

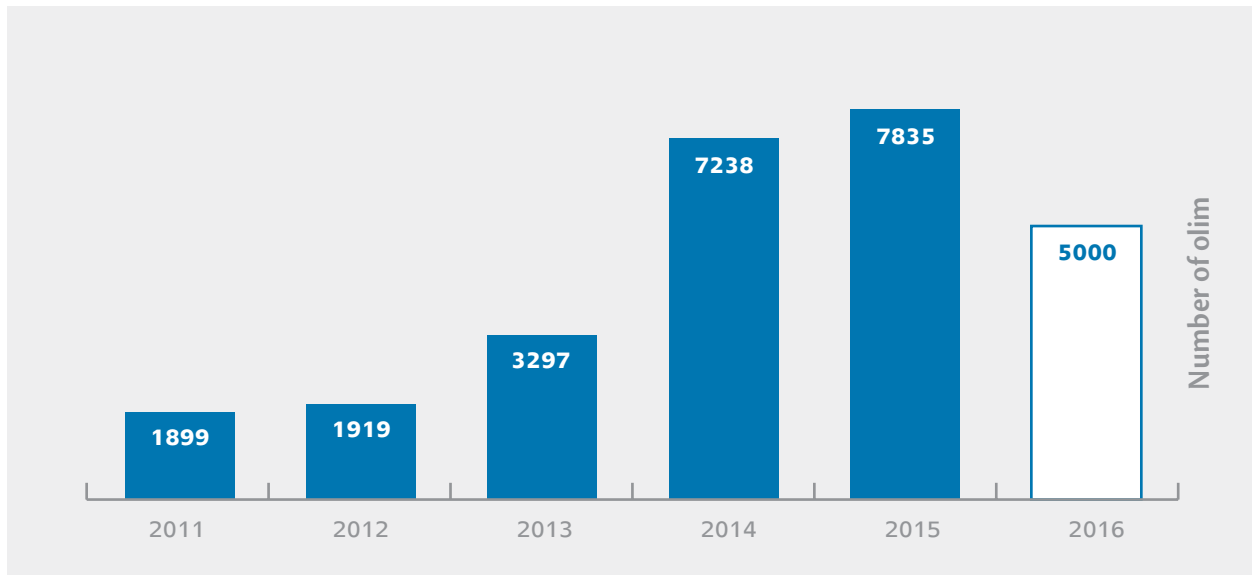


French Aliyah: Governmental Efforts and Recommendations for Realizing the Full Potential

In the wake of the January 2015 terrorist attacks on the Charlie Hebdo satirical weekly and the Porte de Vincennes kosher supermarket, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu accompanied French President François Hollande on a visit to the Grand Synagogue of Paris, where a memorial gathering was held for the victims of the attack. Speaking in the presence of senior French government officials and key Jewish community leaders, Netanyahu referred to Israel as "the home of all of us" and said that "any Jew who wishes to immigrate to Israel will be welcomed with open arms and a warm and accepting heart."¹

The reassuring speech did not fall on deaf ears: the Israeli Prime Minister's assurance that French Jewry could regard the Jewish state as a safe harbor in case of need was met with thunderous applause, and an official plan to encourage French Aliyah soon followed. In light of recent economic, demographic, and political upheavals in France, and in the shadow of intensifying anti-Semitism and terrorism, a significant number of French Jews now regard Aliyah as a real option, and the prime minister's statement as an invitation, even a State commitment, to assist them in the immigration and absorption process.

Downturn in the pace of immigration from France, despite increased efforts to encourage Aliyah



Source: The Jewish Agency for Israel (number of olim, including those changing status while in Israel)

The 2016 forecast presupposes stability in the pace of Aliyah over the course of the year.

Successful absorption is the key to encouraging Aliyah

Over the past decade, and especially during the past three years, interest in Aliyah among French Jews has grown. The Israeli government, which identified this trend, has passed four government resolutions on this issue: resolutions 1736 and 1737 (June 22, 2014); Resolution 2225 (November 23, 2015); and Resolution 2446 (February 15, 2015). The latter was accompanied by a NIS 180 million budgetary commitment to encourage Aliyah from France, Belgium and the Ukraine.² The governmental intervention encompassed four complementary measures: (1) encouraging Aliyah; (2) establishing a committee to remove

bureaucratic barriers, including those pertaining to professional licensing and registration; (3) improving the absorption process; and (4) creating an independent public benefit corporation to coordinate the efforts.

