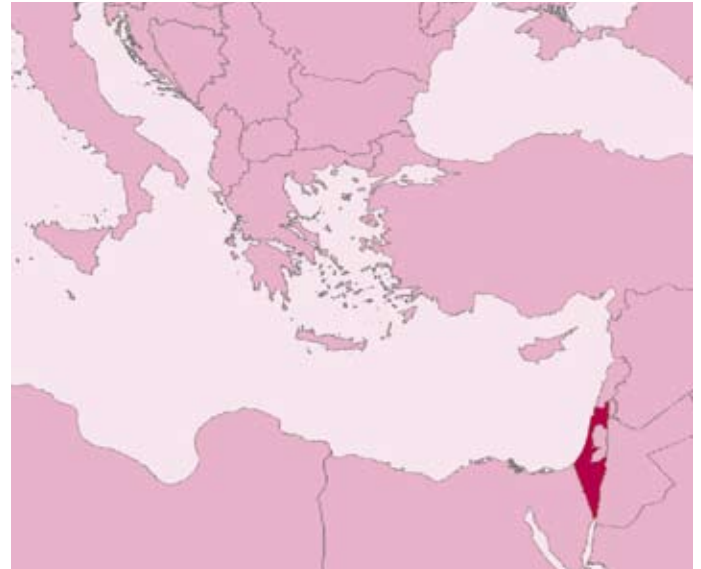


# Israel

In terms of area and population, Israel is quite a small country. Its national territory roughly corresponds in size to that of the US state of New Jersey and, with about seven million inhabitants, it is similarly densely populated. The amount of attention that the Middle East's strongest economy has always attracted bears no relation to these somewhat unspectacular figures. Israel is constantly present in media and political discourse, primarily attributable to the often war-like conflict between Jews and Palestinians that has been smouldering for more than 60 years.

With regard to the subject of migration, too, Israel is unusual in one very important way: the state is virtually built on immigration. Apart from brief interruptions, Jews have immigrated continuously into the originally Ottoman and later British-administered Palestine since 1882. The holocaust in Europe lent the Zionist ideal<sup>1</sup> worldwide legitimacy and accelerated its re-



## Background information

**Capital:** Jerusalem

**Languages:** Hebrew, Arabic

**Area:** 20,770 km<sup>2</sup> (CIA World Factbook)

**Population (2008):** 7,112,359 (CIA, includes Israeli settlers in der West Bank, East Jerusalem and the Golan Heights)

**Population density (2008):** 342 inhabitants per km<sup>2</sup> (CIA)

**Population growth (2006):** +1.8%

**Foreign-born population as a percentage of total population (2006):** 33.8%

**Share of Arab population (2007):** 19.9%

**Labour force participation rate (2006):** 55.4 %

**Percentage of foreign-born employees amongst gainfully employed (2007):** 6.9%

**Unemployment rate:**  
8.4% (2006), 9.0% (2005), 10.4% (2004)

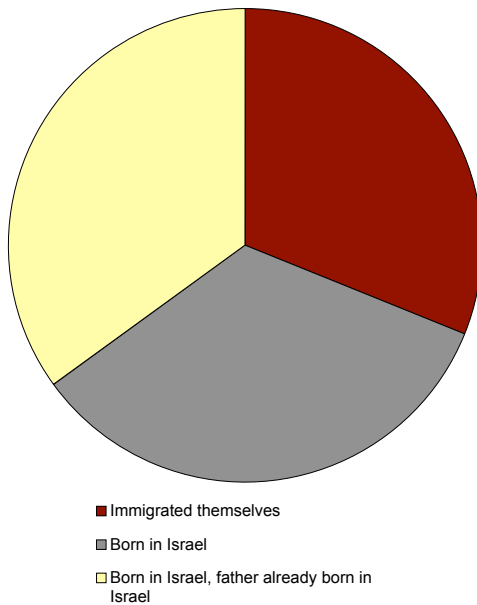
**Religions (2004):** Jews 76.4 %, Muslims 16 %, Arab Christians 1.7 %, other Christians 0.4 %, Druze 1.6 %, not stated 3.9 %

alisation. Mass immigration characterised various periods of the 20th century, especially the years immediately before and after the founding of the state in 1948. The subsequent war that broke out with the neighbouring Arab states (War of Independence) led, on the other hand, to a wave of Palestinian refugees and displaced persons. Later wars generated further refugee movements, with the result that today almost three quarters of Palestinians (about 7 million) live outside their homeland.<sup>2</sup>

The population of Israel has doubled several times over the past 60 years, in particular as a result of immigration (see Fig. 2). Today the country has 7.1 million inhabitants. Since 1948 more than three million immigrants have been registered, and in the 1990s Israel was even the country with the highest percentage of immigration worldwide in proportion to the size of its population. At the same time, Israel is also a country with an indigenous Arab-Palestinian population that makes up about 20% of the total population figures.

Given the considerable number of Jewish immigrants, questions of integration and of the co-existence of new immigrants with the indigenous population play an important role in Israel. In recent times, migration and integration policy has been faced with newly developing challenges. These include labour migration, refugeeism and illegal residence – challenges with which western immigration countries have been typically confronted up to now.

**Fig. 1: Migration background of the Jewish population of Israel 2006**



Source: CBS, own calculations

## Historical development of Jewish immigration

### Before the founding of the state

Jews have been migrating to Palestine since the early 1880s and the emergence of the Zionist movement. Five waves of immigration (*aliyah*, plural: *aliyoth*) are generally identified for the time leading up to the founding of the state in 1948.

The first aliyah, between 1882 and 1903, comprised about 25,000 mostly Russian and Romanian Jews and was, not least, a reaction to a series of anti-Semitic pogroms in southern Russia. It led to the first major towns and agricultural holdings in an area that had hitherto been relatively sparsely populated and economically poorly developed. Between 1904 and 1914 a further 40,000 Jews came to Palestine. This group predominantly consisted of members of the “Zionist Workers” in Russia who were dissatisfied with the slow pace of social reform and who had likewise become victims of anti-Semitic attacks as a consequence of the 1905 revolution. The third aliyah, between 1919 and 1923, was made up of a further 35,000 immigrants, approximately, predominantly from Poland and Russia or the Soviet Union and motivated, among other things, by the Balfour Declaration and the associated boost for the Zionist project, which aspired towards an independent Jewish state.<sup>3</sup> Between 1924 and 1931 a further 80,000 Jews arrived, once again primarily from the Soviet Union and Poland. The Polish Jews in particular suffered from anti-Semitism in Polish government policy, which excluded them from important segments of the economy. By contrast, the prospects for economic development for Jews in Palestine at this time were already significantly improved, and a Jewish infrastructure had been established. The biggest pre-state wave of immigration, the fifth aliyah between 1932 and 1939, involved about 200,000 Jews. They had recognised the

signs of the times, largely following the assumption of power by the National Socialists in 1933, and decided to leave their homeland. The immigrants of the 1930s also already included several thousand Jews from Middle Eastern countries with large Jewish communities such as Yemen and Iraq. Between 1939 and 1945 around a further 70,000 European Jews from Poland, Germany, Romania, Hungary and Czechoslovakia succeeded in fleeing from Nazi terror. They are sometimes also included in the fifth aliyah. These immigrants not only had to overcome the difficulties of leaving Central and Eastern Europe, but, against a background of the looming partition of Palestine, were also confronted by the British Mandatory power’s restrictive immigration regulations. On the eve of the founding of the Israeli state, the Jewish population of Palestine numbered more than 600,000 people.

