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# Towards the Full Integration of Ethiopian-Israelis

## A Progress Report

In 2009, there were 116,000 Ethiopian-Israelis (immigrants or children of immigrants). A significant percentage, 24%, have come in the last ten years and 8,000 more are expected to arrive over the next few years.

## Key factors defining the unique challenges in the integration of Ethiopian immigrants

- Traumatic journey to Israel
- Huge leap from a subsistence economy to a modern industrial economy
- Lack of familiarity with daily living in a modern society
- Major differences between Ethiopian and Israeli culture
- Strain of the process of modernization, creating tension in the family as roles change
- Majority of adults illiterate in their native language and most children had very limited educational exposure
- Very large families, 60% with five or more children
- High percentage of one-parent families, twice the Israeli average
- Overcoming stereotypes based on the color of their skin
- All of these factors have contributed to high levels of poverty

# Principles characterizing the efforts made on behalf of Ethiopian-Israelis

1. Preferential entitlements (affirmative action) across a wide range of services, relative to other immigrant groups and the non-immigrant population.
2. Reinventing service delivery strategies: The creation of alternative systems of service delivery, often implemented by non-government agencies, such as a network of placement services developed to supplement the public employment services.
3. Investment in training community leaders and manpower from within the community to play an important role in integration, in advocacy and in facilitating the dialogue between the community, the service system and the government.
4. Attention to cultural barriers and sensitivity:
  - Concept of cultural mediators and cultural sensitivity training developed and implemented.
  - Traditional institutions were preserved, supported by public funds, to help address complex social problems, such as family disputes and violence.

## Where are we on the road to successful integration?

### The overall trend since the early 1990s

- Significant improvement in high-school matriculation rates over time: from 7% in the early '90s to 33% in 2009. The percentage with matriculation that meets university entrance requirements increased to 20%. Still, the rates for all Jews are considerably higher, 52% matriculation and 45% at the university level. The gap is much greater for boys than for girls.

- Concomitant increase in college attendance: 8% of the young (aged 20-29) are attending college, still the rate is much higher among all Jews (19%) (2007).
- Employment rates for men are approaching the rates for all Jewish men (67 vs. 75% respectively) and women have narrowed the gap dramatically in recent years (56 vs. 71% for all Jewish women) (2007/09).
- Large differences in the type and quality of employment: 37% work in unskilled employment, compared with 7% of all Jews. 10% have academic and professional positions, compared with 40% of all Jews (2007/09).
- Rapid acculturation of the younger population in terms of age of marriage, number of children and the role of women.
- Poverty rates remain very high: 52% among families, compared with 15% of all Jewish families and 65% among children, compared with 24% of all Jewish children (2005).
- Increasing rates of youth delinquency and risk behavior.
- The Myers-JDC-Brookdale national survey of all groups of immigrant youth demonstrates the high percentage of Ethiopian-Israeli youth who identify strongly as Israelis and feel at home in Israel. However, the findings point to negative trends among those born and raised in Israel: fewer sense that they have someone to turn to in school, more have weaker relationships with parents, more report exposure to alcohol, and these youth have significantly lower aspirations for higher education.

### Two distinct periods

Dramatic improvement was made in the '90s, despite the large number of new immigrants. In the last ten years, while there was significant improvement in employment, advances in education were mixed and there was an alarming increase in rates of delinquency and risk behavior, particularly among youth who grew up in Israel.



The role of the Diaspora was not only in providing resources, but in making it possible to overcome the political limitations to affirmative action and create solutions that were beyond the scope of existing social institutions.

# Contribution of focused Diaspora-Israeli partnerships

The progress made was in large part due to the very significant contribution of Diaspora Jewry. The role of the Diaspora was not only in providing resources, but in making it possible to overcome the political limitations to affirmative action and create solutions that were beyond the scope of existing social institutions.

In the '90s, the Diaspora was deeply involved in almost every aspect of integration. In the last decade, the involvement has been more limited but there have been several important initiatives in partnership with the government that have been proven effective. Myers-JDC-Brookdale Institute evaluation studies have shown:

- Significant improvement in educational achievement at the end of first grade and narrowing gaps with non-Ethiopian children in most cities participating in JDC's comprehensive early childhood initiative - PACT.
- Contribution of PACT to a remarkable increase in women's employment, in conjunction with the JDC employment program "Eshet Chayil".
- Highly significant increase in school performance and matriculation scores of youth participating in the Ethiopian National Plan (ENP).

