses.⁶ A high level of assimilation is a feature of small Jewish communities, such as those in Scandinavia. In the CIS, paradoxically, assimilation brings with it a large number of people who become part of the enlarged Jewish population, since non-Jewish husbands and wives, as well as children of mixed marriages, become potential "Jewish" emigrants, and potential recipients of Jewish communal services.

Despite this reserve of people, the median age of the ethnic core of the Jewish community of Ukraine is constantly growing and, according to Mark Tolts, in 1997 it reached 56.2 years.⁷ Thus, about half of the Ukrainian Jewish community – or about 300,000 people – are middle-aged and older. This happened due to the low birth rate and because the proportion of young people among Jewish emigrants is larger than their share in the Jewish population in Ukraine. This is why the welfare services have become one of the most important aspects of communal life in the CIS.

The Social Welfare Situation in Jewish Communities

Unfortunately, a comprehensive study of the social situation in the CIS Jewish communities has yet to be made. Accordingly, this article will use the sample studies that were done by various experts. One of them was a study commissioned by the JDC and conducted by Israeli researcher Nadia Zinger in June-August 1995. The study was based on a census of 3,258 Jews, 55 years and older, in ten CIS cities, including four in Ukraine.⁸

The study discovered a dismal situation among this dominant group of Jews. For instance, less than half had a spouse at the time of the study. Every third respondent lived alone, and 17 percent lived with his or her children. Three-quarters of the respondents were pensioners and did not work, and only 18 percent were employed. Every fourth respondent did not have children, and the majority of the rest had only one child. One of the consequences of World War II was that the number of Jewish females without children was 2.5 times that of males. Every fourth respondent had children who lived in other CIS towns or abroad. Thirty-two percent of the respondents reported that they always or often felt lonely – women more so than men. The rate of those feeling lonely increased with age.

The situation in Ukraine was similar to the above. The social situation in the local Jewish community was also difficult due to the fact that the monthly income of the great majority of older Jews (249,000) in the 1990s was, according to our estimation, less than \$30. The monthly income of about 90 percent of them was less than \$20. Only 16 percent of the respondents reported that they could afford normal food. Only half could afford basic foodstuff. One-third of the respondents reported a lack of money for even minimally necessary food products, and 4 percent said that occasionally they faced hunger.

In addition, more than half of the respondents did not have the resources to purchase clothes. Every fourth respondent, which comes to about 75,000 Ukrainian Jews, lacked money to buy medicine, while 41 percent (123,000) could afford only basic drugs. Thirty-four percent (102,000) defined their health as "poor," about 50 percent (150,000) as "not good," and only 18 percent as "satisfactory" or "good." Between 7 to 8 percent of the respondents declared that their TVs, refrigerators, and washing machines were out of order, while 60 percent said that their apartments were in disrepair.

Finally, 40 percent of the respondents (120,000 older members of the Ukrainian Jewish community) were in need of some sort of aid, including 15 percent (45,000) who totally lacked resources even for basic needs and who requested ongoing assistance. However, only 18 percent, representing about 54,000 older Ukrainian Jews, reported that he or she received any sort of financial help, and only one out of five respondents, who needed a social worker, actually received one.

It is not difficult to conclude that the social situation of the enlarged Jewish population of Ukraine was close to the general picture in the country, as shown in several sociological studies conducted in 1994-1998 by the Institute for Social Studies, Ukrainian National Academy of Sciences.⁹ This fact is also proven by information received in the course of establishing the welfare system for the Jewish community of Ukraine. Due to a lack of funds, a substantial part of the Ukrainian Jewish population in need – one-parent families, orphans, the unemployed, as well as single people over the age of fifty, whose employment under the current difficult economic conditions in Ukraine is problematic – are left out of the communal welfare services.¹⁰

In meetings with the Coordination Council of Jewish welfare institutions in Ukraine, this author attempted to collect all the relevant information in order to estimate the number of those in need of assistance who are registered in the two leading Jewish welfare systems of Ukraine – Chesed and Magen Avot. In November 1998, the figure was more than 85,000 people, and by August 1999, it had grown to around 100,000. Since the databases in some local communities are not efficient, one may estimate that the number is closer to 120-130,000 Jews, who are in need of some kind of aid.

This study showed that small Jewish communities with a working communal infrastructure are usually familiar with almost every Jew living there, and thus can give more precise estimations of those community members in need of communal support. In the smallest communities, with less than 1,000 members, the rate of those in need was reported to be 60 to 70 percent. In the medium-sized communities of between 4,000 to 6,000 members, the number of Jews in need was estimated to be between 2,000 and 3,000. In larger Jewish population centers the situation is slightly better due to a greater number of young people and better employment conditions. Thus, the rate of those who need communal support in such centers was estimated between 15 to 20 percent of local Jewry, or between 30 to 40 percent of all Jewish persons older than 55.

