



RESEARCH REPORT

Patterns of Integration into Israeli Society among Immigrants from the Former Soviet Union over the Past Two Decades

Viacheslav Konstantinov

**Patterns of Integration into Israeli Society
among Immigrants from the Former Soviet Union
over the Past Two Decades**

Viacheslav Konstantinov

Jerusalem

January 2015

Editor: Raya Cohen

English translation (executive summary): Naomi Halsted

Layout and print production: Leslie Klineman

Myers-JDC-Brookdale Institute

P.O.B. 3886

Jerusalem 91037, Israel

Tel: (02) 655-7400

Fax: (02) 561-2391

Website: www.jdc.org.il/brookdale



Related Myers-JDC-Brookdale Institute Publications

Ellenbogen-Frankovits, S.; Konstantinov, V. and Katz, E. 2003. *The Integration of Immigrants from the Former Soviet Union in Post-High School and Academic Institutions. Report No. 3 – Follow-up of Immigrants in University Preparatory Courses in 1997/1998*. RR-395-03 (Hebrew).

Ellenbogen-Frankovits, S.; Konstantinov, V. and Levi, D. 2004. *The Absorption of Youth from the Caucasus: Findings from a Follow-Up Study*. RR-438-04 (Hebrew).

Kahan-Strawczynski, P.; Amiel, S.; Levi, D; and Konstantinov, V. 2012. *First and Second Generations of Immigrant Youth from Ethiopia and the Former Soviet Union – Similarities and Differences*. RR-627-12 (Hebrew).

Kahan-Strawczynski, P.; Levi, D. and Konstantinov, V. 2010. *Immigrant Youth in Israel – the Current Situation*. RR-561-10 (Hebrew).

Kahan-Strawczynski, P.; Vazan-Sikron, L. and Levi, D. 2008. *From Risk to Opportunity – a Program for Immigrant Youth: Findings of an Evaluation Study*. RR-515-08 (Hebrew).

Katz., E.; Korazim, M. and Peleg, T. 2011. *Program to Promote Employability of Immigrant Academics Aged 45+ from the Former Soviet Union: Evaluation Study*. RR-573-11 (Hebrew).

King, J. and Wolde-Tsadick, A. 2006. *Patterns of Integration into Employment of New Immigrants Aged 22-64*. RR-486-06 (Hebrew).

Mandler, D. and King, J. 2008. *Immigrant Employment Two to Three Years after Employment Center Counseling*. RR-522-08 (Hebrew).

To order publications, please contact the Myers-JDC-Brookdale Institute, P.O.B. 3886, Jerusalem, 91037; Tel: (02) 655-7400; Fax: (02) 561-2391; E-mail: brook@jdc.org.il

Reports and English summaries are also available on the Institute website:

www.jdc.org.il/brookdale

Executive Summary

1. Background

Since the early 1990s, over one million of the 1.5 million Jews who lived in the former Soviet Union (according to the 1989 Soviet population census) have immigrated to Israel.¹ On average, the immigrants were relatively young and educated when they arrived in Israel, but many did not know Hebrew or English and many, particularly in the early years, had meager resources. Naturally they had no social contacts in Israel. The situation in Israel at the time of their arrival also posed difficulties for their successful integration: the policy of curbing expansion in the public sector forced many educated immigrants to take jobs that were not commensurate with their qualifications, and the rising housing costs meant that they had only a remote chance of owning their own home. In addition to these difficulties, were the problems of integrating their children into the education system, and health and welfare problems (particularly the older immigrants). Those who were not Jewish according to Jewish law² experienced additional difficulties of their own.

More than two decades have passed since the mass immigration wave began, and since then, the situation has changed somewhat. The main goal of the current study was to use statistical data to analyze the changes in various aspects of the lives of immigrants from the former Soviet Union (FSU) since the early 1990s, as well as the factors that led to these changes.

Since the influx, numerous studies have been published about the immigration from the FSU and the integration of the immigrants. However, most have focused on a specific aspect (education, employment, housing, social integration, etc.) or a particular point in time. The current study attempts to present a multidimensional perspective of the integration of the immigrants over time – from the early 1990s to the present – and to cover demographic aspects, the acquisition of essential skills for living in Israeli society, education, employment, financial status, physical and mental health, and satisfaction with life in Israel.