Implementation of these resolutions substantially raised immigrant numbers: from 3,297 in 2013 to 7,835 in 2015. This increase was largely made possible by the effective cooperation of the Ministry of Immigrant Absorption, the Jewish Agency for Israel, and the World Zionist Organization, and coordination with other government entities. However, the jump in French Aliyah was short-lived; despite the efforts of the Israeli government and other relevant bodies, there has been a slowdown in the first eight

months of 2016: 3,452 olim compared to 5,930 during the first eight months of 2015. Should this trend continue, 2016 will witness a 40 percent decline in French immigrant numbers compared to 2015.

The reason for this slowdown is not entirely clear, but a number of possibilities have been raised: (1) The French prime minister's commitment to protect the community, and the measures taken to contain anti-Semitism; (2) Diminished ideology-based Aliyah (i.e., those most committed to the Zionist idea have already immigrated to Israel); (3) Increased terrorism and a weaker sense of personal security in Israel.

Conversations with Aliyah candidates and shlichim (emissaries) working with them pointed to yet another factor behind the slowdown: a sense of disappointment with the Israeli absorption system. French Jews considering Aliyah, fear a fate similar to that endured by some of their relatives. A chief concern is that they will find it difficult to work in their chosen fields, or to earn at the level to which they have become accustomed. For these reasons some French Jews are delaying Aliyah, or even moving to countries other than Israel.

An in-depth assessment of the situation reveals that once the initial absorption period in Israel has ended, along with its accompanying support and guidance structures, many new immigrants are left feeling that their Hebrew is inadequate, that they face barriers to suitable employment, and that their children have trouble making their way in the Israeli school system. The sense of disappointment is reflected in the fact that, for the first time in the

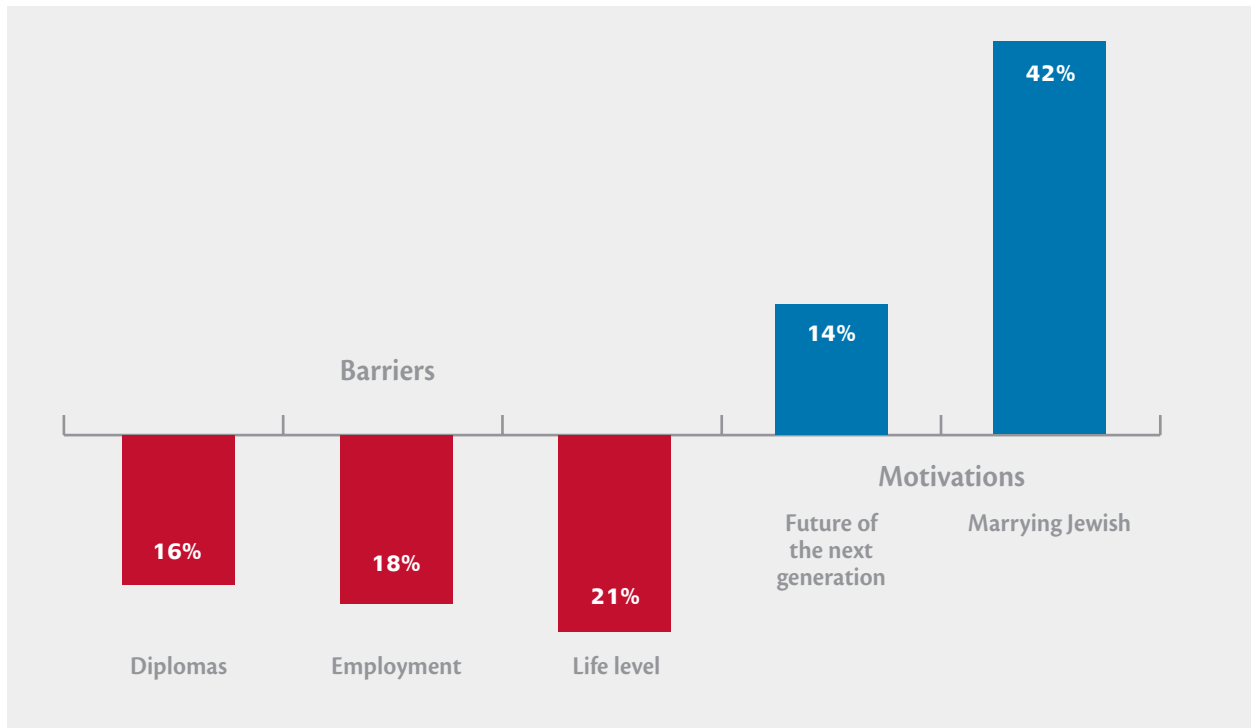
history of French Aliyah, immigrants have started organizing under an umbrella organization. The organization, called Qualita, aims to raise Israeli public awareness of the difficulties and obstacles faced by French olim and to call attention to areas where state intervention is urgently needed.³