If the estimation of 120,000 Jews and their family members, who need ongoing community aid, is correct, the minimum amount of money required for basic needs could reach \$21.6 million (\$45/person as a minimum living wage in Ukraine). Add to this number at least 120,000 more Jews who need periodic aid, and the annual budget of the Ukrainian Jewish communal services could reach \$40 million. Administrative and other internal expenses of the communal service structures will require at least \$20-30 million more, thus bringing the necessary amount of resources to \$60-70 million annually.¹¹

However, as was discovered at the conventions of representatives of Jewish communal services of Ukraine in Sebastopol and Zaporozhye in 2000, although the financial supply for these programs by their major donors (such as the Claims Conference, the UJA, and other funds) was higher than anytime before, it covered only about 30 percent of the estimated amount needed.¹² This situation demands the mobilization of additional funds and increasing organizational efforts to create a more efficient social welfare system in the Jewish community. This work, which was started in the late 1980s, is far from complete.

The Welfare System in the Jewish Community of Ukraine: Origin, Structure and Conflict

The revival of the Ukrainian Jewish community began in the late 1980s, first by independent organizations, which included very few social communal welfare structures. (Jewish religious communities, where the *tsadaka* (charity) tradition was never terminated, are excluded.)

In 1991, on the eve of the collapse of the USSR, the first indications of a growing economic crisis and up-coming financial reform became evident, and the prospects for social instability were obvious. The Jewish community in the USSR, due to its long-lasting negative historical experience in that country, was the first to react to the socioeconomic situation. The first communal charity centers were opened in Kiev and Chernovtsy in spring 1991, and already at that time included food and home-care aid. The establishment and development of the communal social welfare infrastructure was predominantly based on self-funding and volunteer work. Jewish religious communities and their (mainly foreign) rabbis initiated a number of communal aid centers in large Jewish population centers (i.e., Kiev, Odessa, Dnyepropetrovsk and Kharkiv).

Thus, the Rakhmim welfare organization was founded in Kiev in 1990. This group, headed by Faina Naiman, served more than 3,000 elderly Kiev Jews, mainly through the distribution of food parcels.¹³ This service provided a base for a wider social care system called Magen Avot, jointly created by the Association of Jewish Organizations and Communities (Va'ad) of Ukraine and the Association of Jewish Religious Communities of Ukraine in 1992. By 1996, the Magen Avot system worked permanently through its branches and affiliated structures in 48 Ukrainian cities, and in addition provided periodic aid in 175 other cities and villages, and thus served 55,000 older Ukrainian Jews. Beginning in 1993, the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (the JDC – known in Eastern Europe as the Joint) also gave very substantial financial aid and instructions to this system. In 1994-1999, for example, funds provided by the Joint covered about half the budget of the Ukrainian Va'ad charity projects.¹⁴

This system was decentralized. That is, there was minimal financial, professional and organizational involvement by the Va'ad management, on the one hand, and maximum involvement by local Jewish organizations and communities, on the other. However, despite successful organizational and fundraising efforts by Magen Avot leadership, it was unable to serve the whole Ukrainian Jewish community mainly due to limited internal financial sources. The same was true for Jewish charitable organizations in the CIS in general.

At the first large Jewish seminar in the former USSR, organized in August 1991, this author, on behalf of the Va'ad of Jewish organizations and communities in the USSR,¹⁵ stated his views regarding the future difficult social and economic situation to representatives of international Jewish organizations. The Jewish world reacted quickly. By December 1991, the Va'ad and JDC met in New York to discuss the social and economic problems of Jewish communities in the former USSR and ways that American Jewry could help. The JDC, which by that time had gained vast experience in the field of communal and social aid, became the main channel of this aid.

Providing solutions to the problems were difficult for two reasons. First, the Joint experience was mainly in countries substantially different from the former socialist countries of Eastern Europe. Secondly, the JDC was not represented through permanently established structures in Ukraine or in the CIS, thus making discussion of the problems difficult. Solutions were found through Joint organizational and financial support to communal charity programs run by the Ukrainian Va'ad, and by expanding this experience to other Jewish communities in the former USSR.

However, in the mid-1990s the JDC leadership suggested reorganizing the developing CIS communal social welfare system as a Chesed (charity) project. This meant the establishment of Joint-sponsored social welfare and charity centers in various Jewish population centers, which would partially absorb already existing Jewish charity organizations through JDC offices and with the help of JDC's professional management.