2. The Study Population and Sources of Information

The study population consists of *immigrants from the former Soviet Union who have arrived in Israel since the early 1990s*. The study was based on a broad range of sources of information: Data from the 1989 Soviet population census on the Jewish population and its socio-demographic composition in the then Soviet Union; annual data from the Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) and the Ministry of Immigrant Absorption on the number and socio-demographic composition of the FSU immigrants at the time of immigration; files from the CBS Labor Force Surveys from 1991-2011; files from the 1995 and 2008 Israeli population censuses; files from social surveys conducted every year since 2002; files from surveys of household incomes and

¹ Not all the immigrants were registered as Jews in the Soviet Union.

² While Israel's Law of Return recognizes and grants rights to immigrants with a Jewish father or grandfather, religious law recognizes only the sons and daughters of Jewish mothers.

expenditure from 1995 onwards; files from the CBS health surveys for 1996/7, 1999/2000 and 2003/4 (national health survey) and 2009; a file of a survey of immigrants conducted by the CBS in 2010/11; a study of immigrant employment conducted by the Myers-JDC-Brookdale Institute in 1995; Ministry of Education files on students and educational institutions as well as matriculation files for 2000-2013; statistical reports from the Student Authority from 1993/4 to 2010/11; data from HIAS on the number of Jewish immigrants from the FSU to the USA by republic of origin from 1990-2005, as well as a file of the National Jewish Population Survey (NJPS) of the Jewish Federations of North America (JFNA) conducted in 2000/1; data on FSU Jewish immigrants to Germany including official data from the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees; data from a survey conducted in 2005/6 by the Russian-language German newspaper *Partner*; and data from studies.

Most of the data were analyzed by sex, age, age at time of immigration, republic of origin, and other characteristics. Some of the data were also analyzed in a multivariate analysis (regression). Multiyear files were created for this purpose. Based on the characteristics of the immigrants, the study team defined 4 immigration periods: 1990-1991; 1992-1995; 1996-1999; and 2000 onwards, although it was not always possible to observe this distinction.

Where data were available from the 1989 Soviet census on the socio-demographic composition of the Jews in the then Soviet Union and on the immigrants at the time of immigration, we used them in order to assess the factors affecting the decision to immigrate to Israel and the changes that occurred in Israel. We also decided to compare the FSU immigrants with the general Jewish population of Israel.³ Wherever possible, comparisons were also made between Jews who left the FSU for Israel and those who went to the USA and Germany.

3. Main Findings

The study revealed some encouraging findings, including:

- ◆ The great majority of the immigrants feel at home in Israel and plan to stay in the country.
- ◆ The birthrate among female immigrants has risen.
- ◆ Hebrew proficiency and computer literacy have improved, particularly among the younger generation.
- ◆ The percentage of immigrants aged 20-34 who served in the IDF is similar to that of all Israelis of the same age.
- ◆ The percentage of FSU-born students eligible for a matriculation certificate has increased in recent years; among the Israeli-born children of immigrants, the percentage is higher than the national average.

³ To be precise, with a group defined by the CBS as *Jews and others*, which also includes non-Jewish family members who immigrated to Israel.

- ◆ The number of immigrant college students and their percentage among young immigrants have increased rapidly even though most of them are no longer eligible for support from the Student Authority.
- ◆ The professional/occupational status of the immigrants has been steadily improving and today over half of the immigrants with a higher education are working in an occupation commensurate with their education.
- ◆ The longer they remain in the country, the closer their standard of living is to that of other Israelis.

Nevertheless, the FSU immigrants are still experiencing a considerable number of difficulties:

- ◆ Many (particularly the elderly and middle-aged) are still not proficient in Hebrew and English.
- ◆ The dropout rate from school among FSU-born students remains higher than that among total Jewish students.
- ◆ Many of the immigrants (particularly among the more recent arrivals in Israel) are not working in their profession.
- ◆ A significant proportion of the immigrants are experiencing financial hardship, by subjective and objective indicators.
- ◆ About half of the immigrants do not have permanent housing, although the percentage declines the longer they are in the country.
- ◆ A significant proportion of the immigrants (particularly the elderly and older adults) are in poor health.

The findings have been presented to the Ministry of Aliyah and Immigrant Absorption, the Jewish Agency, and the Ministry of Social Affairs and Services. The extensive scope of the findings can provide the foundation for a better understanding of the difficulties facing the immigrants and for improving programs developed for them.

