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The Jews in the Three Post-Soviet Slavic Countries: Selected Population Trends*

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To further the understanding of the current Jewish population trends in the three post-Soviet Slavic countries 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. Differentiations in and dynamics of higher education attainment among Jews remaining in these three FSU Slavic countries will also be examined.

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, 2002a). 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 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; Gitelman, 1994). The last Soviet census was in 1989, giving us a good base against which to measure Jewish population decrease during the recent mass emigration.

A question on ethnicity was included in the censuses of all three post-Soviet Slavic states. The results of these censuses empirically confirmed the earlier prediction of dramatic demographic decline of the Jewish population in each country since the last Soviet census of 1989 (Table 1). The first was the 1999 census of Belarus which counted 27,800 Jews.

Table 1. Number of Jews in Three Slavic Countries 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, %
Belarus	14 February 1999	27.8	112.0	75
Ukraine	5 December 2001	104.3	487.3	79
Russian Federation	9 October 2002	233.6[(a)]	570[(b)]	59

(a) For data evaluation, see text.
(b) Including "Tats".
Sources: Recent Post-Soviet censuses and 1989 Soviet census.

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 (as presented in: DellaPergola, 2002b). 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 ethnicity 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.[1]

For the distribution of these 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,[a] Thousands

Year	Total	Moscow	St. Petersburg	Provinces
1989[b]	570	177	107	286
2002[c]	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 and 2002 Russian census.

As a result of mass internal migration, despite the previous severe Soviet restrictions on resettlement in the two Russian capital cities, according to the data of the 2002

Russian census, of the total number of their Jewish inhabitants, more than 47 percent in Moscow and 41 percent in Saint Petersburg were born outside the respective city.

According to the data of the 2001 Ukrainian census, only about 18,000 (17 percent) of the total number of Jews in the country lived in its capital city Kiev, while a sizable number were in other large cities: 12,400 (12 percent) in Odessa, 11,200 (11 percent) in Kharkov, and 10,500 (10 percent) in Dnepropetrovsk. At the same time, according to the 1999 census of Belarus, a much higher share of Jewish population is concentrated in that country's capital city – the number of Jews in Minsk was 10,100 (36.5 percent).

The most recent estimated figures show that during the 18 years since the start of the recent mass emigration (1989-2006), the total number of "core" Jews in the Russian Federation fell to about 221,000, a drop of 61 percent. In Ukraine and Belarus at the beginning of 2007, these numbers had decreased to approximately 79,000 and 17,500, respectively. The decrease in the numbers of "core" Jews in both two countries was much greater than in Russia – 84 percent.

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, 1997a). For Jews in 1959 the median age was 41.2 in Russia and 39.3 in the Ukraine (Tolts, 2003). But, according to the 1989 census, the median age of the Jewish population had risen to more than 52 years in the Russian Federation and was only slightly younger in Ukraine (Table 3).

Table 3. Jews in Three Slavic Countries, by Age Group, 1989 – ca. 2000, Percent

Country and year	All ages	0-14	15-29	30-44	45-64	65+	Median age
Russian Federation							
1989	100.0	8.4	11.4	19.5	33.8	26.9	52.3
1994 [(a)]	100.0	6.2	9.9	16.5	35.0	32.4	56.0
2002 [(a)]	100.0	4.9	10.7	14.2	33.6	36.6	57.5
Ukraine							
1989	100.0	9.7	12.0	19.8	33.2	25.3	51.6
2001 [(a) (b)]	100.0	5.8	10.5	14.0	34.6	35.1	58.0
Belarus							
1989	100.0	12.5	13.7	21.8	31.8	20.2	47.0
1999 [(a)]	100.0	5.2	8.8	15.5	37.9	32.6	56.3

(a) Data did not cover some non-Ashkenazic Jews.
(b) According to the data for Kiev City, Dnepropetrovsk, Kharkov and Odessa Regions, and Crimea including Sevastopol.
Sources: 1989 Soviet census, 1994 Russian microcensus, and Post-Soviet censuses.

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.[2] By 1979, Ukrainian Jewry had also reached this stage.

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 Belarus already during the first 10 years of the recent mass emigration, the median age dramatically increased by more than nine years. The recent data on age composition show that after the mass emigration of the 1990s the Jewry of that country also reached the "terminal stage" of demographic evolution.

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

Especially old is today's post-Soviet Jewish female population (Table 4). 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 Belarus where it grew from 24 percent in 1989 to 38 percent in 1999.

Table 4. Percentage of Jewish Females Aged 65 and Above
in Three Slavic Countries, 1989 and ca. 2000

Year	Russian Federation	Ukraine	Belarus
1989	32.1	30.2	24.2
ca. 2000[(a)]	41.0	40.3[(b)]	38.3

(a) For Belarus – 1999, Ukraine – 2001, and the Russian Federation – 2002.
(b) According to the data for Kiev City, Dnepropetrovsk, Kharkov and Odessa Regions, and Crimea including Sevastopol.
Sources: 1989 Soviet census and recent post-Soviet censuses.

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 5).

Table 5. 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 age 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 inhabitance of capital cities of the Russian Federation and Ukraine – show a dramatic increase in the already high levels of aging.

3. Higher Educational Attainment

During the Soviet era the educational achievement of Soviet Jewry was the main factor determining its position in the socio-economic stratification in the country (see, e.g.: Krupnik, 1995; Konstantinov, 2000). According to the 1989 census, for total employed Jews in the Russian Federation the percentage with higher education (that is, the Russian equivalent of Western college and graduate degrees as a whole) was 63 percent, or 3.7 times more than among the total employed urban population in Russia (Tolts, 1997b).