This idea conflicted with the decentralizing trend, and had both proponents and opponents. After long discussion, the concept of establishing a centralized system of social welfare, directed from abroad, was finally accepted in 1995. The financial basis for this program would be funds provided by the Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany (the Claims Conference) which began aid to Holocaust survivors in the CIS in 1995, through the Joint.

By 1995, two Chesed centers, in St. Petersburg, Russia and Dnyepropetrovsk, Ukraine were in place. These centers were seen as pilot projects for the development of a new social and welfare aid system. A similar organization – Turbota-Chesed Avot – was founded in Kiev in August 1995 with help from the local Jewish community. The Joint later discontinued most financing of local charitable Jewish structures while establishing Chesed centers in areas with substantial Jewish populations. In Ukraine, as in many other CIS states, existing social welfare organizations run by local Jewish religious communities in the large cities, as well as chapters of the Va'ad's Charity program in small Jewish population centers, were expected to provide a base for the Chesed project.

Most of the Jewish leaders either replied with enthusiasm or did not show any open opposition to these Joint-sponsored plans because their organizational and financial resources were limited. However, in Ukraine the idea of dissolving the communal charity infrastructure faced heavy opposition from the founders of this infrastructure, people from the main umbrella organizations of local Jewry. The directors of Joint's CIS department in Jerusalem thought that the changes would bring professionalism and optimization to the social aid services in the CIS. Ukrainian Jewish leaders argued that the Joint social aid system would alienate the local Jewish community from one of its basic functions – social aid for those in need.

The long and difficult negotiations between the leaders of the Magen Avot communal charity service (the chief rabbi of Ukraine and Kiev Ya'akov Bleich and this author) and administrators of Joint CIS projects were held in December 1995 in Jerusalem in order to resolve this conflict. According to the compromise agreement that was reached, the Ukrainian territory was divided up between the communal Charity-Magen Avot and CIS-sponsored Chesed services. Eight western regions of Ukraine became the domain of the Charity program, which continued to get financial aid from the AJJDC. In the rest of Ukraine, Jewish community charity centers were transferred to the Joint in order to establish Chesed projects. (Magen Avot could also operate in these areas too.)

The years following saw confrontations between the Joint-sponsored Chesed system and the AJOCU and AJRCU-sponsored Magen Avot association. These confrontations were in two areas. The first was the struggle for funds for communal welfare projects. The second was competition between the Cheseds and communal Charity systems as to which most adequately represents the authentic interests of the local Jewish community, in social welfare and other spheres of life.

Concerning the new relationship with the Joint, Ukrainian Jewish leaders took steps to find alternative sources of funds for the Charity organization. Firstly, Magen Avot was decentralized with more power and autonomy transferred to its provincial branches. Secondly, in addition to the Joint, international foundations were approached for social welfare funding. Third, Ukrainian Jews living abroad were made aware of the difficult economic situation of their former fellow-countrymen. Finally, community leaders looked for Ukrainian Jewish businessmen, or people doing their business in the republic, who could support communal social institutions.

The welfare demands of the Ukrainian Jewish community grew tremendously, and the market of donations was and is very limited. Thus, the area of fundraising for charity programs became a battleground for two welfare systems. In October 1999, the Joint finally ceased its centralized support of Charity-Magen Avot. As a result its budget decreased by half, and the share of independently raised finances grew from 22 to 76 percent of the budget.¹⁶

Magen Avot survived, but lost most of its active representation in Ukrainian areas. An attempt to find a financial substitute for these losses brought about a new confrontation with foreign Jewish services. At the end of 1999, the Va'ad of Ukraine applied to the Dutch Holocaust fund, suggesting a number of welfare and other communal projects, and requesting around \$1/2 million. The same fund had earlier received a similar application from the Joint for about \$5 million. In this case, the Joint and B'nai B'rith were given the funding.

Attempts to resolve the conflicts between local communal elites and the Joint brought about the development of several organizational patterns (or models). In some cases Ukrainian Jewish municipal communities became formal founders of the Chesed centers in their respective cities. In this case the leader of a local community often became the Chesed director in many of the small towns, or the Chesed chairman of the board, in the larger towns. In other cases, the Joint preferred its own participation among the founders, and/or began combined funding with private persons (as it was in the city of Sumy). Finally, small local organizations which had never or almost never before been involved in social work were often invited to become founders (Chernovtsy). Gradually, due to the above-described tendencies and for other reasons, conflicts emerged between community leaders and local Joint representatives (i.e., in Kiev, Simferopol, Kharkov, Sumy, Poltava, Berdyansk).

