

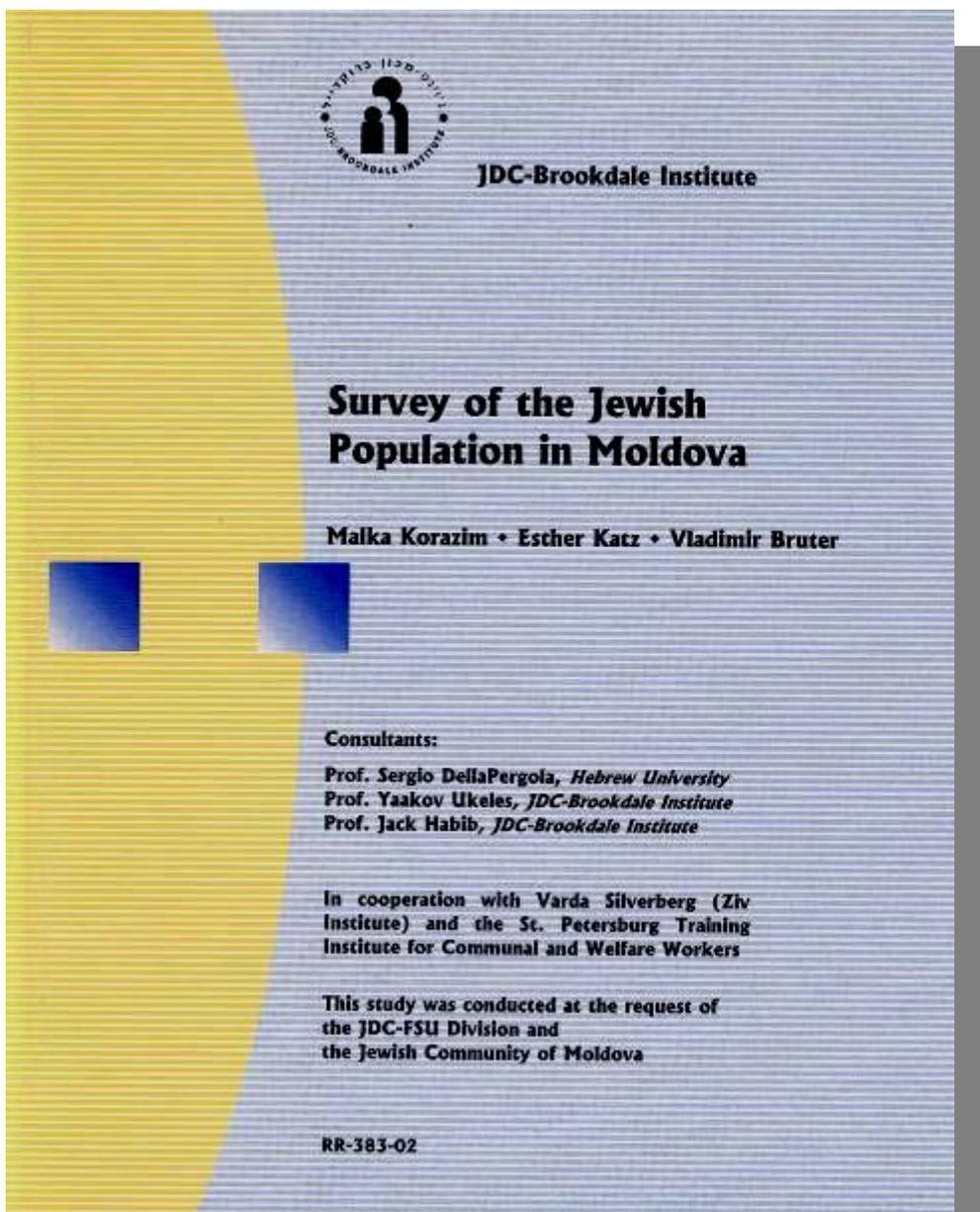


Myers - JDC - Brookdale Institute
מאירס - ג'וינט - מכון ברוקדייל

Research Report



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Abstract

This report presents findings from a needs assessment survey of the Jewish population of Moldova. The survey was initiated by the leadership of the Jewish community in Moldova and the JDC-FSU Division. It was conducted by the JDC-Brookdale Institute in cooperation with the Jewish community in Moldova, the Ziv Institute, and the St. Petersburg Training Institute for Communal and Welfare Workers. The survey was part of the strategic planning effort by the Jewish community focusing on community development and the renewal of Jewish life. It reflects the interest of the Jewish community leadership in Moldova for systematic information on the Jewish population.

