

DEMOGRAPHY: SOVIET UNION, THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION AND OTHER SUCCESSOR STATES

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Marriage and Divorce. Before World War II the Jewish marriage pattern was rather favorable for fertility. In 1939 one half of the Jewish women aged 20–24 and more than 70 percent of those aged 25–44 in the Russian Federation were currently married. However, in 1959, the percentage of currently married Jewish females below the age of 25 was much lower than it had been in pre-war 1939 (Table 1). This may be seen as an indirect indicator of the rise in age at first marriage between the two censuses, for which we have no direct data.

Table 1. Percentage Currently Married Among Jewish Women in the Russian Federation, According to Soviet Censuses, 1939–1989

Age group	1939(a)	1959(b)	1970	1979	1989
16–19	5.5 (c)	3.3	3.8 (c)	6.0	7.6
20–24	49.6	29.3	38.8	44.5	48.9
25–29	70.4	67.3	70.1	70.7	72.2
30–34	73.3	75.8	76.4	75.0	75.3
35–39	74.7	74.8	76.2	75.1	74.0
40–44	72.6	67.1	75.2	73.5	71.9
45–49	68.7	60.8	72.0	71.3	69.8
50–54	62.2	52.9	63.1	68.2	67.8
55–59	53.8	47.8	54.2	61.1	63.6
60–64	30.7 (d)	40.9	42.8	48.6	56.3
65–69	–	31.0	33.8	37.6	44.5
70+	–	14.9	19.2	18.7	18.5

(a) Including Crimea.

(b) Data did not cover some non-Ashkenazic Jews.

(c) 15–19

(d) 60 and over.

Moreover, in 1959 in the Russian Federation the proportion of currently-married Jewish females above age 40 was lower than it had been in 1939. This coincided with the unfavorable dynamics of sex ratios at these ages for the females in the Jewish population during this period. The data of the first post-war census of 1959 show a prevalence of females over the number of males among Jews in Russia in all age groups above 30. However, in 1970 Jewish males outnumbered Jewish females in all ages up to 45; in 1979 the number of males among Jews was higher than that of females in all ages up to 50, and by 1989 even up to 60. By 1989 the percentage of currently married among Jewish women of all fertile ages was about the same or even higher than in 1939. Thus, between 1959 and 1989 in the Russian Federation, the marriage dynamics were rather favorable for Jewish fertility.

Table 2. Mean age at First Marriage and Final Celibacy, Jewish Population in the Entire USSR and Three Slavic Republics, According to the 1989 Soviet census

Republics	Mean age at first marriage		Difference	Final celibacy (percentage) never-married at ages 45–49	
	Males	Females		Males	Females
Russian Federation	25.1	22.7	2.4	3.3	7.3
Ukraine	24.9	22.2	2.7	3.2	5.3
Belorussia	25.0	22.5	2.5	3.0	6.3
Entire USSR	25.0	22.2	2.8	3.1	6.0

Between 1959 and 1970 the proportion of currently married young Jewish females rose, from which we may conclude a decrease in age at first marriage. According to the 1979 census, in the Soviet Union the mean age at first marriage was 24.9 years for Jewish males and 22.7 years for Jewish females; the difference between these ages was only 2.2 years. During the next decade mean age at first marriage remained almost unchanged for Jewish males but decreased by 0.5 year for females. The three Slavic republics had somewhat similar patterns of first marriage in 1989 (Table 2). For Jewish females final celibacy (percentage never-married for 45–49 age group) was at medium level: in the entire USSR it was about 6 percent in 1979 and 1989.

In the USSR incidence of divorce was high among the Jewish population. In 1988–1989, there were 23.2 divorces per 1,000 married Jewish women in the Russian Federation—the highest level registered among this republic’s ethnic groups. In 1989 the percentages of currently divorced Jewish women in the USSR were higher in all age groups than in the total urban population. The highest percentages of currently divorced occurred among Jewish females under 45 in Ukraine and, for older ages, in the Russian Federation. Among the three Slavic republics these indicators were lowest in Belorussia (Table 3).