Assessing the potential: 200,000 French Jews are considering immigration to Israel

In January 2016, the findings of two in-depth studies of French Jews' desire to immigrate to Israel were published. One study was conducted by the survey institute IFOP, the other by a competing firm, IPSOS.⁴ Although they used different methodologies, both studies indicate that many French Jews feel threatened in the country of their birth and are seriously thinking about leaving. Of the half-million Jews currently living in France, 40 percent are considering the possibility of moving to Israel.⁵

Based on these survey findings, the Aliyah slowdown does not necessarily indicate that the pool of French Jewish Aliyah candidates has "dried up" or that interest in immigration has lessened. Rather, it likely indicates the existence of delaying factors that have yet to be addressed. If this is the case, then actualizing the untapped French Aliyah potential will require efforts of a different kind, suited to the challenges of this new target population.

Motivations and Barriers among Adults without Children



Motivations and Barriers among Adults with Children

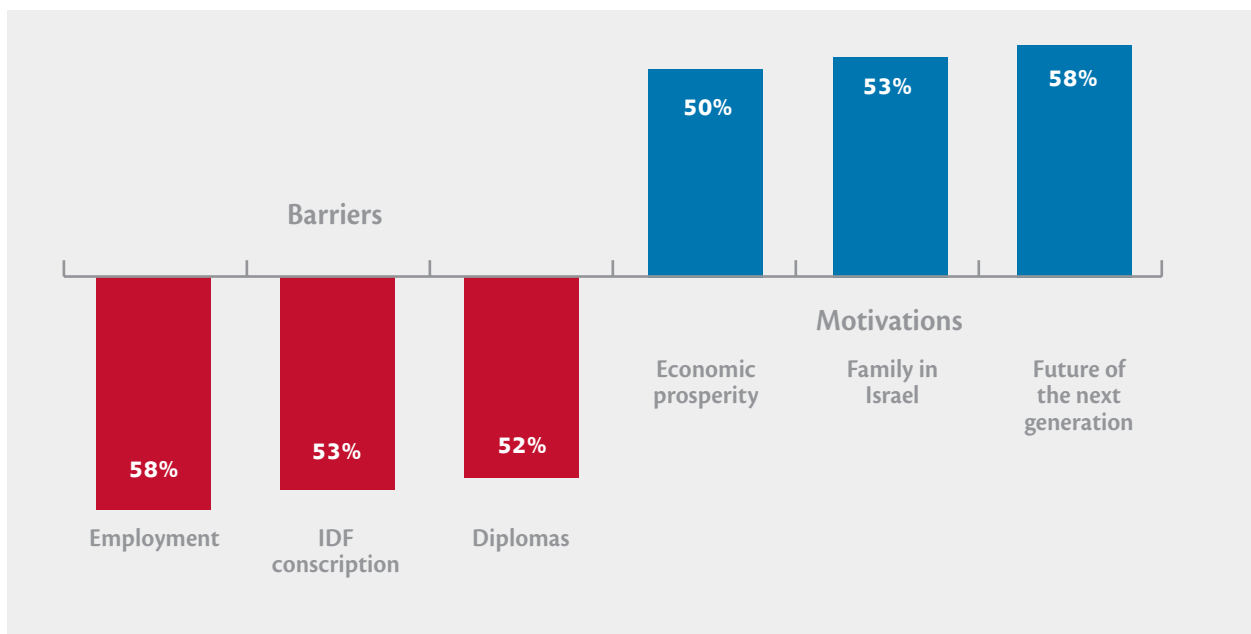


Table 1: Estimated Number of French Jews Seriously Considering or Interested in Emigration