Moldova, formerly a republic of the FSU, gained independence in 1991. Since then, the country has experienced a serious economic crisis, with its standard of living declining from one of the highest in the FSU to one of the lowest in Eastern Europe. At the same time, Moldova has safeguarded minority rights in law and the Jewish community has had the opportunity for spiritual and cultural revival and renewal. The JDC has been helping to rebuild organized Jewish communities in different cities in Moldova.

The Jewish population of Moldova has a rich past as a well-organized community up to the 1940s. During the Second World War, it was destroyed physically. During the Soviet period, the nationalist policy of the regime destroyed the Jewish community spiritually. During the 1970s and the 1990s, the Jewish population of Moldova declined due to emigration. There is no reliable and precise information on the number of Jewish people living in Moldova today; estimates vary from 25,000 to 40,000.

The survey provided information on Moldova's Jewry in terms of socio-demographic characteristics; the need for and utilization of communal services; Jewish identity; the nature of communal life; and involvement in the Jewish community. Data were collected from a random sample of households in which one Jewish adult was interviewed. The sample included 791 adult respondents representing persons living in 3,941 households in three cities in Moldova: Kishinev, Beltsy and Bendery.

The population database, from which we sampled, was created by the Ziv Institute. The databases were created by collecting available lists of the Jewish population, primarily from Jewish organizations as well as Jewish names from the phonebook and 'snowballing' for new names. From further research we know that the population of families with children is significantly underestimated. The questionnaire was developed by the Brookdale staff and the fieldwork was performed by the staff in Moldova.

Findings from the Survey

1. Socio-demographic characteristics

- ♦ A relatively high percentage of the population is elderly (27% are age 65 or over). Children up to age 18 constitute 13% of the population.

- ◆ The household composition regarding age of family members reveals that 28% of households have at least one child age 18 or under living in the household. In 74% of the households there is at least one person over 55 years old.
- ◆ The population in Beltsy is older than in the other two cities.
- ◆ A high percentage (77%) of survey respondents reported that their current income is not sufficient to cover most of their basic needs.

2. Jewish identity

- ◆ Some 70% of household members were born or raised Jewish; 78% consider themselves Jewish.
- ◆ There is a significant group of families of mixed marriages (45%). In about half of the couples, one of the spouses considers himself non-Jewish.
- ◆ Religion plays a less important role in the self-definition of Jewish identity. (Only 32% of the respondents define themselves as Jewish by religion, compared to 51% by culture.)
- ◆ The younger groups, in particular, view their identity more in cultural than in religious terms.
- ◆ A very significant emphasis is placed by the respondents on the importance of knowledge of Jewish history, culture and traditions as a key component of being Jewish.

3. Connections to the local Jewish community

The findings show a quite strong sense of community among the respondents along with some indications about potential for expansion :

- ◆ Over half of the respondents feel part of the Jewish community.
- ◆ More than half (59%) characterize Jewish life in their city as active.
- ◆ Over half (56%) estimate the prospects for developing Jewish communal life in Moldova as good or satisfactory.
- ◆ One-third of the respondents are definitely interested in being more involved in the communal life in their city.
- ◆ One-third are interested in volunteering in the Jewish community. This percentage is even higher in the middle-aged group (40-49).
- ◆ There is a large group that is uncertain or wavering about their degree of involvement (40%), representing a very significant target group. The youngest age group (19-39) has a large proportion (62%) that is uncertain about their interest in more involvement.
- ◆ A significant minority (20%) did not express an interest in involvement in communal activities. A major challenge for the Jewish community is to find ways to identify their interests and involve them in Jewish communal life.
- ◆ The 40-49 age group is an important potential target group for the community because, on the one hand, it has a relatively negative view of Jewish life in Moldova at present but, on the other hand, a very high rate of interest in volunteering.
- ◆ A comparison among the cities shows that the Jewish community is viewed more positively on all indicators in Bendery than in Kishinev and Beltsy.

4. Participation and interest in activities with a Jewish element

The findings demonstrate that the population studied has a strong interest in links with all forms of Jewish activities.