Acknowledgments

Warmest thanks to my colleagues at the Myers-JDC-Brookdale Institute, particularly the director, Jack Habib, and the head of the Engelberg Center for Children and Youth, Miriam Navot, for their organizational and professional assistance with the study. Thanks to my fellow researchers: Dalia Ben-Rabi, for her assistance writing the report and obtaining information from the Ministry of Education; Shmuel Be'er, for helping to obtain information from the Central Bureau of Statistics; and Bruce Rosen and Judith King for their advice during the study. I would also like to thank Assaf Sharon for his statistical advice; the chief technology officer Shlomo Kux, and the network administrator Barak Alon for their support during the data processing; and Revital Aviv-Matok for helping with the proofreading; and to express my gratitude to Jenny Rosenfeld and Raya Cohen for editing this report and Leslie Klineman for preparing it for publication.

I am grateful to Leonid Nevzlin Research Center for Russian and East European Jewry at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem for providing the research grant for this study.

Thanks to the information systems staff at the Central Bureau of Statistics and the Ministry of Education for the information I received, in particular, to Avishai Cohen and Ariela Knaani, and to the staff of the social science database, ISDC, of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, particularly to Natalia Volchkina.

Heartfelt thanks to my wife Rina, for her emotional support and important suggestions throughout.

Table of Contents

1. Introduction	1
1.1 Background	1
1.2 Study Goals	2
2. Study Population and Main Topics	2
3. Short Presentation of the Literature	4
4. Sources of Information and Methodological Issues	6
5. Findings	9
5.1 FSU Immigration: General Trends	9
5.2 Demographic Aspects	11
5.3 Basic Aspects of Integration: Hebrew, English, Computer Literacy, Military/National Service	17
5.4 Level of Education	21
5.5 Children of Immigrants in School	25
5.6 Students in Higher Education and Post-Secondary Institutions	32
5.7 Employment and Occupations	36
5.8 Financial Status	47
5.9 Physical and Mental Health	55
5.10 Satisfaction with Life in Israel, National Identity, and Level of Religious Observance	62
6. Conclusion and Programmatic Directions	68
Bibliography	69

List of Tables

5.1 FSU Immigration: General Trends

Table 1: Immigrant Population, 1990-2013, by Year	9
Table 2: Jews in the FSU, Immigrants to Israel and Jewish Immigrants to the USA and Germany from the FSU, by Republic of Origin	10
Table 3: Immigrants and Total Jews in Israel, by District	10

5.2 Demographic Aspects

Table 4: Jews in the FSU, Immigrants to Israel, Total Jews in Israel, and Jewish Immigrants to the USA and Germany from the FSU, by Age	11
Table 5: No. of Women per 100 Men among Jews in the FSU, among Immigrants to Israel and among Jewish Population of Israel, by Age Cohort	11
Table 6: Immigrants Registered as Non-Jews, by Age Cohort	12

Table 7:	Jews in the FSU, Immigrants to Israel, Total Jews in Israel, and Jewish Immigrants to the USA and Germany from the FSU, Age 18+, by Sex and Family Status	13
Table 8:	Married Persons among Jews in the FSU, Immigrants to Israel, Total Jews in Israel, by Sex and Age	13
Table 9:	Married Immigrants Age 18+, by Sex and Year of Immigration	14
Table 10:	Immigrants to Israel Married to Spouse of a Different Origin among all Married Immigrants, by Sex, Age, and Year of Immigration	14
Table 11:	Immigrants to Israel, Total Jews in Israel and Jewish Immigrants to the USA and Germany from the FSU, by Number of Persons per Household	15
Table 12:	Distribution of all Jewish Women in the FSU, Female Immigrants to Israel, Total Jewish Women in Israel, and Female Jewish Immigrants to the USA, by Number of Children Born per Woman Age 20+	16
Table 13:	Immigrants and the Total Jewish Population in Israel, by Birth Rate, Mortality Rate and Natural Increase	16

5.3 Basic Aspects of Integration: Hebrew, English, Computer Literacy, Military/National Service

Table 14:	Immigrants Age 20+, by Level of Hebrew Proficiency	17
Table 15:	Hebrew Proficiency among Immigrants Age 20+ by Sex, Age and Year of Immigration	17
Table 16:	Immigrants Age 20+, by Level of English Proficiency	18
Table 17:	English Proficiency among Immigrants Age 20+, by Sex, Age and Year of Immigration	18
Table 18:	Immigrants to Israel and Total Jews in Israel of Israel Age 20+ who Use Computers for Any Purpose, by Sex, Age and Year of Immigration	19
Table 19:	Employed Immigrants and Total Jews in Israel in Israel who Use Computers in their Work, by Sex, Age and Year of Immigration	20
Table 20:	Immigrants and Total Jews in Israel in Israel, Age 20-34, who Performed Military/National Service, by Sex and Year of Immigration	20
Table 21:	Immigrants and Total Jews in Israel, Age 20+, by their Assessment of How Military Service Affects Employment Possibilities in Israel, by Sex, Age and Year of Immigration	21

