

## **Demographic Trends Among the Jews in the Three Post-Soviet Slavic Republics\***

**Mark Tolts**

To understand the current Jewish population trends in the three post-Soviet Slavic Republics of the former Soviet Union (FSU) we have prepared new estimates of numerical dynamics. We shall study the aging of the Jewish population in the Russian Federation, Ukraine and Belarus based on the recently released results of post-Soviet censuses. Based on the results of the 2002 Russian census and special processing of birth certificates of that year we shall analyze the changing marriage pattern of the Jews and their recent fertility decline.

### **1. Numerical Dynamics**

The numbers of Jews according to Soviet census data have been entirely dependent on the self-declaration of respondents. Conceptually, these numbers correspond to what has been defined as the “core” Jewish population (DellaPergola, 2002). The “core” Jewish population is the aggregate of all those who, when asked, identify themselves as Jews or, in the case of children, are identified as such by their parents. It does not include persons of Jewish origin who reported another ethnicity in the census. A majority of scholars

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agree that Soviet census figures on Jewish ethnic nationality for adults correspond very closely with “legal” ethnic nationality as recorded in internal passports (see, e.g.: Altshuler, 1987, pp. 21-24; Gitelman, 1994, p. 40; cf. Brym, with Ryvkina, 1994, pp. 21-22). The last Soviet census was in 1989, giving us a good base against which to measure Jewish population decrease during the recent mass emigration.

Table 1. Number of Jews in Three Slavic Republics  
According to the Recent Post-Soviet Censuses, Thousands

Country	Census date	Number of Jews	Number of Jews according to the 1989 Soviet census	Numerical decrease, %
Belorussia	14 February 1999	27.8	112.0	75
Ukraine	5 December 2001	104.3	487.3	79
Russian Federation	9 October 2002	233.6 <sup>(a)</sup>	570 <sup>(b)</sup>	59

(a) For data evaluation, see text.

(b) Including “Tats”.

Sources: Recent Post-Soviet censuses; 1989 Soviet census.

A question on ethnicity was included in the censuses of all three post-Soviet Slavic states. The data on the number of Jews according to these recent post-Soviet censuses are presented in Table 1 in comparison with those of the last Soviet census of 1989. The results of these censuses empirically confirmed the earlier prediction of dramatic demographic decline of the Jewish population in each country. The first was the Belorussian census of 1999 which counted 27,800 Jews.

In Ukraine, the population census was undertaken on December 5, 2001, and yielded 104,300 Jews; we had anticipated about 100,000 for the beginning of 2002. Considering that the baseline for our estimate was 487,300 Jews counted in the census of January 1989, the proximity between expected and actual results was quite remarkable. The census fully confirmed our assessment of ongoing demographic trends, which took into account the dramatic pace of emigration since 1989 and other major intervening changes among Ukraine's Jews .

In the Russian Federation, the October 2002 census indicated about 233,600 Jews as against our core Jewish population estimate of 252,000 on January 1, 2003 (derived from the February 1994 Russian microcensus estimate of 401,000 Jews). We assume that the 2002 Russian census undercounted the Jews due to the cancellation of the compulsory item on ethnicity (*natsionalnost'*) on identification documents and in the census. Like the previous Soviet censuses, the 2002 Russian census was based entirely on self-declaration of respondents. However, the post-Soviet Russian Constitution (Article 26.1), expressly forbids collection of information on an individual's ethnicity against his/her will. As a result, in the 2002 Russian census there appeared for the first time a rather sizable group (about 1.5 million) whose ethnic nationality was not recorded. Clearly, there were some Jews among them.

The census data for Jews were adjusted accordingly, and to this end we used our evaluation of Jewish intercensal demographic decrease. The 2002 Russian census presented figures as of October 9, 2002, and for purposes of comparison we adjusted our estimates of 252,000 for the beginning of 2003 to the census date. Comparison of the

census figure of 233,600 with our intermediate estimate of 254,000 (adjusted to the census date) shows a gap of about 20,000.<sup>1</sup>

For the distribution of this approximately 20,000 Jews who we assume did not report their ethnicity, we proportionately adjusted the results of the 2002 Russian census upwards according to the percentage of Jews recorded in each area among their total recorded number. The respective figures for Moscow, St. Petersburg, and the provinces outside these two capital cities are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Decrease of Jewish Population in the Russian Federation by Area, 1989-2002,<sup>(a)</sup>  
Thousands

Year	Total	Moscow	St. Petersburg	Provinces
1989 <sup>(b)</sup>	570	177	107	286
2002 <sup>(c)</sup>	254	88	40	126
Numerical decrease, %	55	50	63	56

(a) At census date.