- ◆ During the past twelve months, 78% reported reading Jewish newspapers; 52% attended plays, films or concerts on Jewish themes; and 30% attended a lecture on a Jewish theme.
- ◆ Approximately 70% are interested in more meetings with other Jews for recreational and intellectual activities.
- ◆ A great deal of interest was expressed in various kinds of activities with Jewish content: learning about Jewish history and traditions (80%), learning about Israel (83%), and learning about religion (49%).
- ◆ The respondents indicated that Israel and the Hebrew language are an important part of their Jewish identity. Also, a very large percentage of families have relatives and friends in Israel. There is significant interest in activities focused on Israel and the Hebrew language among all age groups and especially among the younger respondents.

5. Participation in religious-cultural activities

While there is a group with an interest in religious activities or synagogue attendance, the vast majority does not view religious affiliation as a basis for their Jewish identity and are interested in Jewish educational activities of a non-religious nature.

- ◆ Ten percent attend synagogue at least once a month (mostly elderly).
- ◆ Jewish holidays most frequently observed are: Purim (54%); Passover (40%); Yom Kippur (33%) and Hanukah (30%).
- ◆ Interest in Jewish holidays is defined more in cultural and family terms than in religious terms.
- ◆ In Beltsy, there is a higher rate of respondents that are observing Jewish religious practices than in the other two cities.

6. Use of services provided by the Jewish community, satisfaction with services and needs

- ◆ Over two-thirds of the households use at least one social-medical service provided by the Jewish community. Among the most common are food packages (68%) and doctor visits (22%). These services are used more by the 55+ age group than the younger ones.
- ◆ Half of the households use at least one cultural-educational service provided by the Jewish community.
- ◆ There is a high level of satisfaction with the services that are provided by the Jewish community. Scores for all services range from satisfied to very satisfied.
- ◆ The familiarity with the diverse kinds of activities provided in the Jewish community is low among non-participants or non-users. Even respondents who use various community services are often unaware of many other services available in the community.
- ◆ The respondents expressed interest in the development and expansion of social-medical services as well as Jewish educational and cultural activities provided by the Jewish community.

- ◆ The population has a strong belief in the importance of the Jewish community in addressing the health, social, educational and cultural needs of the Jewish community. There are differences of emphasis: the younger groups place more emphasis on cultural and educational activities and have a very strong interest in vocational assistance; the older members without children are more interested in health and social welfare needs.
- ◆ We found a disparity between the reports by the respondents about their personal participation in educational and cultural activities and their reports on the utilization of community-sponsored activities. This raises the possibility that there is a significant amount of informal Jewish cultural educational activity that is not necessarily under the auspices of the community or identified with it.

Issues for Planning

The findings demonstrate that the population studied has a very strong interest in links with all forms of Jewish activities as expressed in its current participation, in its interest in greater participation and expanded services, in its view of the roles of the Jewish community and in its desire to contribute and be more involved. The findings of the survey illustrate in a number of ways that the Jewish population in Moldova is not a homogenous group. There are differences in the needs and attitudes to Jewish life and community involvement among different sub-groups such as younger and older households; households with and without children; households with spouses from mixed religious backgrounds; and households in which all members are older people. In light of this interest, the findings of the report raise a number of key issues that were presented to the local planning committee assigned to develop a strategic plan for the Jewish community in Moldova. These include:

- ◆ How should the community take advantage of the unrealized interest in participation in Jewish activities and a greater contribution to community life?
- ◆ How can the community best expand the information available to the Jewish population about communal services and activities?
- ◆ How can the community best give consideration to diversity in the needs and attitudes to Jewish life among different sub-groups within the Jewish population in planning its services and activities?
- ◆ How can meaningful opportunities for Jewish education be best made available for those with a less religious perspective? Are there adequate opportunities for Jews with more religious interests? What activities can these two groups share and what should be provided on a differential basis?
- ◆ How can the community best address the unique needs of mixed households (with Jewish and non-Jewish spouses) and facilitate their involvement.
- ◆ How can the significant willingness of the middle-aged group to take a more active part in the community be best realized?
- ◆ How prevalent is informal educational and cultural activity? To what extent should the community take this into account in its planning and how? Does the community have any role in promoting these informal processes.