In general, the results of a six-year competition between local and foreign structures in the sphere of Jewish social services are obvious. The Chesed system was created and now includes about 120 city and provincial centers in the CIS, more than half (62) in Ukraine alone.¹⁷ In August 1999, their clients in Ukraine numbered approximately 100,000. The general budget (not including internal fundraising) in the Chesed system in 2000 was about \$20 million.¹⁸ Each of the Chesed centers offers from 10 to 20 programs, including material aid, cultural, medical and other programs, as well as programs to ease the social isolation of the elderly. In contrast, the Magen Avot organization has diminished in size, now serving only 5,000 people. However, the competition between the systems continues.

Controlled Community: The Chesed System on the Threshold of a New Century

No one who comes across the work of the Chesed centers can remain indifferent to what can be seen there. Its professional level, as well as the number and quality of its programs, impresses even professionals. Due to Chesed, tens of thousands of people were rescued from starvation. They now receive medical, technical and other kinds of support, and they so longer feel alone. Even those leaders of community structures whose relations with the Joint are not simple

(including this author) must give credit to the Joint for providing social services to the Jews of Ukraine through the establishment of the Chesed centers.

Numerical Indicators of the Chesed System

Qualitative estimation of the Chesed system's activities in Ukraine became possible due to questionnaires distributed by this author. These were filled out by representatives of the majority of Chesed centers who were participants in the meeting of the Coordination Council of Chesed-Ukraine, which took place in August 1999 in Sevastopol, and February 2001 in Odessa. During analysis of the data, which included additional information from various sources,¹⁹ a number of factors had to be faced.

Firstly, the Chesed system is developing in a very dynamic manner, thus causing much data to become outdated. Secondly, the directors of Chesed mainly work with elderly people, so they see communities from the viewpoint of a social protection body. They generally do not see the able-bodied Jewish population that never turns to Chesed for help, or children and teenagers. Thirdly, in addition, there is a subconscious, and sometimes even a conscious, tendency to exaggerate the number of Jews in their community. Finally, due to corporate interests, not all Chesed directors were ready to share internal information on their services. However, the data that we were able to obtain appears to correspond with reality.

Ukrainian Jewry is currently served by more than 60 Chesed centers. According to the evaluation of their managers, the Jewish population in Ukraine, which meets the criteria of the Israeli Law of Return (i.e., ethnic Jews, their children, grandchildren, as well as other family members with no regard to their ethnic origin), is around 440,000 persons. This calculation approximately corresponds to other existing evaluations of the Jewish community of Ukraine. The number of clients of the Chesed system in mid-2001 was 106,596.

There are three types of Ukrainian areas, identified by the characteristics of their Jewish population. This identification was accomplished by looking at the number of Jews in these Ukrainian regions, which vary between 830 in Ternopol and 90,000 in Kiev, and the number of clients of Chesed (from 320 to 16,500, respectively).

The first group includes Vinnitsa, Zhitomir, Trans-Carpathia, Ivano-Frankovsk, Lvov, Rovno, Ternopol, Chmelnytski, Cherkassy, and Chernigov regions in central and north-western Ukraine. From a socioeconomic viewpoint, these regions have a high level of unemployment and many businesses are standing idle. Their Jewish population is small as a result of the Holocaust and significant emigration, and is mainly elderly. Consequently, the percentage of Chesed clients here is high – from 37 percent in the Volyn region to 66 percent in the Zhitomir area. This difference may be explained by the fact that in some western regions, Chesed centers opened in recent years, and one cannot exclude the possibility that, with time, the gap will narrow.²⁰

The second group includes Dnyepropetrovsk, Donetsk, Zaporozhie, Kiev, Lugansk, Nikolayev, Odessa, Kharkov, and Kherson regions, which are located in central, southern and southeastern Ukraine. In these regions there are many more functioning businesses and a lower unemployment rate. They still have a large but more assimilated Jewish population, as a result of somewhat smaller losses during the Holocaust. Emigration from this area began later than from the western parts of Ukraine, and because of this and other reasons, the demographic picture of the Jewish community looks better. The percentage of clients served by local Jewish charity groups is between 17 percent in the Nikolayev region and 26 percent in Kherson. However, due to the large cities in this region, the search for clients is more complicated and is not yet finished.

The third group includes Kirovograd, Crimea, Poltava, and Sumy regions with a medium-size Jewish population. The percentage of clients varies from 25 percent (Poltava region) to 42 percent (Kirovograd region).