### The War of Independence: refugeism and displacement

At the start of Jewish immigration at the end of the 19th century Palestine was by no means uninhabited. Living in the area – initially in peaceful coexistence with the Jewish immigrants, for the most part – was a partly nomadic, partly settled Arab population totalling about 400,000 people.<sup>4</sup> In addition, there were a number of small Jewish communities which, taken together, numbered about 20,000 people and whose settlement went back predominantly to Jews driven out of Spain at the end of the 15th century as well as Jewish pilgrims from the latter years of the Middle Ages.

At the end of the 19th century and turn of the 20th century the living space and economic areas of both population groups overlapped, especially in the mixed-population cities of Haifa, Yaffo (Jaffa), Ramle and Akko. Like the Jews, Arabs, too, migrated from surrounding regions to Palestine and settled there. The early 1920s, however, saw riots and at times armed conflict between Jews and Arabs (mostly over land issues) as well as between both groups and the British Mandatory power in Palestine. In the 1930s and 1940s there were civil war-like clashes, increasing in magnitude after the United Nations (UN) Partition Plan of 1947 which proposed two states on Palestinian soil. Immediately after the Declaration of Independence made by the Jewish National Council on the 14th May 1948, Egypt, Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia and Iraq declared war on the new state of Israel. This first Arab-Israeli war lasted over a year and led to massive displacement and refugee movements, since the victorious Israel also conquered areas that, according to the UN Plan, were to belong to the Arab state of Palestine.

In all, between 600,000 and 800,000 people of Arabic origin were left without a homeland: more than 450,000 settled in the Gaza Strip as well as in the part of the West Bank under Jordanian control until 1967, 70,000 in Transjordan (today’s Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan), 75,000 in Syria and a further 100,000 in Lebanon. Palestinian refugees also found themselves in Iraq (about 4,000) and in Egypt (around 7,000).<sup>5</sup> Unlike most Jews, who saw in the newly-founded and defended independence of Israel the realisation of the Zionist dream, the war, refugeism and displacement of the year 1948 meant catastrophe (*Nakba*) for Arab Palestinians. In 1948 a small number of Arabs stayed in the newly founded state: a good 150,000 non-Jews were granted Israeli citizenship, making them an ethnic minority.

Depending on (self)definition, members of that minority are described as Israeli Arabs or as Palestinian Israelis. Today this group comprises more than 1.4 million people.

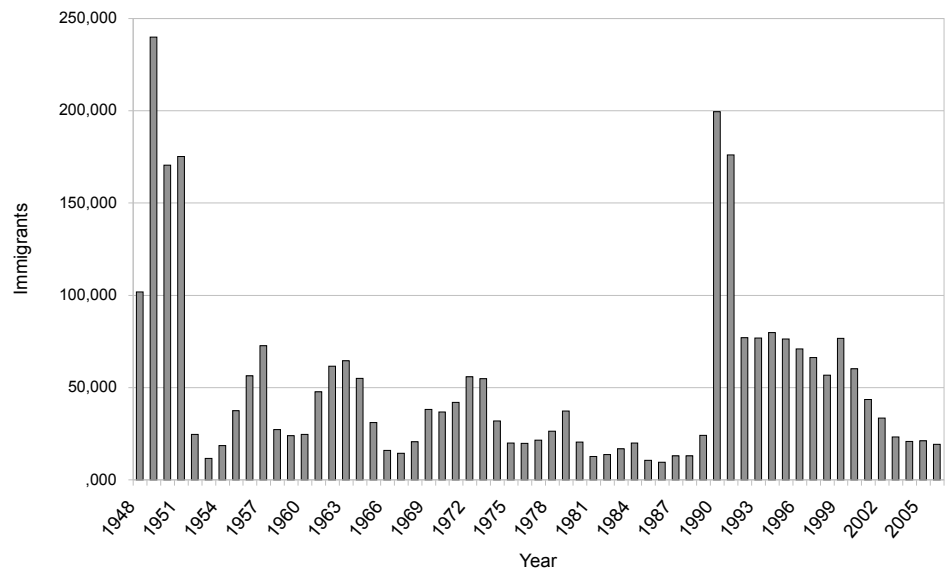
### Since the founding of Israel

For the surviving Jewish communities in post-war Europe, winning the War of Independence sent out a signal. Several thousand Jews set out for Israel. Shortly after the founding of the state there was mass immigration of Middle Eastern Jews from Iran, Iraq, Morocco and Yemen that, in some cases, resembled an exodus and led to the virtual disappearance of Jewish population groups in the countries from which they came.<sup>6</sup> In the first years between 1948 and 1952 alone, more than 600,000 Jewish immigrants came to Israel, doubling the total population. In the mid 1950s and early 1960s the annual total of new immigrants fell. Arrivals averaged 15,000 per year between 1960 and 1989, most of them coming from Europe and North and Central America. The biggest wave of immigration to date started after the fall of the Iron Curtain. It was characterised by the fact that almost 90% of the immigrants came from the former Soviet Union and this continues on a low level through to this day. The main countries of origin are Russia and Ukraine. Since 1989 a total of about 1.3 million Jews and non-Jewish family members have come to Israel as immigrants. In addition, a significant immigrant group in recent decades has been Jews from Ethiopia (see "Integration"). Since the outbreak of the second *Intifada*<sup>7</sup> in autumn of 2000, however, immigration has declined drastically; in the year 2006 fewer than 20,000 new immigrants arrived in Israel, in 2007 the number stood at just 18,000 (in comparison to an average of 73,000 per year between 1992 and 1999).

### The immigration/emigration balance

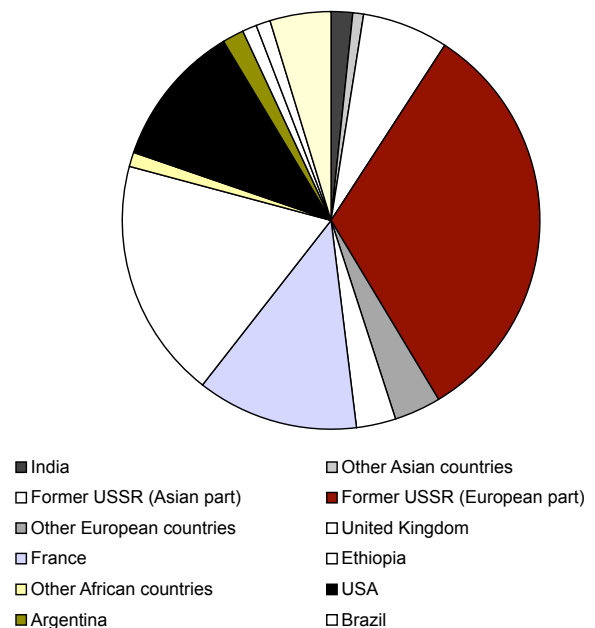
Since the founding of the state, Israel's net migration has been consistently very high. Particularly when compared with the record immigration numbers of the early 1990s, emigration figures have been of little consequence; nonetheless, there have been examples of emigration at all times: Jewish Israelis, who for family or professional reasons preferred to live, for example, in the United States or Europe; new immigrants from the former Soviet Union who were unable to cope with the climatic conditions and political clashes in the Middle East and returned home or migrated to another country after a relatively short time; as well as long-established residents grown weary of the prolonged conflict or the tense and sometimes dangerous living circumstances in Israel who were trying for a new start elsewhere. As early as 1980, results of the US American population census revealed that more than 150,000 Israeli citizens – some with dual nationality – were living in the United States, of whom about a third had been born in Israel.<sup>8</sup>