Table of Contents

1. Introduction	1
2. Study Goals and Methodology	1
2.1 The Goal of the Survey	1
2.2 Methodology	1
3. Socio-Demographic Characteristics	3
3.1 Comparison by Cities	5
4. Jewish Identity	6
4.1 Self-identification	6
4.2 Behavioral Dimension of Jewish Identity	8
4.3 Normative Dimension of Jewish Identity	11
4.4 Comparison by Cities	12
5. Connections to Jewish Community and Emigration	13
5.1 Connections to Jewish Community	13
5.2 Emigration	15
5.3 Comparison by Cities	16
6. Utilization of Services and Programs Provided by the Jewish Community	17
6.1 Social-Medical Services	17
6.2 Jewish Educational Programs and Services	20
6.3 Jewish Cultural and Religious Programs and Activities	22
6.4 Integrated View of Service Utilization	25
6.5 Perceptions of What Should be the Major Roles of the Community	26
6.6 Comparison by Cities	27
7. Conclusions and Issues for Discussion	30
Bibliography	33

List of Tables

Table 1:	Source of Households in Sample, by City	2
Table 2:	Selected Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Respondents	3
Table 3:	Age Distribution of Household Members, by Gender	4
Table 4:	Dimensions of Household Composition	4
Table 5:	Selected Socio-demographic Characteristics of Respondents, by City	5
Table 6:	Number of Persons in Household, by City	6
Table 7:	Personal Definition of Jewishness and Importance of Being Jewish	6
Table 8:	Households by Whether Respondents and Spouses Consider Themselves Jewish and Were Born/Raised Jewish (Not Including Cases without a Spouse)	7
Table 9:	Responses to Various Components of Self-Definition of Jewish Identity	8
Table 10:	Respondents who Strongly Agree and Agree with Statements regarding Jewish Identity	8
Table 11:	Respondents Reporting the Observance (Always or Often) of Jewish Practices, by Age	9
Table 12:	Meanings Attributed to the Celebration of Jewish Holidays	9
Table 13:	Respondents Participating in Activities with Jewish Content in the Last 12 Months, by Age	10
Table 14:	Respondents Reporting Interest in Participation in Activities with Jewish Content, by Age	11
Table 15:	Items that are Important for a Person to be Considered a Genuine Jew	12
Table 16:	Respondents Using Various Components of Self- Definition of Jewish Identity, by City	13
Table 17:	Respondents' Attitudes to Jewish Community in Moldova, by Age	14
Table 18:	Intentions to Emigrate to Another Country, by Age	15
Table 19:	Respondents' Attitudes to Jewish Community in Moldova, by City	16

Table 20:	Utilization of Jewish Social-Medical Services, Familiarity With Services among Non-Users and Interest in Development/Expansion/Improvement of Services	18
Table 21:	Number of Jewish Social-Medical Services Utilized by Age Composition and Presence of Children under 18 in the Household	18
Table 22:	Utilization of Jewish Educational Programs and Services, Familiarity with Programs among Non-users and Interest in Development/Expansion/Improvement of Programs	20
Table 23:	Number of Jewish Educational Programs Used, by Age Composition and the Presence of Children Under 18 In the Household	21
Table 24:	Households not Using the Service but Familiar with Educational Programs, by Presence of Children in the Household	22
Table 25:	Utilization of Jewish Cultural and Religious Programs and Activities, Familiarity with Programs among Non-users and Interest in Development/Expansion or Improvement of Programs	23
Table 26:	Number of Jewish Cultural and Traditional Programs Used, by Age and Presence of Children under 18 in the Household	23
Table 27:	Use of Services from any of the Three Areas (Social, Education, Cultural Combined)	25
Table 28:	Use of at Least One Service for the Individual Areas, for Culture and Education Combined, and All Three Areas Combined	25
Table 29:	What the Three Main Roles of the Jewish Community Should be in Moldova, According to Respondents	27
Table 30:	Number of Jewish Social-Medical Services Utilized, by City	27
Table 31:	Utilization of Selected Social Programs, Activities and Interest in Development/Expansion/Improvement of Programs, by City	28
Table 32:	Number of Jewish Cultural-Religious Services Utilized, by City	28
Table 33:	Utilization of Selected Jewish Cultural-Religious Activities and Interest in Development/Expansion/Improvement of Programs, by City	29
Table 34:	Households Utilizing Jewish Educational Services, by City	29
Table 35:	Utilization of Selected Jewish Educational Programs and Activities versus	

Interest in Development/Expansion of Programs, by City 29

Table 36: The Main Roles of the Jewish Community in Moldova According to Respondents, by City 30