Table 3. Percentage of Currently Divorced of all Ever-Married Jewish Women in Selected Ages in the Entire USSR and Three Slavic Republics, According to the 1989 Soviet Census

Age group	Entire USSR	Russian Federation	Ukraine	Belorussia
20-24	6.9	7.0	7.9	6.8
25-29	10.7	10.4	12.5	8.7
30-34	13.3	13.0	15.3	11.2
35-39	15.9	16.1	17.2	13.7
40-44	18.1	18.4	19.5	15.9
45-49	17.6	18.9	18.0	15.7
50-54	16.1	18.2	15.6	13.6
55-59	12.8	15.4	—	—

Mixed Marriage and Its Consequences. In the postwar period one of the most characteristic features of Soviet Jewry was the great increase in mixed marriage. This increase was the continuation of a process which had already begun between the two world wars (see Table 4). Ethnically mixed marriages were widespread in the Soviet Union, and Jews were no exception among the relatively small and widely dispersed ethnic groups.

Table 4. Percentage of Mixed Marriages Among All Registered Marriages Involving Jews in the Russian Federation, Ukraine and Belorussia, According to Vital Statistics Data, 1924–1996

Year	Russian Federation		Ukraine		Belorussia	
	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females
1924	17	9	4	5	2	3
1926	25	17	5	6	2	4
1936	44(a)	35(a)	18(b)	16(b)	13	11
1978	59	43	45	34	38	26
1988	73	63	54	45	48	40
1996	–	–	82	74	–	–

(a) Data did not cover some non-Ashkenazic Jews.

(b) 1939.

In 1988–1989 in the Soviet Union as a whole, among Jews who married, 58 percent of males and 47 percent of females entered into mixed marriages. The share of mixed marriage was highest among divorced Jewish males (62 percent) and lowest among widowed Jewish females (34 percent). Among the Jews of the Soviet Union, those of the Russian Federation had a very high percentage of mixed marriage. The mass migration of the 1990s hastened the erosion of the Jewish marriage market. By 1996, according to the data of annual official vital statistics, the frequency of mixed marriages among all marriages involving Jews in Ukraine had substantially surpassed even that of Russia's Jews in 1988.

Table 5. Percentage of Children of Mixed Origin among All Children Born to Jewish Mothers in the Former USSR, by Republic, According to Vital Statistics Data, 1958–1993

Republic	1958	1968	1978	1988	1993
Former USSR	19	—	—	41	—
Russian Federation	27	40	42	58	68
West					
Ukraine	17	30	31	42	52
Belorussia	14	32	30	37	71
Moldavia	7	12	15	17	58
Baltic					
Latvia	14	27	28	40 (b)	48 (d)
Lithuania	12	19	28	32	—
Estonia	34	—	—	63 (c)	67
Transcaucasia					
Georgia	9	13(a)	17	25 (b)	—
Azerbaijan	20	21	32	28 (b)	40
Armenia	27	—	—	75 (c)	100(e)
Central Asia					
Uzbekistan	10	13	12	13	20
Tadzhikistan	13	9(a)	12	15	18
Kirgizia	16	—	—	25 (c)	47
Turkmenistan	37	—	—	60 (c)	44 (f)
Kazakhstan	35	43	42	41	65

(a) 1967.

(b) 1987.

(c) 1989.

(d) 1992.

(e) One birth.

(f) Four births to Jewish mothers and non-Jewish fathers.

In the post-war period rising intermarriage in the Soviet Union was accompanied by a great increase in the proportion of children born to mixed couples: from 19 percent in

1958 to about 41 percent in 1988. Corresponding to Russia's high percentage of mixed marriages, the proportion of these children among all children born to Jewish mothers was greater there than in most other republics (Table 5). Following the start of the recent mass emigration, the proportion of children born to mixed couples among all children born to Jewish mothers continued to grow. By 1998 this proportion had reached 74 percent in the Russian Federation. In 2000 among all children in Latvia born to married Jewish females, 77 percent had fathers from other ethnic groups.