**Fig. 2: Jewish Immigration to Israel, 1948-2006**



Source: Central Bureau of Statistics

**Fig. 3: New immigrants in Israel according to country of origin, 2006**



Source: CBS, own calculations

The flow of people out of Israel did not necessarily, however, lead to permanent emigration. Frequently it represented only a temporary transfer of the main place of residence. If we consider net migration, then between 7,000 and 12,000 Israeli citizens leave Israel each year. In the years 2001 to 2006 there were about 65,000 in total, and of these about 90 % were Jews. In each of the last three years this "demographic blood-letting" has only just been compensated for by immigration. For the year 2008, US-American estimates assume a positive net migration of just 2.5 migrants per 1,000 population.<sup>9</sup>

Emigration stands in direct opposition to the Zionist Ideal on which the *raison d'être* of the state is founded: the Jewish diaspora communities in the world were to gather in Israel – in other words, to “return home”. Against this background Israelis who left their country to lead what they believed would be a more comfortable life overseas away from the wars and conflicts were often spoken of disparagingly. Yet the general increase in mobility, as well as processes of re-migration or economically driven circular migration, have meanwhile led to (temporary) emigration being regarded as a normal phenomenon. Very highly educated young adults in particular frequently work abroad for a few years, by preference in the cities of the North American west and east coasts.

## Immigration policy

Israeli immigration policy is based on what is known as the Law of Return, adopted on 5 July 1950. This makes manifest the concept of a Jewish-Zionist state allowing, indeed suggesting, that every person in the world of Jewish origin or of the Jewish faith should return to the land of their fathers. It literally states: “Every Jew has the right to come to this country as an *oleh*” [a person entitled to immigrate]. Immigration is described as a “return” or “return to their homeland”, literally an ascent (Hebr. *aliyah*). From the very beginning, however, the virtually unrestricted Jewish immigration did not go undisputed. In consideration of the immense challenges of integration in the early 1950s, the Israeli government attempted at times to control immigration through regulations: the young, healthy and potentially productive were to be given precedence. In practice, however, the restrictions proved hard to carry out.<sup>10</sup>

In order to contend with the realities of family immigration the scope of the Law of Return was even extended, for, according to Jewish law (*Halacha*), a person is only Jewish if either the mother is a Jew or if the person has been converted to Judaism in accordance with the rulings of the Orthodox rabbinical court. This made family reunification more difficult. If the original version of the Law of Return already reached beyond the Halachic definition of belonging to Judaism, since 1970 immigration law has also included non-Jews if they have at least one Jewish grandparent. Spouses are also granted a legal entitlement to immigration and citizenship whether they are themselves Jewish or not.<sup>11</sup>

It is not only the laws on citizenship and residence that are oriented towards immigration. In other areas too the state offers numerous incentives for potential immigrants. These include tax relief, customs privileges and material assistance with integration (see below), in particular.

The Jewish Agency is central to preparation for immigration. This is an organisation that was founded as early as 1929 and that initially worked towards the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine. Since Israel's independence it has primarily pursued the aim of persuading diaspora Jews to immigrate to Israel. Today it is responsible for processing all applications for immigration made by Jews outside countries of the former Soviet Union,<sup>12</sup> and checks applicants' entitlement case by case. Although in terms of its legal and organisational form it is a non-

state agency, the Jewish Agency effectively carries out governmental functions in this regard. It also acts as a “go-between” for money donations from Jews worldwide (especially North America) intended for the benefit of the Israeli state.

Organised actions towards mass immigration of certain Jewish communities should also be regarded as part of the Israeli immigration policy. The most prominent and significant in terms of the numbers involved was the secretly planned transfer of thousands of Jewish families from Ethiopia from the mid 1980s. Called “Beta Israel” and also known as the “Falasha”, Ethiopian Jews were suppressed in the exercise of their religion under the totalitarian Mengistu regime and at times persecuted. In the state-controlled Operations “Moses” and “Joshua” in 1984/85, Israel succeeded in bringing about 8,000 Jews to Israel via Sudan. In Operation “Solomon” in 1991, a further 14,000 Ethiopian immigrants were flown to Tel Aviv.

In addition to an active immigration policy, promoting the family is one of Israel's important aims in order to secure a medium and long-term “demographic majority” and with it the Jewish character of the state against a background of high birth rates among the Arab population. The avoidance of emigration forms a third element in Israel's population policy rationale. Attempts since the end of the 1960s to persuade, by means of special support programmes, some of the estimated 200,000 Israeli citizens living abroad to return, however, have so far yielded little success.

## Integration

In line with immigration law there are corresponding state measures to promote integration. Historically, the Jewish Agency has played an important role here too. Since its founding in 1968, however, the Ministry of Immigrant Absorption has been responsible for state integration programmes. Integration measures are limited to new Jewish immigrants and members of their family and are directed towards swift, profound and lasting integration. Common governmental parlance, therefore, adheres to the term “absorption”. After decades of mass immigration from completely different countries and cultures, however, it is apparent that any “ascent” of the immigrants into the new Israeli society in terms of cultural integration as understood by the US American model of a *melting pot* can scarcely be regarded as a realistic concept. In practical parlance, therefore, “absorption” has meanwhile come to be understood to a large extent as synonymous with “integration”.

New immigrants and their families are entitled to a large number of material integration services (see Fig. 4), and not for this reason alone can the integration of newly immigrated Jews be described as a continuing success story. The integration of immigrants from post-Soviet states since the early 1990s in particular has been effective from a structural perspective, due, among other things, to their high level of education (60 % have tertiary qualifications compared with 40 % of the resident population and almost 12 % are doctors or engineers) and their high labour force participation rate in their country of origin, although they were initially worse affected by unemployment. After ten years in Israel, however, employment rates have just

about evened out. With regard to schooling, meanwhile, there is even talk of an “immigrant paradox”. Despite starting from a weaker socio-economic position, young immigrants, on average, perform equally well in school or even better than children and young people born in the country. This, however, cannot disguise the fact that the integration of some immigrants from Russia has not succeeded. In addition to significantly higher levels of drug addiction and alcoholism, in recent times the detention of Russian-born members of radical right-wing and neo-Nazi groups has caused a considerable stir.<sup>13</sup> In the area of cultural identification in particular, integration is often minimal. Here the plural and multicultural character of Israeli society is becoming obvious along with clear tendencies towards differentiation (see section “Pluralisation of Society”).