(b) Estimate based on the 1989 Soviet census; including “Tats” (corrected).

(c) Estimate based on proportionately adjusted results of the 2002 Russian census, see: Tolts, 2004.

Sources: 1989 Soviet census; 2002 Russian census.

The most recent estimated figures show that during the first 16 years of the contemporary mass emigration (1989-2004), the total number of “core” Jews in the Russian Federation fell to about 235,000, a drop of 59 percent. In Ukraine at the beginning of 2005, this number decreased to approximately 84,000. The decrease in the numbers of “core” Jews in Ukraine was much greater than in Russia – 83 percent.

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<sup>1</sup> For the detailed analysis of the 2002 Russian census’ results for Jewish population, see: Tolts, 2004.

## 2. Aging

Since the Second World War the Jewish population of the FSU aged substantially, a fact which is linked to the low fertility level (Tolts, 2003). For Jews in 1959 the median age was 41.2 in Russia and 39.3 in the Ukraine. But, according to the 1989 census, the median age of the Jewish population was older than 52 years in the Russian Federation (Table 3) and only slightly younger in Ukraine (Table 4).

Table 3. Jews in the Russian Federation, by Age Group, 1959-2002, Percent

Year	All ages	0-14	15-29	30-44	45-64	65+	Median age
1959 <sup>(a)</sup>	100.0	13.7	18.8	22.8	35.8	8.9	41.2
1970	100.0	10.3	15.7	23.1	33.9	17.0	45.5
1979	100.0	8.3	14.7	20.8	31.4	24.8	49.2
1989	100.0	8.4	11.4	19.5	33.8	26.9	52.3
2002 <sup>(a)</sup>	100.0	4.9	10.7	14.2	33.6	36.6	57.5

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

Sources: Soviet censuses (Tolts, 1997a), and 2002 Russian census.

Table 4. Jews in Ukraine, by Age Group, 1959-2001, Percent

Year	All ages	0-14	15-29	30-44	45-64	65+	Median age
1959 <sup>(a)</sup>	100.0	17.6	17.9	22.6	32.6	9.3	39.3
1970	100.0	12.6	15.7	22.3	33.0	16.4	44.7
1979	100.0	10.2	15.1	19.6	31.4	23.7	48.6
1989	100.0	9.7	12.0	19.8	33.2	25.3	51.6
2001 <sup>(a)(b)</sup>	100.0	5.8	10.5	14.0	34.6	35.1	58.0

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

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

Sources: Soviet censuses (Tolts, 1997a), and 2001 Ukrainian census.

The data on age composition show that by 1970 Russian Jewry had already reached what has been defined as the “terminal stage” of demographic evolution.<sup>2</sup> By 1979, Ukrainian Jewry had also reached this stage of demographic evolution.

The recent mass emigration has accelerated this process. In 2002, the median age of the Jews in the Russian Federation reached 57.5 years and according to partial data it was about the same in Ukraine. In Belorussia already during the first 10 years of the contemporary mass emigration, the median age dramatically increased by more than nine years (Table 5). The recent data on age composition show that after the mass emigration of the 1990s the Jewry of that country reached the “terminal stage” of demographic evolution.

Table 5. Jews in Belorussia, by Age Group, 1959-1999, Percent

Year	All ages	0-14	15-29	30-44	45-64	65+	Median age
1959 <sup>(a)</sup>	100.0	23.2	20.0	23.0	26.7	7.1	33.7
1970	100.0	16.5	18.3	24.3	27.7	13.2	40.1
1979	100.0	12.5	19.6	19.8	30.3	17.8	43.9
1989	100.0	12.5	13.7	21.8	31.8	20.2	47.0
1999 <sup>(a)</sup>	100.0	5.2	8.8	15.5	37.9	32.6	56.3

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

Sources: Soviet censuses (Tolts, 1997a), and 1999 Belarus census.