(In parentheses: percentage of the entire Jewish community)

Survey institute	Considering Aliyah to Israel		Considering emigration but not to Israel	
	IFOP	IPSOS	IFOP	IPSOS
Seriously considering emigration	65,000 (13%)	90,000 (18%)	95,000 (19%)	75,000 (15%)
Total interested in emigration	215,000 (43%)	175,000 (35%)	255,000 (51%)	200,000 (40%)

Socio-cultural profile of French olim

Half of the immigrants arriving in Israel from France in 2014 had academic backgrounds (16 or more years of schooling); half of them were under the age of 34, while 29 percent were 24 or younger. This is a young and highly educated population capable of making an impressive contribution

to Israel's labor force in the coming years.⁶ In the economic sphere, a number of studies predict that investment in Aliyah from the West would justify itself within a year, and that such Aliyah could potentially make a significant contribution to Israel's economy (the value of the positive impact of 18,000 North American olim on the Israeli economy during the period 2002-2008 was over a billion shekels).

Table 2: Profile of Olim in Recent Years⁷

2014 data	France	Ukraine	Russia
16+ years of schooling	51%	52%	43%
Women	51%	53%	54%
Married men	74%	67%	66%
Married women	64%	60%	54%
Divorced women	6%	11%	13%
Widows	7%	9%	8%
Single-parent families	3%	5%	
Single seniors	11%	11%	
Young people to age 24	29%	6%	
Young adults to age 34	47%	22%	
Seniors above age 75	11%	30%	

Employment prospects and Aliyah

Thanks to an extensive publicity campaign by Jewish Agency and World Zionist Organization emissaries over the past two years, Aliyah has become a stronger presence in French public awareness, and many French Jews see it as a real option. Unlike immigrants from distressed countries who have compelling reasons to emigrate that often intensify over time, and in contrast to idealists motivated by a Zionist-pioneer ethos, the average *oleh* (immigrant) from an affluent country is unwilling to forego employment in the field for which s/he trained, or embark on an entirely new vocational training path at the bottom of the pay scale. The unique attributes of these potential *olim* differ from those of earlier immigration waves. In the past, most governmental effort was directed at highlighting Israel's advantages and encouraging Aliyah and providing initial absorption services (including teaching Hebrew in *ulpan* settings). Employment was relegated to the post-*ulpan* period.

In our view, accelerating the pace of immigration from France does not entail augmenting current Aliyah-management efforts. Nor is there a need for aggressive marketing campaigns or additional Aliyah fairs. What is needed is a response to the basic needs of employment, including degree recognition, professional training, job placement, and assistance in finding affordable housing.

Implementing government resolutions

Various initiatives sprang from government Aliyah resolutions. Some have been executed successfully, some have been implemented with only partial success, and others have not been implemented at all. On the basis of the Ministry of Immigrant Absorption directions and with ministry funding, the relevant agencies have worked to improve the array of pre-Aliyah processes: they have increased exposure to Israel, especially via the Taglit-Birthright Israel and MASA programs. French Taglit participant numbers rose from 103 in 2013 to 2,100 in 2015, thanks to efforts by the Ministry of Diaspora Affairs; BBB pilot trips for 12th graders increased their participant numbers from 1,200 to 1,500. MASA enrollment increased from 1,000 in 2013 to 1,400 young people in 2015 (80 percent of whom changed their status from tourist to *oleh* at the end of the program). These activities have been highly successful, and the bottleneck that emerged due to the threefold increase in Aliyah candidates has been handled satisfactorily.

The preparatory stage for Aliyah to Israel, implemented in the country of origin – a stage that was all but irrelevant for waves of immigration from distressed countries – requires special attention when the immigration is from affluent countries such as those of Western Europe and North America. Here, as well, the Israeli government is making significant investments: 25 new Hebrew *ulpan* classrooms have already been opened, with another 75 expected to open in the future; there is a concerted effort to make reliable

information on occupational licensing available in French (the option has been created of submitting documents to the occupational licensing committee before actually relocating to Israel); and several license exam preparation courses have been launched in France. Additionally, two employment counselors and an IDF representative who provides information to those subject to conscription have been posted in France.