5.4 Level of Education

Table 22: Jews in the FSU, Immigrants to Israel, Total Jews in Israel, and the Jewish Immigrants to the USA and Germany from the FSU, Age 18+, by Level of Education	22
Table 23: Higher Education among Jews in the FSU, Immigrants to Israel, and Total Jews in Israel, by Sex and Age	23
Table 24: Higher Education among Immigrants aged 18+, by Year of Immigration, Republic of Origin, and Religious-National Affiliation	24
Table 25: Higher Education among Immigrants Age 20+ (by Country of Education) and among all Jewish Israelis Age 20+, by Academic Discipline	24

5.5 Children of Immigrants in School

Table 26: Children of Immigrants among Students in Schools in the Jewish Sector in Israel, by Year	25
Table 27: Children of Immigrants and all School Students in the Jewish Sector in Israel, by Education Stream	26
Table 28: Students in Technological/Vocational/Agricultural Tracks in Senior High School at Jewish Schools in Israel – Children of Immigrants and Total Students, by Sex	27
Table 29: Accumulated Dropout Rate among Children of Immigrants and Total Students at Jewish Schools in Israel, Grades 9-12, by Sex	27
Table 30: Average Scores of Children of Immigrants and Total Students in Jewish Schools in Israel, by Grade and Basic Subjects Studied according to GEMS Examinations ⁴	28
Table 31: Matriculation Eligibility among Children of Immigrants and Total Twelfth-Graders in Jewish Schools in Israel, by Type of Eligibility, Year and Sex	30
Table 32: Association between Matriculation Results and Selected Characteristics of Immigrant Twelfth-Graders (Logistic Regression)	31

5.6 Students in Higher Education and Post-Secondary Institutions

Table 33: Students in Higher-Education and Post-Secondary Institutions – Immigrants and Total Jewish Students, by Socio-Demographic Characteristics	33
Table 34: Immigrant Students and Total Jewish Students in Universities in Israel, by Degree	34
Table 35: Immigrant Students and Total Jewish Students in Universities in Israel, by Academic Discipline	34

⁴ Growth and Effectiveness Measures for Schools

Table 36: Immigrant Students and Total Jewish Students in Universities in Israel, by Academic Institution	35
Table 37: Immigrant Students Supported by the Student Authority, by Sex, Family Status and Length of Time in Israel	35
Table 38: Immigrant Students Supported by the Student Authority, by Type of Academic Institution	36

5.7 Employment and Occupations

Table 39: Employed Individuals among Immigrants to Israel, Total Jews in Israel and FSU Jewish Immigrants to the USA, Age 18-64, by Sex, Age and Year of Immigration	37
Table 40: Unemployed Individuals among Immigrants to Israel, Total Jews in Israel and FSU Jewish Immigrants to the USA and Germany, by Sex, Age and Year of Immigration	37
Table 41: Employed Individuals among Immigrants to Israel, Total Jews in Israel and FSU Jewish Immigrants to the USA, by Sex and Weekly Work Hours	38
Table 42: Immigrants at the Time they Were Employed in the FSU, Employed Immigrants and Jewish Population in Israel and FSU Jewish Immigrants to the USA, by Occupation	39
Table 43: Immigrants who were Employed in Various Occupations in Israel in 2008, by Occupation in FSU	40
Table 44: Individuals in Israel Employed in Scientific, Academic, Liberal, Technical and Management Occupations, among Immigrants with Higher Education and Total Israeli Population with Higher Education, by Academic Degree	41
Table 45: Immigrants Employed in Israel in Scientific, Academic, Liberal, Technical and Management Occupations, by Academic Discipline, Sex, Year of Immigration, and Country where Most Recent Academic Degree was Earned	41
Table 46: Immigrants with Higher Education in Israel Employed in Scientific, Academic, Liberal, Technical and Management Occupations, by Sex, Age, Year of Immigration, Religious-National Affiliation, and Republic of Origin	42
Table 47: Immigrants with Higher Education in Israel Employed in Scientific, Academic, Liberal, Technical and Management Occupations, by Sex, Family Status and Employment of Spouse	43
Table 48: Association between the Probability of Employment in Israel in Scientific, Academic, Liberal, Technical and Management Occupations and Selected Characteristics of Immigrants with Higher Education (Logistic Regression)	44