Table 6. Percentage of Children Declared Jewish of all Children under 18 Living with Mixed Couples, Entire USSR and Some Soviet Republics, According to the 1979 Soviet Census

Republic	Composition of mixed couples	% of children declared Jewish
Russian Federation	Jewish husband, Russian wife	6.1
	Russian husband, Jewish wife	4.5
Ukraine	Jewish husband, Russian wife	10.3
	Russian husband, Jewish wife	4.9
	Jewish husband, Ukrainian wife	9.1
	Ukrainian husband, Jewish wife	3.3
Belorussia	Jewish husband, Russian wife	10.3
	Russian husband, Jewish wife	1.5
	Jewish husband, Belorussian wife	9.2
	Belorussian husband, Jewish wife	5.6
Kazakhstan	Jewish husband, Russian wife	9.6
	Russian husband, Jewish wife	3.0
Uzbekistan	Jewish husband, Russian wife	30.0
	Russian husband, Jewish wife	10.0
Entire USSR	Jewish husband, Russian wife	9.1
	Russian husband, Jewish wife	4.7

The data on offspring of mixed couples collected before the start of the recent mass emigration showed a clear preference for non-Jewish ethnic affiliation for the children (see: Table 6). This preference did not change in the post-Soviet period. According to the data of the 1994 Russian microcensus, non-Jewish ethnic affiliation was also clearly preferred for the offspring of mixed couples. For children under 16, the percentage declared Jewish was about the same regardless of the composition of the mixed couples—only 11 percent. But among offspring aged 16 and above, the percentage was lower: 6.2 percent for couples consisting of a Jewish husband and a Russian wife and 4.1 percent for couples consisting of a Russian husband and a Jewish wife.

Fertility. The fertility of Jews in the Soviet Union has for a long time been too low to ensure replacement. In the period preceding the recent mass emigration, according to the data of the 1979 and 1989 censuses, various birth cohorts of Russian and Ukrainian Jewish females had very similar levels of fertility. In fact, as of 1919–1923 the birth cohorts of Jewish females in both republics had very stable and low levels of completed fertility—about 1.4–1.5 children or less (Table 7).

Table 7. Fertility Indicators for Birth Cohorts of Jewish Women^(a) in the Russian Federation and Ukraine, According to Data of the 1979 and 1989 Soviet Censuses

Birth years of women	Age at census data	Average number of children ever born		Percentage of childless women	
		Russian Federation	Ukraine	Russian Federation	Ukraine
before 1909	1979 census				
	70+	1.59	1.71	19.0	16.7
1909–1913	65–69	1.59	1.58	17.5	16.1
1914–1918	60–64	1.56	1.54	17.4	15.3
1919–1923	55–59	1.43	1.46	17.7	15.3
1924–1928	50–54	1.41	1.47	17.3	12.7
1929–1933	45–49	1.34	1.41	17.2	11.9
	1989 census				
1934–1938	50–54	1.34	1.38	15.1	11.8
1939–1943	45–49	1.33	1.38	14.7	11.1
1944–1948	40–44	1.33	1.37	14.2	10.3

(a) All marital statuses.

The low level of Jewish fertility was only partly caused by a high frequency of permanent infertility. According to the 1979 census, among the women of the oldest cohort (born before 1909) in the Russian Federation 19 percent had had no births, and the percentage of childless women born in 1909–1933 was about 17 percent. In Ukraine frequency of permanent infertility for women born before 1924 was about 15–16 percent. According to the 1989 census, in the younger 1934–1948 cohorts, 14–15 percent of the Jewish women in the Russian Federation never bore children. For Jewish women in Ukraine in these birth cohorts this indicator was lower—10–11 percent.

However, the marriage pattern (age at first marriage and final celibacy; see above) was not the main factor causing low Jewish fertility. The main cause was low marital fertility. According to the 1979 census, the average total number of births in the Russian Federation never exceeded 1.8 children per married Jewish woman born in the first part of the twentieth century, and the fertility of married Jewish women born since 1919 was as low as 1.6 or less. By 1926 the crude birth rate of Jewish mothers in the European part of the Russian Federation had fallen to 19.6 per 1,000 Jews. By 1936, according to

partial data, this rate was as low as 15.8 per 1,000 Jews. That is, the Jewish population of the Russian Federation had already reached an advanced stage of fertility reduction before World War II.