A special Israeli feature are the so-called absorption centres (*merkazei klita*) founded and administered by the Jewish Agency. These simple housing estates for new immigrants were built in the 1960s and offer a range of different support services. These include, for example, the offer of a Hebrew language and integration course (*ulpan*) right on-site, as well as a formalised

network to provide advice on professional and psychological matters, schooling and more. Subsidised living in the absorption centres is, however, normally limited to six months. Whereas the Israeli state adopted a system of “direct absorption” with regard to mass immigration from the former Soviet Union, wherein the immigrants themselves had the financial means and freedoms to organise their primary integration, Ethiopian Jews were almost without exception housed institutionally after their arrival. At times up to 10,000 people were living in the absorption centres, some also for significantly longer than a year. Here they underwent a formalised and bureaucratic integration process. This was justified by the often low level of education and the “culture shock” of migrating from the rural, pre-modern society of Ethiopia to high-tech Israel which led to the conclusion that Ethiopian Jews were in need of special protection and assistance. Thus Ethiopian-born juveniles are given special support with their schooling and are entitled to university grants for a significantly longer period than other new immigrants.

The drawback of this special support with integration, however, is that the authorities treat the immigrants paternalistically.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, unlike most immigrants, Ethiopian Jews were not unreservedly received into the state and religious system in accordance with the Law of Return. On the orders of the rabbinate, several thousand had to subject themselves to a certain ceremony, which some found humiliating, in order to substantiate their allegiance to Judaism, since some of their early forebears had been forced to become Christians. The religiously and bureaucratically controlled absorption process, as well as the sceptical behaviour of the population, which also includes racist stereotypes, have led to Ethiopians in particular becoming a marginalised immigrant group occasionally suffering discrimination.<sup>15</sup>

**Fig. 4: Important integration assistance for new immigrants**

Type of assistance	Form of assistance	Period for which assistance guaranteed	Period of eligibility to make a claim
Help with living expenses upon initial reception	“Absorption basket” in eight instalments	Six months	One year from date of aliyah
Assistance with acquiring household goods	Customs grant	Once, in two instalments	Four years from date of aliyah
Hebrew language course	Assumption of course costs (part of “absorption basket”)	6 months, one-off payment	18 months from date of aliyah
	Travel costs to participate in course	Up to 6 months	One year from date of aliyah
	Assured basic income	Up to 6 months after expiry of “absorption basket”	One year from date of aliyah
Accommodation/living expenses	Housing benefit/rental assistance	5 years	-
	Accommodation in public housing	Once	-
	Mortgage loan	Once	Up to ten years from date of aliyah
Employment	Assured income or allowance for job seekers	Up to 12 months	One year from date of aliyah
	Assistance for degree courses, training and retraining	Duration of courses	Ten years from date of aliyah
Student support	Tuition grant, loan	Up to three years of study	At the responsible authorities’ discretion

Source: MOIA (2007)

## Citizenship

The citizenship law is based primarily on *jus sanguinis* and thus follows ethnonational or ethnoreligious principles. As a rule, Jews who make aliyah, in other words immigrate, to Israel automatically become Israeli citizens. Moreover, those non-Jewish inhabitants (Arabs) who were not driven away or did not leave the country after 1948 or who returned there by 1952 were also entitled to Israeli citizenship. Thus, today an Arab minority of Muslim, Christian and Druze faith comprising about 1.4 million people live as citizens

in Israel. Although they in fact have the same individual rights, they are de facto disadvantaged, in many cases.

Israeli law does also provide for, as a matter of principle, the naturalisation of foreigners; however, this option is tied to a large number of conditions. In addition, it lies within the discretion of the Ministry of the Interior and has, to date, played a subordinate role. With some exceptions, the latest Israeli policy tends towards the opposite direction: in July 2003 the Israeli parliament (Knesset) adopted a law by which the granting of residence permits or of Israeli citizenship to Palestinians from the Occupied Territories is prohibited, even if immigration is to be in the context of family reunification. According to the Citizenship and Entry into Israel Law, Palestinians who marry Israeli citizens can be granted neither residence status nor Israeli citizenship. The law, which takes the form of a regulation extended annually by a vote of Parliament, is officially justified as being in the interest of Israeli security.

The law runs counter to both the international practice of family reunification and the civil rights standards of western democracies and petitions called for the Supreme Court to review the plan. The latter, however, approved it by a small majority, imposing limiting obligations on the legislator. In both 2005 and 2007 small amendments were made. Firstly, the Ministry of the Interior may now, in individual cases, grant women over 25 and men over 35 years of age, plus children younger than 14, temporary residence, signifying a slight easing of the law. On the other hand, the scope of the law was recently extended to the effect that members of families from “enemy states” (listed in the law as Syria, Iran, Iraq and Lebanon) are also excluded from rights of residency and citizenship. The current legal regulation, against which once again an appeal has been made to the Supreme Court, is valid until the 31 July 2008.

### Ethnic democracy

Israel is still rightly considered to be the only democratic state in the Middle East. Yet its democracy is subject to certain restrictions, particularly in the area of citizenship. Critics stress that the law on citizenship and immigration robs the Arab minority of some of their civil rights and aims exclusively to keep to a minimum the number of Palestinians with a permanent right of residency or Israeli citizenship. It is said to be the expression of a form of control that regards equality and individual freedom not, in the sense of liberal democracies, as universal rights for all groups and minorities, but rather gives preference under ethno-religious criteria to the Jewish majority – a non-democratic “ethnocracy”. In Political Science, the classic model of Israel as an “ethnic democracy” assumes, by contrast, that the system of government and political processes functions as a matter of principle on the basis of the same rights and principles for all citizens and guaran-

tees the exercise of these basic rights. However, the majority ethnic group controls the state institutions while adhering to democratic rules. Accordingly, “ethnic democracy” is a diminished form of democracy; dominance is manifested through democratic majority decisions.<sup>16</sup>

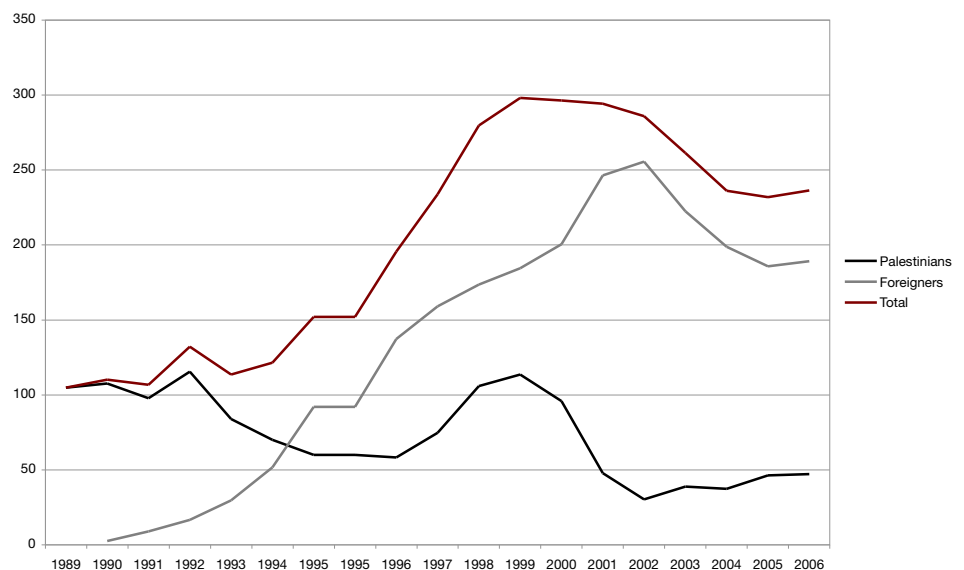
Israel’s Palestinian citizens find this discriminatory. Despite clear discrimination in education, income and accommodation, the majority are by no means dissatisfied with regard to their personal opportunities for development in the country, and in particular their economic, educational and professional opportunities. Nonetheless the legal situation is perceived to a large extent as unacceptable. More than 90 % of Arab Israelis acknowledge the right of Israel to exist. A majority, however, wishes for conversion to a consensus democracy – a binational political polity in which no population group is preferred by the state.<sup>17</sup>