In the intercensal period in the Russian Federation, the percentages of all age groups under 65 decreased. According to the most recent data, about 37 percent of the

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<sup>2</sup> The situation when the proportion aged under 15 falls to 10 percent (DellaPergola, 1992).

Jews in Russia were aged 65 and above. In Belorussia, the share of this group grew the fastest: from 20 percent in 1989 to 33 percent in 1999.

Table 6. Percentage of Jewish Females Aged 65 and Above in Three Slavic Republics, 1989 and ca. 2000

Year	Russian Federation	Ukraine	Belorussia
1989	32.1	30.2	24.2
ca. 2000 <sup>(a)</sup>	41.0	40.3 <sup>(b)</sup>	38.3

(a) For Belorussia – 1999, Ukraine – 2001, and the Russian Federation – 2002.

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

Sources: 1989 Soviet census; recent post-Soviet censuses.

Especially old is today's post-Soviet Jewish female population (Table 6). 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. The increase in the share of this group was fastest in Belorussia where it grew from 24 percent in 1989 to 38 percent in 1999.

According to the 1989 Soviet census, the “core” Jewish populations of Moscow and St. Petersburg were more aged than those of the provinces. The median ages of the Jews in Moscow (53.8) and St. Petersburg (53.7) were about the same, but this indicator for provincial Jewry (50.7) was lower by 3.0 years or more.

According to the 2002 Russian census, the “core” Jewish population of St. Petersburg aged more than that of Moscow. In the intercensal period the median age of Moscow Jews increased only by 3.1 years, whereas that of St. Petersburg Jews – by 8.9

years. The median ages of Moscow Jews and St. Petersburg Jews reached 56.9 and 62.6 years, respectively (Table 7).

Table 7. Jews in Moscow and St. Petersburg, by Age Group, 1989 and 2002, Percent

Age group	Moscow		St. Petersburg	
	1989	2002	1989	2002
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
0-14	7.6	5.1	7.2	3.4
15-29	10.6	11.3	10.7	8.6
30-44	18.1	15.9	18.4	11.7
45-59	24.1	21.2	25.1	21.8
60+	39.6	46.5	38.6	54.5
Median age	53.8	56.9	53.7	62.6

Sources: 1989 Soviet census and 2002 Russian census.

As a consequence, the difference in the median ages of the Jewish populations in the two Russian capitals reached 5.7 years. This was due to the different propensities to emigrate of these two Jewries. During the approximately 14 years between the 1989 Soviet census and the 2002 Russian census the estimated decrease of the “core” Jewish population was higher in St. Petersburg (63 percent) than in Moscow (50 percent; see: Table 2).

In the intercensal period in St. Petersburg, the percentages of all age groups under 60 decreased. However, in this period in Moscow the share of Jews aged 15-29 years grew slightly. This may be due to immigration of young Jews to Russia’s capital from other parts of the Russian Federation and other countries of the FSU in the intercensal period. All the other age groups under 60 in Moscow Jewry decreased.



According to the 2001 Ukrainian census, Jews in the country's various regions were close in age to Russia's Jewry. The median ages of Kiev Jews reached 60.4 years. Unlike Moscow's Jews, the Jewry of the Ukrainian capital was among the most elderly in that country.

All analyzed data from the recent post-Soviet censuses – for the total and female Jewish populations of the three Slavic FSU countries and for the inhabitation of capital cities of the Russian Federation and Ukraine – show a dramatic increase in the already high levels of aging.

### 3. Marriage Pattern

Based on the results of the 2002 Russian census and special processing of birth certificates of that year we can analyze the contemporary marriage pattern of the Jewish population in detail. Data of the recent Russian census show a sizable increase after the 1994 Russian microcensus in the percentage never-married for males and females aged 20-29 (Table 8). This process of marriage postponement is a new phenomenon in Russia. According to the data of the 1994 Russian microcensus, the percentage never-married for Jewish females aged 20-29 was lower than that in 1979.

Clearly, these recent changes among the Jewish population indicate a rise in the age of first registered marriage. In fact, according to the data of the 2002 Russian census, the average age at first marriage reached 24.7 years for Jewish females and 27.6 for Jewish males, a very sizable increase of more than two years during the period of less than nine years from the 1994 Russian microcensus.