In 1988–1989 the total fertility rate (the average number of children that a woman would bear in her lifetime if current age-specific fertility rates remained stable) of Russia’s Jewish population was 1.49. For 1993–1994 this fertility indicator was estimated at about 0.8; that is, it fell dramatically by 46 percent. This coincides with the general negative dynamics of fertility in the total Russian population at this time. In 1988–1989 the total fertility rate of the Jewish population in the Soviet Union as a whole was only slightly higher than in the Russian Federation—1.56. For the Jewish population of the former USSR as a whole this indicator was guesstimated at 0.9 in the mid–1990s, and it would probably not have risen subsequently.

Table 8. Children born to Jewish mothers in the Russian Federation and the Entire Former USSR, According to Vital Statistics Data, 1958–1998

Year	Russian Federation	Former USSR
1958	8,937	27,904
1988	3,710	11,591
1993	1,121	Less than 3,400
1998	875	—

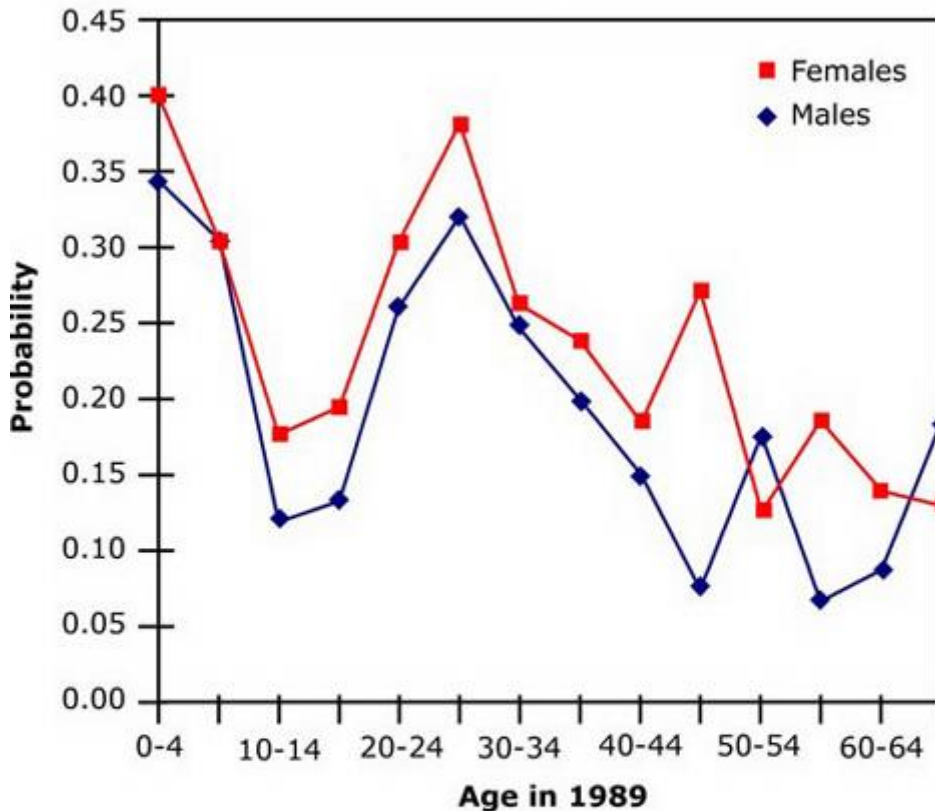
Between 1958 and 1988 the number of children born to Jewish mothers in the Soviet Union fell by 58 percent (Table 8). During this period the reduction in the number of births to Jewish mothers was most pronounced in the Ukraine (by 63 percent), less so in Russia, Belorussia, Latvia and Moldavia (by 56–58 percent), Kazakhstan (by 54 percent), and lowest among the Jews in Uzbekistan (by 35 percent).

Following the onset of the recent mass emigration, from 1988 to 1993, the decline in births in each republic of the former USSR was more intense than during the entire previous three decades. Despite much higher emigration from Ukraine than from the Russian Federation, between 1988 and 1993 the decrease in the number of births to Jewish mothers was slightly more pronounced in Russia (70 percent) than in Ukraine (68 percent). In the Russian Federation most of this decline in the number of births to Jewish mothers has been attributed to the dramatic drop in the level of Jewish fertility, rather than to the mass emigration. Whatever the reason, over the four decades between 1958 to 1998 the total number of children annually born to Jewish mothers fell by 90 percent.