It is possible that in three or four years, when the activities of the Chesed centers stabilize, the final number of clients will reach 120,000-130,000. The number of the Jewish population will be more accurate after the all-Ukraine census, and the above-described groups of regions will be more definite according to a whole number of parameters. Thus, more people will meet the criteria of the welfare activities of the Ukrainian Jewish community described below.

The Charitable Activities of the Chesed Funds

From the end of the 1980s the main charitable aid in Jewish communities was through food parcels. Since 1993, due to support from the Joint, the Chesed program annually distributes about 600,000 parcels, an average of 6 parcels per client a year. As a rule, all clients are split into two or three groups, depending on criteria set by the Joint and the "Claims Conference." The extremely needy (20-30 percent) in many cities receive monthly parcels. Almost every client receives parcels on the Jewish holidays – three to four times a year. In recent years, in order to save money, the Joint has decided that a client could receive either a parcel or a hot meal, not both.

Soup kitchens are one source of hot meals. In most Ukrainian Jewish population centers, between 10 and 25 percent of needy clients receive hot meals. Despite the great expense, this program has a number of advantages, such as encouraging physical movement and social interaction among the older clients.

Besides food parcels and soup kitchens, Chesed funds also provide "meals on wheels" (meals delivered to private homes and distant and small Jewish population centers) and "warm homes" (socializing centers for elderly and single Jews). The Chesed system decides how to distribute the resources of food aid provided by the centers. However, Social Services directors, taking into account the financial situation and other factors, may consider another scheme of distribution of available recourses.

Preventive care and medical assistance are also vitally important forms of aid, which approximately every tenth client needs. The number of clients for this type of assistance is around 10,500.

At the moment, the Ukrainian Jewish population is served by more than 2,000 caregivers. There are two forms of regular prophylactic and medical attendance provided by the Chesed system, both full and partial, which is determined by the number of clients under the auspices of a caregiver. Apart from their direct functions (cooking meals, feeding, cleaning the house, washing), these caregivers fill a social function for the older client – they read together, go for a walk, and engage in discussions with them. At the beginning of the 1990s, the first representatives of the Joint in Ukraine were surprised to see local communities in some cities providing preventive care and medical assistance as well as food packages. That is why it is no coincidence that in 1994-1995, the first Chesed centers, which grew from community social services, paid a lot of attention to this program.

The need for medicine is even greater, since almost none of the Chesed clients are able to provide for themselves. According to this author's poll, around 200,000 members of the Jewish communities of Ukraine need medication (twice as many as the general number of clients), while only 44,000 actually get medical aid from their communities. The minimal need is for \$25 a year/person, so this is unlikely to happen in the near future. Thus, only the category of the extremely needy receives free medicine from the Joint in most of the cities of Ukraine now, but even their needs are only partially met. Since 2001, the Joint is planning to channel money to this program from the Swiss Foundation, which is expected to somewhat improve the situation.

Other forms of Chesed welfare activities in Ukraine and the CIS include "winter aid" – fuel, warm clothes, blankets, and heaters; medical services; the "Moked La-Kashish" program (repair of apartments and household appliances for the elderly).

Workers and Volunteers

The major work of the Chesed centers is done by two groups of activists – staff and volunteers. The number of staff workers in the CIS Chesed centers is substantially higher than in Israeli and Western social aid systems, where volunteers conduct most of the complicated work. The reason is that the high unemployment rate and low average salaries in the CIS creates the possibility to organize a greater number of professionals for work in the Chesed system with relatively lower costs. As a result, in Ukraine, one staff worker of the Chesed system is in charge of 30 clients, while another is in charge of 20 clients. On the one hand, it solves the problem of increasing the professional level, diligence, and discipline of the staff, while, on the other hand, the excessive red tape of the system also increases, helping to turn it into a professional-bureaucratic structure.

Since the mid-1990s, the JDC "Bancher" seminars system and the Institutes of Community and Social Workers with their branches in St. Petersburg, Kiev, Dniepropetrovsk and Kishinev, became main centers for the recruitment, training, and selection of the Jewish professional staff and volunteers for "Chesed."

Financial Aspects of the "Chesed" System

As was mentioned previously, the Joint contributes about \$20 million yearly to meet the social needs of Jews in Ukraine. Around two-thirds of this sum is donated by the Claims Conference, which receives money from the German government in the form of compensation for Jewish property stolen during the Holocaust. The rest of the funds come from the UJA (United Jewish Appeal-U.S.), WJR (World Jewish Relief-Great Britain), the Weinberg Family Fund and other funds. Under direct distribution, each client would receive around \$200 a year.