Regarding the issue of degree recognition, several major successes have been achieved: French degrees in practical engineering and some degrees in para-medical fields have been granted automatic recognition. On March 26, 2016 a law was passed by the Knesset exempting dentistry degree holders from Western countries from the Israeli licensing exam.

In the sphere of absorption at the municipal level, the number of “proyektorim” (case managers who help families with initial absorption) has been increased from 7 in 2013 to 17 in 2016. We have no detailed information regarding French olim in particular, but for the group of olim from Ukraine, France, or Belgium – initial efforts have been made that have proven effective in terms of access to employment. The most prominent of these efforts were: two licensing courses in which 30 people participated; a job fair in which 700 families took part; employment counseling for over 1,000 people; the creation of 50 business models and business plans for immigrants who own businesses in their countries of origin; 131 feasibility studies for potential immigrant businesses; over 50 entrepreneurship conferences and workshops in Israel and abroad; the distribution of 700

vocational training vouchers, and 300 vouchers for Hebrew language study. It is important to note that in 2014, when French olim accounted for 24 percent of all immigrants, 1,071 employment vouchers were distributed to the entire immigrant population, but – mainly due to bureaucratic reasons – only 98 to French olim, that is, only 9.1 percent of the vouchers were allocated to French olim.

The Education Ministry allocated NIS 20 million (funded by the Ministry of Immigration and Absorption) underwrote six weekly hours of educational guidance for immigrant pupils during their first year in Israel; additionally, French-speaking mediators were assigned to improve communication between teachers and non-Hebrew-speaking parents. In Jerusalem and Ashdod, learning centers were established for immigrant pupils. Unsurprisingly, children of families living outside major immigrant concentration centers receive fewer services.

Additional efforts required in the employment sphere

Putting aside for the moment issues of occupational licensing (e.g., licensing procedures for pharmacists, nurses and investment consultants, as well as the component of Government Resolution 2225 that relates to reserved public service jobs), we can say that most elements of the government resolutions have been implemented successfully. The downturn in Aliyah is due to the fact that the resolutions focused mainly on encouraging Aliyah, while

absorption, especially its employment aspects, did not receive the attention it deserved. This eroded both the potential for Aliyah and the potential for absorption.

To preserve what has been achieved in terms of encouraging Aliyah and streamlining management of French immigrants' Aliyah files, it is urgent that the 2015 special budgetary allocation be renewed

for 2016 and 2017. However, if we are to realize the potential that Aliyah from France represents, we must also be prepared to undertake additional efforts – particularly in the employment sphere. Improving employment absorption entails an occupational guidance initiative (providing guidance, personal assistance, vocational counseling) as well as augmented placement services.

The Aliyah Continuum of Employment-Oriented Services



Employment and businesses

- **Relocating businesses.** To keep more affluent populations from emigrating to competing countries, and to ensure that Israel also reaps the benefits of a highly-skilled immigrant pool, we should encourage and prioritize entrepreneurs who choose to relocate a major portion of their commercial activity to Israel. Not only will bringing these entrepreneurs to Israel contribute economically to the state; it could also potentially create large numbers of

French-speaking workplaces for future olim from France.⁸

- **Special programs for occupations in high demand in Israel.** Structured employment programs should be launched similar to those designed in the past for engineers and physicians from the CIS. In coordination with Israeli employers interested in hiring their graduates, these programs would involve early identification in France and Belgium and initial training in Israel. Relevant occupations

include researchers in selected fields, specialist physicians, engineers, investment consultants, and more.

- **Vocational guidance centers.** In cities with large numbers of immigrants, it is advisable to establish vocational guidance centers that provide assessment, courses and training vouchers, and personal guidance and placement services. These centers should also be accessible to Aliyah candidates, prior to immigration.