Table 8. Percentage of Never-Married Among the Jews in Selected Ages in the Russian Federation, 1979-2002

Year	Males			Females		
	20-24	25-29	45-49	20-24	25-29	45-49
1979	65.5	24.7	2.8	52.0	20.5	8.8
1989	68.7	26.7	3.3	45.8	18.0	7.3
1994	71.1	34.1	4.5	49.4	18.7	11.9
2002	78.9	46.9	6.2	67.0	32.8	10.5

Sources: 1979 and 1989 Soviet censuses (Tolts, 1992); 1994 Russian microcensus (Tolts, 1997b); 2002 Russian census.

Table 9. Children Born to Jewish and Total Urban Females in the Russian Federation, by Marital Status, 2002, Percent

Group of females	Total	Marital births	Of these: Pre-marital conceptions <sup>(a)</sup>	Births out of wedlock	Of these registered by:		Extra-marital conceptions
					Both parents	Mother alone	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)= (3)+(4)
Jewish	100	78	13	22	15	7	35
Total urban	100	72	26	28	14	14	54

(a) Births less than nine months after registration of marriage.

Source: Special processing of birth certificates (for detailed data on the total urban population and methodological aspects of the processing, see: Tolts et al., 2005).

Reasonably, the issue of a spread of cohabitation and subsequent births within relatively stable informal unions arises here. We can see from the results of special processing of the birth certificates of 2002 (Table 9) that 15 percent of all children born to Jewish women were registered by parents who were not formally married. This

percentage among births to Jewish mothers was about the same as among total urban births. At the same time, the percentage of children registered by the mother alone among total births to Jewish mothers (7 percent) was only half that in the total urban population (14 percent).

Clearly, this difference coincides with a different level of contraception among Jewish and non-Jewish females. An indirect indicator of this may be our data on pre-marital conceptions – births less than nine months after registration of marriage. The percentage for Jewish mothers (13 percent) was half that in the total urban population (26 percent). All in all, extra-marital conceptions constitute 35 percent of total births to Jewish mothers and 54 percent in the total urban population.

Table 10. Percentage of Currently Divorced of All Ever-Married in Selected Ages Among Jews in the Russian Federation, 1989 and 2002

Sex and age group	1989	2002
<b>Males</b>		
20-24	5.4	9.6
25-29	6.6	10.6
30-34	7.6	14.3
35-39	7.6	14.1
40-44	8.4	14.2
45-49	8.4	13.1
<b>Females</b>		
20-24	7.0	11.3
25-29	10.4	15.1
30-34	13.0	19.6
35-39	16.1	22.0
40-44	18.4	20.6
45-49	18.9	22.4

Sources: 1989 Soviet census (Tolts, 1992); 2002 Russian census.

The 2002 Russian census data also show a rise in the incidence of divorce (Table 10). The proportions of currently divorced among all ever-married during the intercensal period rose for both Jewish males and females of all age groups. The highest percentages of currently divorced occur among Jewish males aged 30-44 years old – 14 percent, and Jewish females older than 35 years even more than that – 20-22 percent.

It is not surprising given all these findings that the proportions of currently married during the intercensal period decreased for both Jewish males and females of all age groups presented in Table 11. These proportions dropped especially among Jewish males and females under age 30.

Table 11. Percentage of Currently Married in Selected Ages Among Jews in the Russian Federation, 1989 and 2002

Sex and age group	1989	2002		
	Total	Total	Thereof in:	
			Registered marriage	Unregistered marriage
Males				
20-24	28.2	18.8	14.6	4.2
25-29	67.3	47.1	40.6	6.5
30-34	81.6	63.6	56.6	7.0
35-39	86.1	73.3	66.9	6.4
40-44	86.5	76.3	70.8	5.5
45-49	87.2	79.5	74.7	4.8
Females				
20-24	48.9	28.9	23.9	5.0
25-29	72.2	56.4	50.3	6.1
30-34	75.3	64.5	58.6	5.9
35-39	74.0	65.7	61.0	4.7
40-44	71.9	68.5	64.3	4.2
45-49	69.8	64.2	61.0	3.2

Sources: 1989 Soviet census (Tolts, 1992); 2002 Russian census.