At the same time, there is a sort of geographical disproportion in the distribution of aid money, which is not always relevant to the number of clients. Thus, according to available data, while in 1998 the average amount of funds that were allocated for one "Chesed" client in Ukraine was around \$200 a year, in Kiev it was more than \$200, in the Kiev region – around \$130, in the Odessa region – around \$80, in the Dnyepropetrovsk region – around \$60, in the Kharkov sub-region – around \$50, and in the western region – around \$30. The least amount went to the Ternopol region, where the Joint spent around \$8 a year per client.²¹

If one takes into account the fact that government pensions to clients of the communal charity funds is \$150-180 a year, even with equal and total distribution of available social welfare funds, that would give to those in need an income less than the cost of living (\$480 a year in 2000). In fact, the funds that actually reach the clients are even smaller, since the Chesed program forbids any direct financial support, and thus funds are invested in charitable programs, which also require the building of infrastructures and the training of professionals. Chesed service donors are also ready to put up with substantial administrative expenses because the increasing role of its bureaucratic component seems like a guarantee for its professional effectiveness and a barrier against corruption among the management and personnel.

All this explains a number of shortcomings in the functioning of the Chesed and other CIS Jewish communal funds. First of all, together with the constant lack of funding, many Chesed centers, due to over-bureaucratized planning, paradoxically often have a proficient budget (in some cases close to 10 percent of the allocated funds).²² Secondly, fundraising endeavors often demand that Chesed decision-makers give priority to impressive, but expensive, projects. The prestigious and expensive Chesed building in Kiev is a good example of this.

Chesed Communal Centers

During the five years after the establishment of the first Chesed centers, they proved themselves to be effective and professional institutions able to meet the many welfare needs of local Jewry. However, the Chesed centers created by the Joint in parallel or even in competition with indigenous Jewish groups and their elites, in the majority of places, were unable to become fully communal institutions. To fill this gap, it was decided to create community programs and

community centers under the Chesed organization.

The principles of this new program were: "Community, Volunteers, Yiddishkeit." Thus, the major aim of these centers is to provide cultural, educational and other services besides the welfare ones, and to work with those Jews who were not cared for by the welfare centers (i.e., youth and middle-aged). After receiving funds from sponsors for the new network of community centers project, the Joint put them together with the funds for social programs.

By the late 1990s a network of JDC-sponsored community centers in a dozen CIS cities was created, often with no connection or coordination with the existing local communities. In fact, these community programs can be regarded as "new communities." As a result, some of the local communal elite saw it as a step to expanding the power of foreign Jewish structures at the expense of the local one. It was regarded in the same way as when their Jewish education functions by the Ministry of Education of Israel, and their youth activities by the Sochnut.²³ According to these activists, local Jewish communities, which include synagogues, schools, societies, clubs, and social centers, which were created independently by the Jews of Ukraine, even with assistance from abroad, today are almost uninvolved in the most important aspects of the Chesed organization – decision-making and financing the system.

Chesed-based JDC-sponsored communities suggest a new model for community building, different from the hundred-year tradition of East European Jewry, when community life centered on the synagogue. It is also different from the experience of the first years of Jewish revival in the former USSR, when the communities were built from the bottom up, in an attempt to meet the new problems and needs, and usually consolidated around Jewish schools and other local organizations. The new community focuses on service functions, thus became a well-functioning enterprise of social services, brought to Ukraine from abroad.

The attempts to formalize and legalize the communal idea at the national level were done through the founding of Chesed organizations. One of them was the Coordination Council of Chesed-Ukraine. This author first suggested this in spring 1996 at one of the first meetings of the Board of Trustees of the Kiev-based Chesed-Avot. The idea was again vocalized two years later, this time on behalf of the chairman of the Board of Trustees of the Chernigov Chesed. In September 1998, a constituent meeting of what was later called the Coordination Council of Chesed-Ukraine took place in Kiev.

Another idea was to create an all-Ukrainian Jewish communal organization, which could serve as the political wing of Chesed and thus compete with local Jewish umbrella organizations such as the Association of Jewish Organizations and Communities of Ukraine and the Ukrainian Jewish Congress. This idea, first expressed in 2001, has not been implemented.