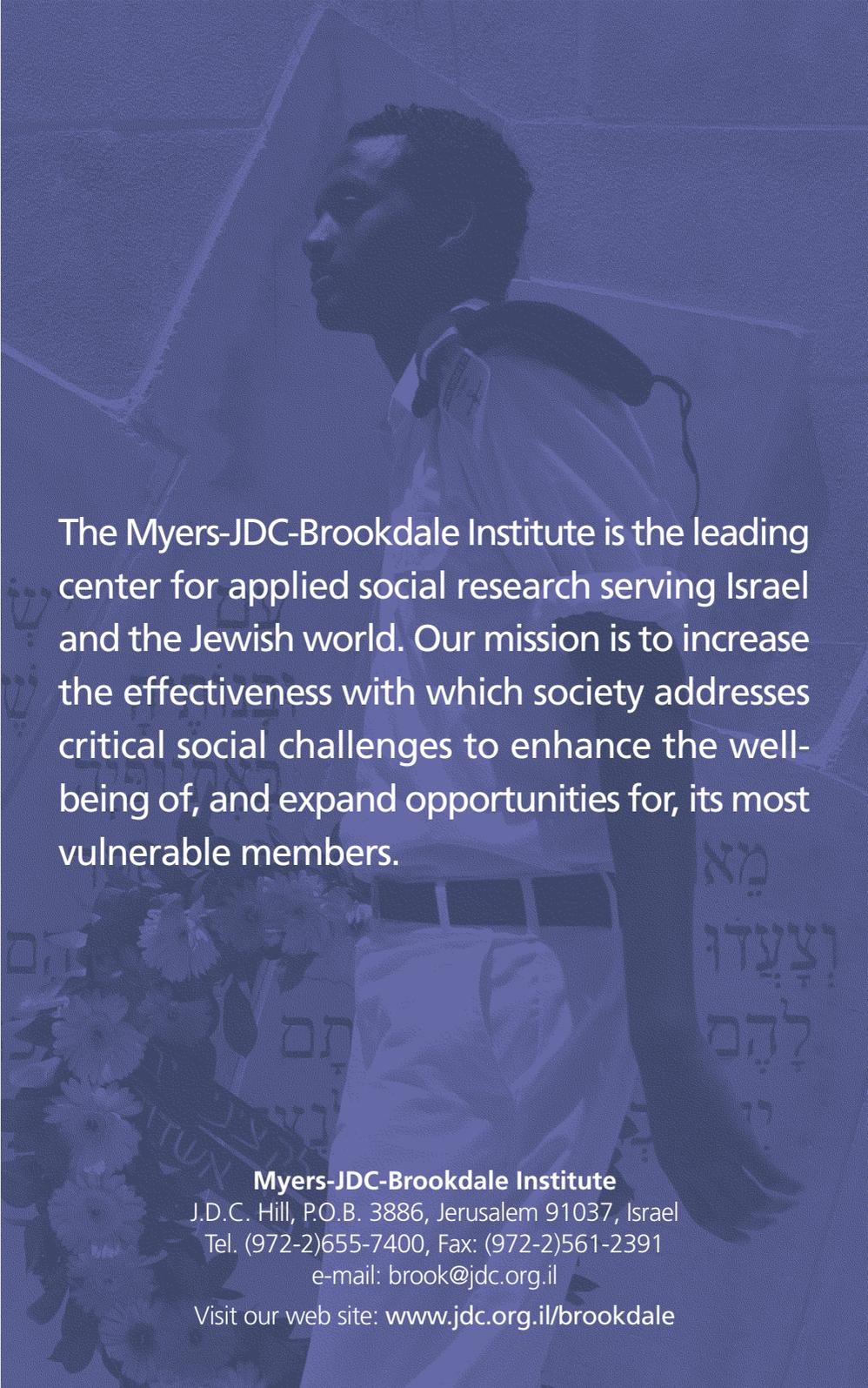
Taken together, these trends point to a growing split in the Ethiopian community between those who are making it and those who are not sharing in the progress.

Future progress will depend on sustaining and enhancing the special assistance of the Israeli Government and the Diaspora, particularly focusing on reducing educational gaps and on more aggressive support for youth at high risk.



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A man in profile, wearing a light-colored shirt and dark pants, with a backpack on his shoulders. The image is overlaid with a semi-transparent blue filter. In the background, there is a menorah and Hebrew text, including the words 'מא' and 'וצעדו'.

The Myers-JDC-Brookdale Institute is the leading center for applied social research serving Israel and the Jewish world. Our mission is to increase the effectiveness with which society addresses critical social challenges to enhance the well-being of, and expand opportunities for, its most vulnerable members.

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