### Labour migration

Until about 15 years ago, the foreign immigration into then Israeli labour market was a negligible category. High birth rates, a comparatively good education system and a permanent migration surplus brought about by immigration secured a constantly adequate supply of workers for almost all areas of the labour market. Underpaid activities with low social prestige, above all in agriculture and the building industry, were carried out by a reserve of Palestinian workers from the Occupied Territories, who commuted daily or weekly into the Israeli heartland. According to official labour market statistics, during the 1980s at times there were more than 110,000 Palestinians working in Israel – up to 7% of all employed persons.

The first serious shortages came during the 1991 Gulf War, when Israel closed the borders with the West Bank and Gaza Strip for several weeks and the Israeli construction industry practically came to a standstill. In the early 1990s the Israeli

Fig. 5: Non-Israeli employees in the Israeli labour market, in thou.



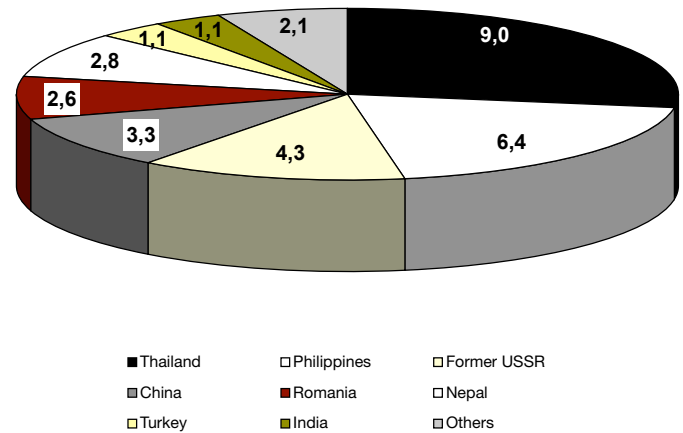
Source: Bank of Israel

army sealed the areas off ever more frequently. Palestinians were unable to pursue their occupations in Israel's fields and cities or were only able to do so sporadically. The noticeable shortage of cheap labour increased calls for alternatives. Political attempts to steer the occupations of those involved in the mass immigration from the Soviet Union that started in 1989/90 towards the affected areas of the low-pay sector failed. As a result, the shortage of workers was to be relieved by recruiting guest workers from overseas. Since 1991 a law on the occupation of foreign workers has regulated the arrangements. As a result, the number of guest workers grew continually to more than a quarter of a million in the year 2002. Since 2006, after clear decreases in the years 2003 to 2005, a slight increase has again been recorded. The Israeli government's aim to reduce the employment of Palestinians to zero by 2008 for security reasons does not appear to have been attained. Nonetheless, a comparison of employment figures since the year 2000 shows a clear tendency to replace local and regional workforces with guest workers from abroad (see Fig. 5).

Foreigners are permitted employment in just five economic sectors: in agriculture, in the building and construction trade, large-scale technical industry, home care and the catering industry. With the exception of care for the sick and aged, fixed annual quotas are determined for all areas. In the year 2006, for example, 15,000 foreigners were newly employed in the building and construction trade, 26,000 in agriculture and 3,200 in other services (in fact 32,700 guest workers entered the country with a work permit). For 2007 the quotas for construction and agriculture were each increased slightly. Foreign workers come from a relatively broad spectrum of countries. Some countries, however, stand out in terms of numbers (see Fig. 6).

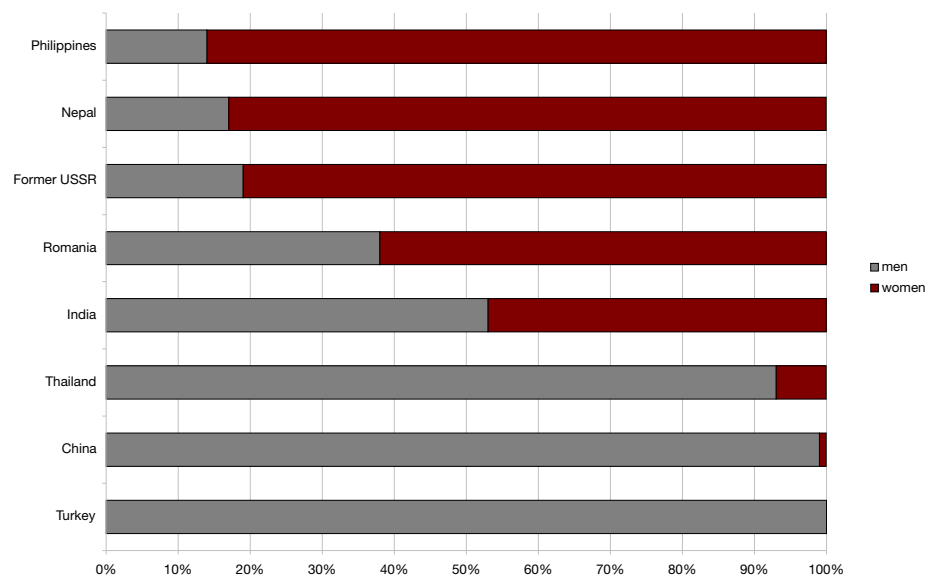
In addition, the sectors of the labour market demonstrate a clear allocation bias based on regional origin and gender. Thus the majority of guest workers in the construction sector come from Romania, China and Turkey, while predominantly women from the Philippines, Nepal and the states of the former Soviet Union are employed in care work. The majority of guest workers employed in agriculture are of Thai origin. Figure 7 shows the gender distribution for selected groups. In relation to the Israeli population, the foreign employment dimension is entirely comparable to the migration of guest workers to European countries up to the beginning of the 1970s. According to the National Bureau of Statistics, at the end of the year 2006 there were a total of 102,000 foreigners living in Israel who had entered the country with work permits. The total number of foreign workers (including those who entered the country on tourist visas and did not comply with exit requirements) was estimated at 186,000 at that same point in time.<sup>18</sup>

**Fig. 6: Countries of origin of the new immigrants with work permits 2006, in thou.**



Source: Central Bureau of Statistics

**Fig. 7: Distribution of the sexes of the new immigrants with work permits 2006, selected countries of origin**



Source: Central Bureau of Statistics

## Irregular residence and migration control

Irregular residence in Israel is rarely the result of illegal border crossings. More often it comes as a direct consequence of the restrictive recruitment policy which limits residence permits to a maximum of five years, as well as of a system that binds guest workers closely to their respective employer or professional employment agencies. It is true that a portion of the workers overstay their visa period or enter the country with only a tourist visa. However, illegality, and therefore forfeiture of their right for residency, occurs primarily through migrants leaving their jobs due to prolonged illness, outstanding remuneration, illegal underpayment, overlong working hours or exploitative employment conditions.