Crisis of the System and Attempts at Overcoming It

More than half a decade of operation of the Chesed program in Ukraine has showed unmistakable success in rescuing thousands of people from starvation, cold, sickness, and loneliness. However, a crisis occurred at the end of the last decade, a fact acknowledged by the founder of the Chesed program, Dr. Amos Avgar, at the August 1999 Sebastopol convention of the Coordination Council of Chesed-Ukraine.²⁴

According to Dr. Avgar, there were two main components of this crisis. First of all, there are the financial problems of the JDC-sponsored social welfare structure in the CIS. Ten years ago nobody was able to predict that social welfare in the community would devour so much money, and that the socioeconomic crisis would turn out to be so vast and permanent. Therefore, the Joint is facing the difficult problem of raising at least \$40-50 million in the Jewish world and investing it in the Chesed-CIS program alone (not counting all other programs). In order to reach the optimal level of functioning, the system needs three or four times as much money. Despite JDC experience in fundraising, this problem is almost unsolvable, especially in light of the fact that the main donor to the Chesed system – the Claims Conference – has begun to cut back its funding.

The second negative factor lies with the system's administration. Almost 120 Chesed centers are managed from Jerusalem. There are local representatives of the Joint and leaders of Chesed centers, but their authority is limited. The Chesed centers are located in unstable countries, with various socioeconomic and political peculiarities, often under corrupt and unreliable local officials, which make it very difficult for the Israeli Joint representatives to run the Chesed system. Over the past year, the administrative staff in the Israel department of the Joint has increased, making it a heavy burden on the budget.

In order to partially solve the financial problems of the Joint, an old idea was discussed of asking local businessmen to fund social programs. However, this author has seen no examples of permanent cooperation between local businessmen and Chesed centers. Sometimes businessmen would assist the Chesed centers in Dnyepropetrovsk, Donetsk, Odessa, Lugansk, and Kiev, but they are not willing to risk permanent cooperation.

There are at least three reasons for this. First of all, local businessmen can give little compared to the Joint, and thus their role would go unnoticed. Secondly, high overhead, including the salaries of many Chesed workers, which makes local Jewish businessmen think that foreign Jewish organizations do not consider saving money, makes the endeavor unattractive to them. Finally, the role of the board of trustees of the Chesed centers in the decision-making is usually very insignificant, which makes them unattractive to businessmen.

As a way of overcoming the problems with management it was proposed to strengthen the independence of Chesed centers. To do this, the role of the boards of trustees had to be increased. They must be delegated some planning functions and given a decision-making role. However, this transfer of authority would mean the breakup of the organization's management unity, a problem that has yet to be solved.

More than two years have passed since that Sebastopol convention, and the Chesed system remains in continuous crisis and even though the system is operating; the problems are accumulating, while the reform proposals have not been implemented.

Conclusions and Suggestions

The Joint has more or less finished setting up the Chesed system. This system is operating well enough, helping thousands of Jews in Ukraine to survive this hard transitional period. The dominant role the Joint has played in creating the Chesed system cannot be overestimated and it will continue to do so in the foreseeable future.

Although the Joint does dominate the social welfare scene in Ukraine, it has not entirely monopolized the field. The communities of Ukraine, mostly in western Ukraine, have managed to preserve some community social structures (in Trans-Carpathian, Bukovina, and Galicia), which, after changes were made in sources of funding, continue to actively function and compete with the Chesed centers. It is difficult to imagine that the Joint will organize fundraising for social programs in the CIS at a level significantly higher than today's, leaving the annual budget with a deficit of \$100-120 million.

Cardinal changes in the existing system and its transformation into self-administration and self-funding requires serious measures, which the Joint will never take on its own. There is no doubt that within the next few years or decades, it will be impossible to raise more than 20-30 percent of the funds necessary for the social programs. Thus, the outside factor remains dominant in the financing – that is, support from various Jewish funds and organizations.

A suggested way out of the crisis would be for the Joint, together with local Jewish communities, to take the following measures over the next three-five years:

1. Decentralization of the Chesed system.
2. Transfer of Chesed centers to the local communities, or creation of an independent social service, like in Germany.
3. Training and transfer of fundraising functions to the new system, but with its mandatory decentralization.
4. Assistance in establishing and developing direct links between the Jewish communities of Ukraine (or social structures) and the Jewish communities of the United States and other countries, including inter-community fundraising.
5. The establishment of Chesed boards of competent, independent (including financially), and energetic representatives of the Jewish communities of Ukraine.

The independent Jewish movement in the CIS is far from ideal, and other forms of Jewish communal social security structures are possible. In any case, only practical work will decide the winner in this competition.