This decrease resulted from the process of marriage postponement of which we spoke earlier. The 2002 Russian census data show that the proportion of currently married whose union was unregistered was highest at ages 30-34 for Jewish males – 7 percent, and about 6 percent at ages 25-34 for Jewish females. These proportions not as high as in the general population of Western Europe (cf. United Nations, 2003). However, we may assume that our findings show the direction of demographic development.

#### 4. Contemporary Jewish Fertility

The fertility of the Jews in Russia has for a long time been too low to ensure replacement. Total Jewish fertility in the Russian Federation has not exceeded 1.6 children per woman in all the cohorts born since the beginning of the 20th century. Moreover, according to the data of the Soviet censuses of 1979 and 1989, since 1919 the birth cohorts of Jewish women had a very stable and low level of fertility – about 1.4 or less (Tolts, 2003).

Table 12. Average Number of Children Ever Born to Jewish Females in the Russian Federation, by Age, 1989 and 2002

Age at census date	1989	2002
20-24	0.41	0.32
25-29	1.02	0.79
30-34	1.30	1.07
35-39	1.40	1.34
40-44	1.33	1.45
45-49	1.33	1.40

Sources: 1989 Soviet census; 2002 Russian census.

According to the 2002 Russian census, Jewish fertility has recently declined further among females under age 35. Between the 1989 Soviet census and the 2002 Russian census, the average number of children ever born to Jewish females aged 20-29 fell by 22-23 percent. Among those aged 30-34 the decrease was only slightly less – 18 percent (Table 12).

According to the 2002 Russian census, there were sizable differentiations in the levels of Jewish fertility by region. For example, the average number of children ever born to Jewish females aged 25-29 years old in Birobidzhan (1.16) was more than twice that in St. Petersburg (0.58) [see: Table 13].

Table 13. Average Number of Children Ever Born to Jewish Females in St. Petersburg and Birobidzhan, by Age, 2002

Age at census date	St. Petersburg	Birobidzhan
20-24	0.34	0.32
25-29	0.58	1.16
30-34	1.05	1.44
35-39	1.17	1.52
40-44	1.25	1.76
45-49	1.33	2.02

Source: 2002 Russian census.

Moreover, according to the 2002 Russian census, total Jewish fertility in Birobidzhan exceeded two children by ages 45-49. However, as a result of the extremely high emigration to Israel, the “core” Jewish population in Birobidzhan underwent a very pronounced decline, from 8,900 in 1989 to 2,300 in 2002 (about three-quarters), and

according to the 2002 Russian census, only about one percent of the total number of Russia's Jews lived there.

Thus, new data from the 2002 Russian census clearly show that vital crisis among Russia's Jewry is continuing and has deepened following the mass aliya and emigration of the 1990s. This has coincided with general depopulation in the Russian Federation.

##### 5. Concluding Remarks

At the start of the recent mass aliya and emigration (1989) the Jewish population of the Russian Federation was the 2nd largest Jewish community in the Diaspora, and Ukrainian Jewry was in the 4th place. Sixteen years later, in 2005, the Jewish population of the Russian Federation ranked 5th in the Diaspora, and Ukrainian Jewry was number 10 (DellaPergola, 2005). Results of the recent post-Soviet censuses empirically confirmed the previously predicted demographic decline of the Jewish communities there.

The data on age composition show that before the onset of mass emigration in the 1990s Russian and Ukrainian Jewry had already reached the "terminal stage" of demographic evolution. The recent mass emigration has dramatically accelerated the process of aging of the FSU Jewish populations. The recent data on age composition demonstrate that now Belorussian Jewry has also reached the "terminal stage" of demographic evolution.

Data of the 2002 Russian census revealed the process of marriage postponement and a sizable rise in age at first marriage for Jewish males and females following the 1994 Russian microcensus. Consequently, the proportions of currently married dropped considerably among Jewish males and females under 30. The fertility of the Jews in

Russia has for a long time been too low to ensure replacement. According to the 2002 Russian census, Jewish fertility has recently declined further among females under age 35.

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[e-mail: mtolts@mssc.huji.ac.il]