Emigration and Aging. At most adult ages the female’s propensity to migrate is higher than that of the male. This reflects the emigration of Jewish single mothers, and the higher percentage of mixed-married among currently married Jewish males than females.

On the other hand, in age group 65–69 the propensity to migrate is lower for females than for males (Figure 1). This phenomenon can be explained by the fact that beginning with this age group, the percentage of single Jewish females who never bore children is very high, this being concurrent with the high incidence of female widowhood in the older ages.

Figure 1
Russian Jewish Net Emigration, 1989-1993



Note: Data from the 1989 census and the 1994 microcensus for the Jewish population of the Russian Federation were used as statistical sources to estimate the probability of net migration during the recent mass Jewish emigration in the 5 years following 1989 by age and sex.

Older women without any family members are less liable to emigrate since they are not part of a family. Moreover, according to the 1994 Russian microcensus, 20 percent of the Jewish women aged 65 and above had never given birth. In 1994 the women of this age group constituted 38.2 per cent of the total female population in Russia. If we consider the fact that some of the women who did give birth lost their children, we may then assume that among Jewish women aged 75 and above (who had given birth before

World War II) more than one-quarter have no living offspring. This group of childless old Jewish women is quite large, and presents a social problem.

The recent mass emigration has hastened the erosion of the Jewish demographic structure. The unusual phenomenon of an increased percentage of never-married may be seen in some Jewish female cohorts. For example, according to the 1994 Russian microcensus, for all the cohorts of women who were between the ages 40–54 at the time of the 1989 census, the percentage of never-married had grown. This may be explained only by the fact that in the period of the recent mass emigration a lower percentage of never-married women emigrated than did women of other marital statuses. The selective character of emigration has also caused a rise in the percentage of Jewish women who never bore children among the cohorts of women who already finished their childbearing. For example, among women aged 55–59 in 1994, 19.0 percent had never given birth, but five years earlier the 1989 census reported that this indicator was only 15.1 percent for these same women, who were then aged 50–54.

One special aspect of the interrelationship between emigration and Jewish fertility in the former USSR should perhaps be noted here. According to Israeli statistics, the level of fertility among ex-Soviet immigrants was somewhat high during their first year in the country: some Jewish women obviously preferred giving birth in Israel, and this may have lowered the level of Jewish fertility in the former USSR. According to some recent data by duration of residence in Israel, the total fertility rate among ex-Soviet immigrants rose to 1.8–2.0; that is, the contemporary level of Jewish fertility in the former USSR (about 0.9; see above) was doubled and approached the level of the total fertility rate of Israeli non-religious Jews.

Table 9. Percentage of Jewish Women Aged 65 and Above in the Entire Former USSR and Three Slavic Republics, According to Soviet and Post-Soviet Censuses, 1959–ca. 2000

Year	Former USSR	Russian Federation	Ukraine	Belorussia
1959(a)	9.0	9.5	9.3	6.7
1970	17.0	19.5	17.6	14.1
1979	25.3	28.8	27.0	20.5
1989	28.1	32.1	30.2	24.2
ca. 2000 (a) (b)	—	41.0	40.3(c)	38.3

(a) Data did not cover some non-Ashkenazic Jews.

(b) For Belorussia—1999, Ukraine—2001, and the Russian Federation—2002.

(c) According to the data for Kiev city, Dnepropetrovsk, Khar'kov and Odessa Regions, and Crimea including Sevastopol.

Sources: Soviet and Post-Soviet censuses.

From World War II until the start of the recent mass emigration the age structure of the Soviet Jewish population substantially worsened, a factor which is linked mainly to the decline in fertility. According to data from the 1989 census of all Jewish women in the Soviet Union, those aged 65 and over constituted 28.1 percent of the total, or 3.1 times more than in 1959 (Table 9). The recent mass emigration has accelerated this process, and today's Jewish female population remaining in the former USSR is very old. According to the data from the recent post-Soviet censuses, in the Russian Federation and Ukraine more than 40 percent of the women are 65 years old and over.

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