Although never official policy, until the beginning of the new millennium most migrants without a residence permit were de facto tolerated because, among other reasons, no system existed to expel or deport them and they had a supporting function for some of the areas of the Israeli labour market listed above. In 2002, however, the government of Ariel Sharon justified a radical about-face with the symptoms of an economic crisis during the second Intifada as well as rising unemployment figures among Israelis. Notice was given of the expulsion of all “illegals”, which was, in particular, associated with the creation of an immigration office with police powers (immigration police). The real reasons for the change probably lay, however, in the realisation that, contrary to anticipation, guest worker migration was not a temporary phenomenon. The knowledge of being reliant for the long term on labour migration runs contrary to the aim of avoiding the establishment of non-Jewish population groups in the country wherever possible.

The central precept of migration control is, therefore, to expel as many “illegals” as possible from the country. On their Internet site the immigration office also addresses migrants directly in this respect. Here, foreign workers who are not authorised to stay in Israel are promised, on the one hand a form of “safe conduct” if they leave the country voluntarily. At the same time, hints are made as to the possible consequences of a continued stay.<sup>19</sup>

## Current developments and future challenges

### Measures against the exploitation of foreign workers

It has meanwhile become clear that it is not possible for the policy of deporting illegally employed foreigners to reduce the number of irregular migrants in the country over the long term. After deporting, on average, more than 1,500 people a month during the years 2003 and 2004, since 2005 the criminal prosecution authorities have focused on two points: penalising employers who employ migrants illegally, and attempting to track down “black sheep” in the system of private employment agencies, because placing guest workers in temporary jobs has developed over recent years into a full-blown industry, often with illegal practices. According to law, licensed agencies may only demand brokerage fees of a few hundred US dollars from recruited workers. In fact, however, illegal demands for money made by agents for obtaining a work permit are becoming exorbitant: according to organisations lobbying for the rights of foreign workers the average fees paid by Thais amount to between 8,000 and 10,000 US dollars, and by Chinese people to as much as 16,000 to 18,000 US dollars.<sup>20</sup> For the employment agents involved it is, therefore, highly lucrative to recruit new migrants and pocket the relevant fees; guest workers who are dismissed or lose their jobs for other reasons are “released into illegality”. In recent years there has been no shortage of grounds for believing that parliamentary and governmental circles are also involved in this illegal business.<sup>21</sup>

Through the first steps towards reform in 2004, the dependence of guest workers on their employers has already been reduced. Measures to limit the power of employment agencies

and to strengthen the individual rights of foreign employees, discussed by a separate parliamentary committee in the Knesset, have to be the next steps. In addition to this, the improvement of health provision for these migrants is on the agenda.

### Border security

In recent years, the prostitution industry in Israel has increasingly become a market for professional human traffickers and smugglers who deal in the sexual exploitation of women, in particular, from the former states of the Soviet Union. Further efforts on the part of Israeli migration control are thus concentrated on securing external borders. The more than 200 km long Green Line with Egypt, which runs primarily through hard-to-access desert areas between the Negev and Sinai, is particularly favoured by human traffickers. Sinai is deemed a transit route for transporting drugs and weaponry. In January 2008 the border was opened by force, allowing hundreds of thousands of Palestinians from the Gaza Strip to cross over into Egypt and stay there temporarily.<sup>22</sup> Consequently, the Israeli government finalised its already existing plans to secure the southwestern border with Egypt. The government fears that the opening of the border might have allowed Palestinian terrorists to cross through Egypt into the south of Israel where they could carry out attacks. Government circles close to Prime Minister Ehud Olmert discussed the expansion of border installations, estimating that the erection of a continuous border fence would cost in excess of 1 billion US dollars. By contrast, the border barriers between Israel and the Palestinian Territories, on which construction started at the beginning of the millennium, are quite far along and already form an effective means of migration control. In conjunction with hundreds of checkpoints inside the Occupied Territories, however, they drastically restrict mobility and further reduce the remaining Palestinian settlement area. The fact that the security installation – part fence, part wall – has been built predominantly on Palestinian territory and, in places, extends far inside the area of any future Palestinian state creates a serious handicap to the peace process.

### Refugee and asylum policy

Although Israel was among the first to sign the Geneva Refugee Convention and the 1967 Protocol, and even participated in drafting them, it does not have, as yet, any established system or law for receiving or protecting refugees. Until recently, asylum seekers were dealt with by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) on whose recommendation Israel repeatedly accepted small contingents of refugees. Only in the year 2002 did an inter-ministerial working group draw up an internal directive on the treatment of asylum applicants and introduce a governmental committee to screen asylum seekers. Since then, this “National Status Granting Body”, made up predominantly of government representatives from the Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of the Interior, has been responsible for screening applications for asylum. The UNHCR continues to play an important role, assisting the committee with preliminary screening and with recommendations.

At the end of 2006, 837 recognised refugees were living in Israel, while decisions had not yet been made with regard to a further 863 asylum seekers (files pending). During the course of



the year 2006, 1,348 new applications for asylum were filed and 1,425 cases decided. This included only five recognised applications but 805 rejections; in a further 339 cases deportation was suspended on humanitarian grounds, and 276 cases were otherwise resolved.<sup>23</sup>

A relatively recent refugee movement has left Israel facing new challenges. Hundreds of refugees from the civil war in the Darfur region of Sudan have fled to Israel via Egypt since 2005. The immigration of Sudanese via Egypt increased especially in the middle of the year 2007, when at times more than two hundred civil war refugees per month arrived in Israel. According to some estimates, at the beginning of 2008 more than 2,000 Sudanese were staying in the country of whom, however, only some filed applications for asylum. They were initially accommodated in prisons and in temporary reception centres. The city council of Tel Aviv, in whose area of responsibility the considerable majority of Africans stay, fears a humanitarian crisis and is pleading for rapid integration in the labour and accommodation market. Together with the Ministry of the Interior, it is currently discussing plans for financial assistance so that the refugees can settle independently; as early as the summer of 2007 Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and Interior Minister Meir Sheerit were deliberating offering Israeli citizenship to several hundred Sudanese from Darfur.<sup>24</sup>