At the same time, the educational level of Russian Jewry was the highest among all the Jewries of the FSU. According to the data of the 1989 census, only 45 percent of total employed Jews in Ukraine and 42 percent of those in Belarus had achieved higher education; that is, for Russian Jewry, this percentage was higher by 1.4 and 1.5 times, respectively (ibid.).

The data of the recent post-Soviet censuses show that this sizable difference persisted after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. According to the 2002 Russian census, 61.1 percent of Jews aged 20 and over had attained higher education; that is, for Russian Jewry, this percentage was higher by 1.2 and 1.5 times than for those in Ukraine and Belarus, respectively (Table 6).

Table 6. Percentage of Jews Aged 20 and Over with Higher Education in Three Slavic Countries, ca. 2000[(a)]

Country and region	Percentage
Russian Federation[(b)]	61.1
Moscow City	66.8
St. Petersburg City	63.3
Ukraine[(c)]	49.2[(d)]
Kiev City	50.7
Dnepropetrovsk Oblast	46.8
Kharkov Oblast	59.8
Odessa Oblast	41.3
Crimea[(e)]	47.4
Belarus	41.7
Minsk City	55.4

(a) For Belarus – 1999, Ukraine – 2001, and the Russian Federation – 2002.
(b) Including postgraduate degrees presented separately in the 2002 Russian census results.
(c) Including a small number with only B.A. degrees presented separately in the 2001 Ukrainian census results.
(d) The average for listed regions.
(e) Including Sevastopol.
Sources: Estimates based on recent post-Soviet censuses.

The data of the recent post-Soviet censuses also show a sizable differentiation in level of education within each of the three FSU Slavic countries. According to the 2002 Russian census, the percentages of Jews aged 20 and over who had attained higher education varied from place to place: 66.8 percent in Moscow, 63.3 percent in St. Petersburg, but only 56.3 percent in the Russian provinces. Thus, the previously documented substantial educational differences between the Jews of Moscow, St.

Petersburg and those of the provinces based on the data of the last Soviet census of 1989 (Tolts, 1997b) persisted.

Unlike the Russian Federation, according to the 2002 Ukrainian census, the percentage of Jews aged 20 and over who attained higher education in the country's capital – 50.7 percent in Kiev – is about the same as the average for their regions for which we have data. In fact, in the Kharkov region this percentage is sizably higher – 59.8 percent. However, Belarus is similar to the Russian Federation in this respect, and according to its 1999 census, in Minsk, the capital of Belarus, the percentage of Jews aged 20 and over who attained higher education is 55.4; that is, much higher than that the country's average for Jews – 41.7 percent.

However, despite Russian Jewry's maintenance of the leading position in the level of education in the FSU, according to the data of the 2002 Russian census, the percentage of Jews with higher education decreased among those aged under 40 (Table 7). The most pronounced decrease was among Russia's Jews aged 30-34; in this age group the share with higher education fell from 66.4 percent in 1989 to 58.2 percent in 2002.

Such dynamics among the Jewish population differ strikingly from the general educational development in the Russian Federation, where the percentage of people with higher education increased noticeably between the 1989 Soviet census and the 2002 Russian census (see: Vishnevsky, 2006) Moreover, according to the data of the recent Russian census, the highest educational attainments were of Jews aged 45-59 who received their degrees mostly in the Soviet period.

Table 7. Percentage of Jews in the Russian Federation with Higher Education, by Age, 1989 and 2002

Age group	1989	2002[(a)]
25-29	60.3	59.2
30-34	66.4	58.2
35-39	66.4	63.9
40-44	66.7	66.7
45-49	64.1	67.8
50-54	64.8	67.7
55-59	61.8	67.9
60-64	52.8	65.3
65-69	52.7	66.8
70 and over	35.8	56.0

(a) Including postgraduate degrees presented separately in the census results.
Sources: 1989 Soviet census and 2002 Russian census.

The latter can not be attributed to the character of mass emigration since 1989. Intercensal dynamics of cohort data on the percentage of Jews with higher education

show its very moderate increase (1-2 percent point; Table 8). However, it is well known that persons with higher education have a lower mortality level (see, e.g.: Shkolnikov et al., 2004), and this probably caused some increase in the percentage of Jews with higher education as their education coordinated with greater longevity.

To sum up, our analysis shows that mass emigration was not selective by level of education for those cohorts of Russian Jews who received their higher education in the Soviet era. At the same time, among younger Jews who remained in the Russian Federation we found a decrease in educational attainments as compared with older cohorts.

Table 8. Percentage of Jews in the Russian Federation with Higher Education in Selected Birth Cohorts, 1989 and 2002

Births years	1989 census		Births years	2002 census[a]	
	Age in the census	Percentage with higher education		Age in the census	Percentage with higher education
1954-1958	30-34	66.4	1953-1957	45-49	67.8
1949-1953	35-39	66.4	1948-1952	50-54	67.7
1944-1948	40-44	66.7	1943-1947	55-59	67.9
1939-1943	45-49	64.1	1938-1942	60-64	65.3
1934-1938	50-54	64.8	1933-1937	65-69	66.8

(a) Including postgraduate degrees presented separately in the census results.
Sources: 1989 Soviet census and 2002 Russian census.

4. Concluding Remarks

At the start of the recent mass 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. By 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, but this 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.

Among the Jews in the three FSU Slavic countries the educational level of Russia’s Jewry is the highest, and according to the data of the recent post-Soviet censuses, this sizable difference persisted also after dissolution of the Soviet Union. Furthermore, sizable differences were found in the levels of education within the Jewries of these countries. Data from the 2002 Russian census revealed a decrease in the educational attainment of younger Jews in the Russian Federation as compared with older cohorts.

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[1] For the detailed analysis of the 2002 Russian census results for Jewish population, see: Tolts, 2004.

[2] The situation when the proportion aged under 15 falls to 10 percent (DellaPergola, 1992).