* * *

Notes

1. *National Structure of the Ukrainian Population, According to the 1989 All-Union Population Census, Part 1* (Kiev, 1991), p. 19 (Ukrainian).
2. The Israeli Law of Return gives the right of repatriation to Israel to every person, who might have been a potential victim of the Holocaust, according to the Nuremberg Laws of Nazi Germany. Thus, the right for Israeli citizenship is reserved for Jews (meaning persons born to a Jewish mother, or those who have converted to Judaism), as well as to their spouses and descendants up to the third generation.
3. A. Sinelnikov, "Nekotory'e demograficheskie posledstviya assilyazii evreev v SSSR," *Vestnik Evreiskogo universiteta v Moskve*, (Moscow-Jerusalem) 1994, no. 1 (5), p. 95; and Mark Kupovetsky, "Evrei na territorii byvshego SSSR: sovremennaya etnodemograficheskaya situatsiya, in Problemy suschestvovaniya v diaspore. Materialy Seminara," Moscow, 21-23 April 2000, p. 126. It should be taken into account that not all demographers accept Kupovetsky's approach. For instance, Mark Tolts, a leading demographer of post-Soviet Jewry argues that Kupovetsky's data is considerably overestimated. According to Tolts, the enlarged Jewish population of Ukraine in 1989 was 659,500 people. See Mark Tolts, "Demographic Trends Among the Jews in the Three Slavic Republics of the Former USSR: A Comparative Analysis," in Sergio DellaPergola and Judith Even, eds., *Papers in Jewish Demography, 1993* (Jerusalem: Institute of Contemporary Jewry, 1997), p. 165.
4. *The Jewish Agency for Israel, The FSU Department: Aliya from the FSU* (Jerusalem: JAFI, 2001), pp. 3-6.
5. For a detailed calculation, see Yosef Zissels, "Development of Community Process in Ukraine." Paper presented at the 2nd International Conference on Personal Absorption, Herzliya, November 1999.
6. *Goskomstat Ukra'inu* [State Committee for Statistics of Ukraine] *Annual Abstract of Statistics, 1997* (Kiev: Goskomstat, 1997).
7. Mark Tolts, "Demographic Trends," p. 165.
8. Amos Avgar, Nadia Zinger and Maria Olesina, *Dostupnost socialnykh i meditsinskikh uslug pozhilomu evr naseleniu SNG* [Accessibility of the social and medical services for the CIS elder population] (St. Petersburg: IOSR, 1997).
9. Each representative sample included more than 1,800 respondents. See Natalia Panina and Evhen Holovakha, *Tendentsii rozvytku Ukraïns'koho suspil'stva, 1994-1998* [Trends in the Development of Ukrainian Society in 1994-1998] (Kiev: Institute of Social Studies of NAN, 1999).
10. The FSU Jewish welfare services currently use the criteria of the Conference of Jewish Claims against Germany (the Claims Conference), which is the major donor to Jewish welfare structures in Eastern Europe.
11. Yosef Zissels, "Sotsialnaia zashchita evreiskoi obshchine Ukrainy" [Social Security Jewish Community of Ukraine], in Yosef Zissels, ed., *Sotsial'naia zashchita v natsional'nykh obshchinakh Ukrainy* (Kiev: KIJS, 1999), pp. 20-23.
12. Coordination Council of Chesed-Ukraine. Minutes of Meeting, Sebastopol, 18-19 August 1999.
13. Author's interview with Faina Naiman, Kiev, January 1992.

14. Ukrainian Jewish Va'ad. Report of the Magen Avot Charity Service, 1993 (Kiev, 1994), p. 1.
15. The Va'ad of Jewish Organizations and Communities was organized at its all-USSR constitutional meeting in December 1989. Samuel Zilber, Michail Chlenov and this author became co-chairmen of the organization. For details, see Vladimir Khanin's and Eugene Satanovsky's articles in this issue.
16. *Ukrainian Jewish Va'ad: The Community Report, 1999*. Kiev, 2000, pp. 3-6.
17. Interviews with directors of Ukrainian Chesed Centers, February 2001.
18. Calculated according to the Claims Conference, *Annual Report, 2000* (New York, 2001), and the interviews.
19. *Evreiskoie blagotvoritel'noie dvizhenie v SNG* [Charitable Movement in the CIS] (St. Petersburg: JDC, 1999).
20. The Chernovtsy region should relate to the same group, however the percentage of those served by the local Chesed is much lower than in other Ukrainian cities with the same Jewish population. The reason may be as follows: the leadership of the Jewish community and its Chesed center are either exaggerating the number of the Jewish population in this region or have yet to find all of its clients.
21. Under the impact of the Va'ad of Ukraine, in the beginning of 2000, Dr. Amos Avgar declared the JDS's decision to equalize the funding of different regions.
22. This data was obtained through interviews with Chesed officials.
23. See Eugene Satanovsky's article in this volume.
24. Coordination Council of Chesed-Ukraine. Minutes of Meeting, Sebastopol, 18-19 August 1999.

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