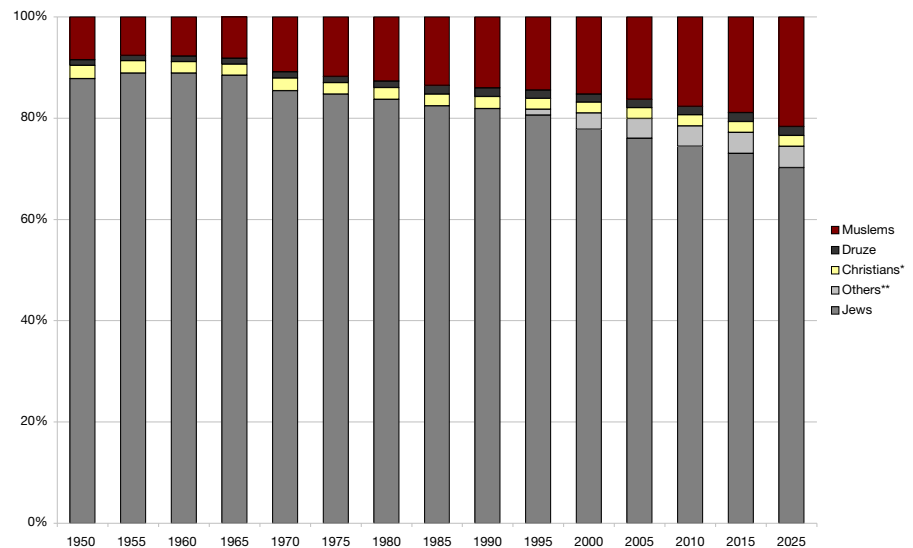
In terms of transparency and refugee protection, Israel's still young asylum program has yet to prove itself. There are repeated reports from African refugees of being rejected at the border without a hearing. Refugee aid organisations criticise, among other things, the precarious provisions made for refugees during their case, the absence of any opportunity for independent legal examination of the asylum decisions, as well as the fact that the ultimate decision-making about refugee recognition always lies with the Ministry of the Interior.<sup>25</sup>

### The question of Palestinian refugees and the demographic factor in the peace process

Palestinians are a special group in the greater international refugee situation. At the end of 1949 the United Nations founded a special organisation to look after the Palestinian refugees in the Middle East: the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA). It provides assistance with infrastructure and finance in particular to those Palestinians who live in the refugee camps of the West Bank, Gaza Strip, and also the neighbouring Arab states (Jordan, Lebanon, Syria). These currently number about 4.4 million people. Supported by numerous UN resolutions, the international community of nations assumes these Palestinians have a right of return – a right that Israel has so far categorically rejected since it would massively change the current population structure and with it the Jewish character of the country.

The ratio of Arabs to Jews has been the subject of intense debate and consideration with regard to population and political strategy ever since the Jews started to migrate to historical Palestine. Despite massive immigration on the Jewish side, over the decades the population growth on the Arab side has been greater, due to relatively high birth rates. The Arab population of Israel is currently about 20 %. According to moderate prognoses, however, already in the year 2025 it will be about 25 % (see Fig. 8). The Arab-Palestinian population in the part Israeli, part Palestinian National Authority-administered communes of the West Bank and Gaza Strip is also growing rapidly. If we include them in the demographic analysis and consider the entire territory of the former Palestinian Mandate, then the Palestinian population growth is more readily apparent: by 2006 both groups – Jews and Palestinians – were the same size in numeric terms with just over 5 million persons each (demographic parity).

**Fig. 8: Population of Israel by religious affiliation since 1950 (from 2010 on: forecast, medium model)**



Source: Central Bureau of Statistics

\* until 1994: incl. Persons with other/not stated religious affiliation

\*\* mainly family members of Jewish immigrants from the former USSR

In view of these figures, Israeli discourse refers alternatively to the “demographic question”, “demographic problem” or even the “demographic threat” that challenges the character of Israel as a Jewish state in the medium term. In addition to rejecting any right of return for Palestinian refugees to Israeli territory, right-wing politicians are therefore also considering the exclusion of predominantly Arab-populated areas in the context of negotiations around a two-state solution.<sup>26</sup> By implication, this is intended to increase acceptance for incorporating Jewish towns and communities in the Occupied Territories of the West Bank, now rendered virtually permanent as a result of Israel's offensive aggressive settlement policy, into the Israeli state.

The idea of a “land swap” is, however, vehemently rejected, particularly by Israel's Arab citizens. It remains to be seen whether, and in what context, a land swap appears on the agenda in

the course of the negotiations for a final status, which were resumed at the end of 2007.

The demand for a solution to the refugee issue is, for the Palestinian side, a dead pledge in these negotiations. In all probability Israel will agree, at best, to a right of return in a highly limited sense. For this reason, solutions are currently being devised that aim for an agreement between Israelis and Palestinians that provides financial compensation for giving up the right of return.<sup>27</sup>

### Pluralisation of society

As a result of the mass immigration of Jews from the entire world, Israeli society has been in a state of permanent transformation since the founding of the state. This process of change has taken place with greater intensity in the last 25 years than in any previous phase. The street scene is characterised by ethnic diversity: Ethiopians and sub-Saharan Africans, Asians and Latin Americans are equally present in the cities. Some streets in the poorer residential districts of Tel Aviv are meanwhile clearly dominated by Romanian guest workers, while areas around the bus station in the south of the city metamorphose at weekends into “Little Bangkok”. Yet probably no migration movement has stamped the public life of Israel so markedly as the immigration of more than one million people from the former Soviet Union. The Russian language has become firmly established despite comprehensive promotion of Hebrew; even some Russian-born Knesset MPs are unable to make parliamentary speeches in either of the two official Israeli languages (Hebrew and Arabic). There exists a broad palette of Russian-language media and a lively cultural landscape. Added to that is the fact that far from all immigrants from the Soviet Union are Jews. In the first half of the 1990s, 20% of immigrants were received as non-Jewish family members in accordance with the Law of Return, and between 1995 and 1999 this figure even exceeded 40% – a total of about 300,000 persons, with numbers rising (see also Fig. 8). Conflict is brought about, for example, by their demand for pork, the consumption of which is not compatible with Jewish dietary rules.

Through the emergence of new parties and group-specific voting preferences, the political system has also undergone significant changes. Israeli election researchers attribute to the “Russian vote” the function of an independent – and for some elections already decisive – political force.<sup>28</sup> In the 1996 elections Natan Sharansky’s “Yisrael B’Aliya” party, founded as a collection of moderate conservative movements, celebrated major successes in the new immigrants’ camp, gathering 44 % of their combined votes. Russian-born voters incline predominantly towards the parties of the right-wing or national camp. Since the end of the 1990s the “Yisrael Beiteinu” party (Israel is Our Home) has dominated in this group. The party leader is Avigdor Lieberman, the former Deputy Prime Minister. In the 2006 elections the party gained – not least through the votes of about half the Russian-born voters – 11 of the 120 seats in Parliament (9 %) and, up until its withdrawal in January 2008, had two ministers in the coalition government.

Parallel to this there is a type of “orientalisation” running through Israel’s political and cultural landscape in the form of a rise in the importance of Sephardic Judaism. The Sephardic

Jews, also known as *mizrachim* (Orientals), migrated from North African and Middle Eastern/West Asian countries after the founding of Israel and are mostly descended from the Jews driven out of Spain in the 15th century. The founding generation of Israel and the political establishment, by contrast, consisted of Ashkenazi Jews – immigrants from Europe and (rarer) North America with roots in central and east European Judaism. They have dominated public and cultural life as well as the sense of identity and self-understanding compared with the less educated Sephardim who were often regarded as culturally inferior and not uncommonly treated paternalistically. This turn towards oriental or Arab Judaism is expressed culturally, for example, through the growing popularity of oriental music. Even if income and educational opportunities continue to be unequally distributed,<sup>29</sup> the situation of oriental Jews, and especially their political representation and self-awareness as a social group has improved in recent years.