Table 49: Immigrants with Higher Education in Israel Employed in Scientific, Academic, Liberal, Technical and Management Occupations, by Level of Proficiency in Hebrew and English	45
Table 50: Immigrants with Higher Education in Israel Employed in Scientific, Academic, Liberal, Technical and Management Occupations, by Sex, Year of Immigration and Vocational/Professional Training Courses	45
Table 51: Employed Immigrants and Total Employed Jews in Israel Age 20+, by Level of Satisfaction with Job, Sex, Year of Immigration, and Occupation	46
Table 52: Employed Immigrants and Total Employed Jews in Israel Age 20+, by Extent they Fear Job Loss, Sex, Year of Immigration, and Occupation	47

5.8 Financial Status

Table 53: Average Monthly Wages of Employed Immigrants and Total Jews in Israel, by Sex	48
Table 54: Average Monthly Wages of Employed Immigrants and Total Jews in Israel, by Age	48
Table 55: Average Monthly Wages of Employed Immigrants, by Year of Immigration	49
Table 56: Average Monthly Wages of Employed Immigrants and Total Employed Jewish Population, by Occupation in Israel	49
Table 57: Association between Average Monthly Wages (Gross) and Selected Characteristics of Immigrants Employed in Israel (Linear Regression)	50
Table 58: Average Gross Monthly Income of Immigrant Families, by Year of Immigration, and of all Jewish Families in Israel	51
Table 59: Average Monthly Income of Immigrant Families and Total Jewish Families in Israel, by Source of Income	51
Table 60: Average Monthly Expenditure of Immigrant Families and Total Jewish Families in Israel, by Items of Expenditure	52
Table 61: Immigrant Families Living in their Own Apartments, by Year of Immigration and Comparison with Total Jewish Families in Israel	52
Table 62: Immigrants and Total Jews in Israel in Israel by Number of People per Room	53
Table 63: Immigrants and Total Jews in Israel in Israel by Ownership of Durable Goods	53
Table 64: Annual Vacations in Israel and Abroad among Immigrants and Total Jews in Israel Age 20+, by Sex, Age and Year of Immigration	54
Table 65: Immigrants and Total Jews in Israel Age 20+, by Satisfaction with Financial Status and by Sex, Age and Year of Immigration	55

5.9 Physical and Mental Health

Table 66: Immigrants, Total Jews in Israel in Israel and FSU Jewish Immigrants in the USA, Age 20+, Reporting Good or Very Good Health Status, by Sex, Age, and Year of Immigration	56
Table 67: Illness among Immigrants and Total Jews in Israel, by Illness, Sex, and Age	57
Table 68: Average Number of Annual Physician Visits among Immigrants and Total Jews in Israel, by Sex and Age	58
Table 69: Hospitalizations in the Course of a Year among Immigrants and Total Jews in Israel, by Sex and Age	59
Table 70: Daily Smokers among Immigrants and Total Jews in Israel, by Sex and Age	60
Table 71: Immigrants and Total Jews in Israel Age 20+, by Frequency of Feeling Stress and Depression, Sex, Age, and Year of Immigration	61
Table 72: Immigrants and Total Jews in Israel Age 20+, by Frequency of Sense of Loneliness, Sex, Age, and Year of Immigration	62

5.10 Satisfaction with Life in Israel, National Identity, and Level of Religious Observance

Table 73: Immigrants and Total Jews in Israel Age 20+, by General Satisfaction with Life and by Sex and Age	63
Table 74: Immigrants Satisfied with Life Age 20+, by Selected Characteristics	64
Table 75: Immigrants who Feel "At Home" in Israel and Immigrants who are Sure they will Remain in Israel, by Sex, Age, and Year of Immigration	65
Table 76: Immigrants who Identify Themselves as Israeli/Jewish/ according to their Country of Origin, by Sex, Age, Year of Immigration, and Republic of Origin	66
Table 77: Immigrants and Total Jews in Israel, by Religious Observance, Sex, Age, and Year of Immigration	67