Housing and Communal Life

- Addressing the employment problem without offering appropriate housing options only constitutes a partial solution. Enlarged mortgages of 90 percent should be permitted (like those available in the subsidized Mechir LaMishtachen housing program). Making absorption centers available to young families for their first three years in Israel is another appropriate solution for this population.
- **Relocating communities.** Efforts should be made to involve community rabbis in developing group Aliyah plans for members of their communities, in coordination with appropriate Israeli local authorities. Interested local authorities would offer special benefits, including land for synagogue construction and part-time jobs for community heads, as project managers or "spiritual absorption officers."

Conclusion

After several years of increase in French immigration, 2016 shows signs of a significant decline, despite the fact that 40 percent of French Jews say they are considering immigration to Israel (see Table 1 above).

The main barriers keeping potential immigrants from making Aliyah are related to employment, children's education, and housing. This document proposes ways of overcoming these three obstacles, and of easing immigrant absorption. The employment barrier can be minimized through a focused effort on vocational guidance and degree recognition even before the immigrant leaves his/her country of origin, as well as by initiating training and placement programs for French olim after arrival in Israel. Because the French olim are highly educated (half of all French immigrants have higher education, and half are under the age of 34), there is no question that such an investment would prove productive and worthwhile for the Israeli economy.

In recent years, the Israeli government has focused successfully on improving the administrative side of Aliyah, resulting in the immigration of 20,000 people over the past three years. Actualizing the Aliyah potential of tens of thousands of additional Jews will entail employment-focused initiatives and efforts, both in France and in Israel.

If Israel prepares itself to offer such services, it will be able, for the first time in the history of Zionism, to welcome a mass Aliyah of olim from affluent countries. This would be a historic breakthrough,

and would create an opportunity to test new mechanisms that may, in the future, foster large-scale immigration from other Western countries. The magnitude of this challenge requires a correspondingly monumental governmental effort.

Endnotes

1 "Any Jew who wishes to immigrate to Israel will be welcomed with open arms and warm and accepting hearts. They will not arrive in a foreign land but rather the land of our forefathers. God willing, they will come and many of you will come to the home of all of us." From: Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's remarks at the Grand Synagogue of Paris on January 11, 2015.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oTvQImWRvWA>

2 Government of Israel, Government Resolution No. 1736: <http://www.pmo.gov.il/Secretary/GovDecisions/2014/Pages/dec1736.aspx>

Government of Israel, Government Resolution No. 1737: <http://www.pmo.gov.il/Secretary/GovDecisions/2014/Pages/dec1737.aspx>

Government of Israel, Government Resolution No. 2225: <http://www.pmo.gov.il/SecretaryGovDecisions/2010/Pages/des2025.aspx>

Government of Israel, Government Resolution No. 2446: <http://www.pmo.gov.il/Secretary/GovDecisions/2015/Pages/des2446.aspx>

3 According to an as-yet-unpublished survey commissioned by Qualita (an umbrella organization for Francophone olim), French immigrants' level of satisfaction with Israeli employment-absorption services is low (3 on a scale of 10); most olim are interested in

vocational training and many are uninformed about the existence of training program vouchers.

4 Although the research findings may seem unrealistic (over 75% of French Jews are considering emigration) and inconsistent with current Aliyah rates, they nevertheless indicate uncertainty regarding destinations and the existence of a potentially significant pool of individuals eligible for Aliyah who are open to hearing about their options in Israel.

The IFOP study: http://www.ifop.fr/media/pressdocument/883-1-document_file.pdf.

The IPSOS study: <http://www.fondationjudaisme.org/wp-content/uploads/PRESENTATION-GLOBALE-ENQUETE.pdf>.

In 2012, 49% of French Jews expressed interest in emigrating due to concerns about personal security (per a study by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights): <http://fra.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/data-and-maps/survey-data-explorer-discrimination-and-hate-crime-against>

5 According to a position paper by Qualita (an umbrella organization for Francophone olim) that was submitted to Absorption Minister Ze'ev Elkin in May 2016.

6 Deloitte Information Technologies Israel Ltd. The Economic Impact of Nefesh B'Nefesh Aliyah on the State of Israel, October, 2009, p. 4.

7 Courtesy of Qualita.

8 On relocating companies from France and creating thousands of new workplaces suited to olim, see the Jewish People Policy Institute's innovative plan: <http://jppi.org.il/uploads/Plan%20for%20Immigration%20from%20France-En.pdf>