The fundamental conflict of multiethnic cohabitation however lies in the opposition between Jewish and Arab-Muslim Israelis. The latter are disadvantaged or even excluded in many areas. Despite Arab political representation in the Knesset and in autonomous municipal administrations, it is, more often than not, the Jewish population that receives the benefit of political decisions concerning development planning, infrastructure and education. Access to universities is generally more difficult for those who qualify from within the separate Arab school system. In many sectors, segregated labour markets with limited movement from one to the other exist because, among other reasons, they are categorised as “security-related”, thereby virtually excluding the employment of Palestinians.

Recently, consideration has been given to the introduction of a voluntary civil service, which would be open to all Israelis; with the exception of the Bedouin and Druze, most Arabs to date have been excluded from military service, which is extremely important for professional advancement. With regard to Jews and Arabs living together inside Israel, the just demand for full and equal integration is faced by a political and social reality which makes it seem impossible to achieve. Tackling this dilemma in a constructive manner is one of the central challenges facing social policy in the multiethnic state of Israel.

### Israel’s future as an immigration country

Non-Jewish immigration to Israel in the foreseeable future seems likely to be very limited. The future of the country as an immigration country remains closely tied to the Law of Return, even if, for pragmatic reasons, Israel adheres to the system of temporary recruitment of foreign workers. In mid-2005 a government-introduced advisory commission, primarily made up of lawyers and chaired by the renowned former minister Amnon Rubinstein, was to take a close look at Israeli migration policy. Its objective was to define an immigration policy for the state of Israel that was not exclusively oriented towards security considerations, but rather to ensure the existence of Israel as a Jewish and democratic state. In its interim report the commission assumed that immigration for those persons who fall outside the Law of Return would be possible in the future, at least for those who marry either an Israeli citizen or a person with a permanent right of residence. It recommended a series of re-

restrictions to these rights of entry, in particular banning the entry of foreign spouses from countries and regions hostile to Israel. In this way it confirmed the government's restrictive citizenship and residence policy (see above). The commission made recommendations aimed at a liberalisation of migration policy on humanitarian grounds solely with regard to guest worker families.

In fact, parallel to the commission's work, the Israeli government has already, uniquely, created a relatively uncomplicated route to citizenship for children of guest workers: whether or not their parents were residing in Israel legally, up to a fixed deadline children of guest workers who have reached the age of ten years were able to apply for a permanent right of residence with the option of naturalisation. To do this they had to have been born in Israel and integrated in the Israeli education system as well as able to speak Hebrew. In line with this, their parents and siblings could also become regularised. In total, by the end of 2005 more than 2,000 people had benefited from the regulation.

Regularisation for guest workers remained for the time being just one episode in Israel's otherwise restrictive migration and citizenship regime. Even the Rubinstein commission never presented a final report owing to the change in government after the 2006 elections. A major breakthrough in Israeli migration policy is, thus, yet to come. In the meantime, the chance of a renunciation of the dominant ethnonational understanding of belonging appears very small – on the one hand because of the unresolved Arab-Israeli conflict, on the other hand because a predominant majority in the country will also in future declare themselves in favour of the ethnoreligious characterisation of Israel through Judaism.

#### Endnotes

- 1 Zionism is the term given to a worldwide Jewish national movement and ideology originating in the second half of the 19th century. Its aim was the founding or reconstitution of a Jewish national state in Palestine.
- 2 The following account relates primarily to circumstances relevant to migration policy in the state of Israel. The Arab-Israeli conflict, matters of Palestinian statehood and migration movements and policies in the Palestinian-administered or Israeli-controlled areas are not the explicit subject of this country profile.
- 3 Between 1917 and 1948, Great Britain as victors in the First World War wielded the administrative and military power in Palestine ("Mandate") which had previously belonged to the Ottoman Empire. The so-called Balfour Declaration was a letter from the British Foreign Secretary at the time, Arthur Balfour, in which Great Britain declared that it was essentially sympathetic with Zionist aspirations to establish a "national home for the Jewish people".
- 4 The Arabs in Palestine were not an homogeneous group of people. They were predominantly Sunni Muslims, including some Bedouin. In addition there were large groups of both Christians and Druze (members of a non-missionary sect of Shiite-Islamic origin with strong group identity and their own, partly arcane religious practices).
- 5 Cf. Gilbert (1996)
- 6 This was the case, for instance, in Yemen and Iraq; the total number of Jews remaining and living in Arabic countries today is estimated at only about 60,000 (cf. Shibliak 2005).
- 7 The term Intifada refers to the violent Palestinian uprisings against Israeli occupation in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. The first Intifada began in 1987 and its conclusion is generally associated with the Oslo Accords of 1993. The second Intifada, also known as the al-Aqsa Intifada, began in September 2000 and ended with a formal truce at the beginning of 2005.
- 8 Cf. Eisenbach (1998)
- 9 Cf. Central Intelligence Agency, *The World Fact Book* (online), as at: 13.06.2008. Israel Central Bureau of Statistics data for 2007 was not available at the time of going to press.
- 10 Cf. Hacoheh (2003).
- 11 Entitlement to immigrate and the granting of Israeli citizenship are not, however, synonymous with recognition as a Jew under civil and family law.
- 12 By contrast, to administer the immigration of Jews from countries of the former Soviet Union, the Israeli state has created additional official structures within the responsible ministry on account of the exceedingly high number of cases since the beginning of the 1990s.
- 13 Cf. Haaretz, 11.9.2007; Spiegel Online, 9.9.2007
- 14 Cf. Hertzog (1999).
- 15 There are parallels to the integration of non-European-born Jews in the 1950s and 1960s, frequently referred to as "Orientals", who to this day continue to be disadvantaged as a social group in socio-economic terms; see also Semyonov and Lewin-Epstein (2004).
- 16 For more information on this controversial debate in Israeli political science see Peled (2007) and Smootha (2001).
- 17 Cf. Ghanem (2002).
- 18 Cf. CBS (2007) and Central Bureau of Statistics press release dated 30 July 2007 ([http://www1.cbs.gov.il/reader/newhodaot/tables\\_template\\_eng.html?hoda=200720139](http://www1.cbs.gov.il/reader/newhodaot/tables_template_eng.html?hoda=200720139), 12.12.2007).
- 19 Cf. <http://www.hagira.gov.il/ImmigrationCMS/zchuyot/English.aspx>, 09.12.2007
- 20 Kav LaOved, Annual Report 2006 ([http://www.kavlaoved.org.il/UserFiles/news825\\_file.pdf](http://www.kavlaoved.org.il/UserFiles/news825_file.pdf), 21.02.2008); The Hotline for Migrant Workers, Kav LaOved (2007): Freedom Inc. - Binding migrant workers to manpower corporations in Israel ([http://www.kavlaoved.org.il/media-view\\_eng.asp?id=1075](http://www.kavlaoved.org.il/media-view_eng.asp?id=1075), 12.3.2008)
- 21 Cf. Kemp (2004); Haaretz, 29.3.2007.
- 22 Cf. newsletter: "Migration and Population" 2/2008.
- 23 Figures according to the UNHCR.
- 24 Cf. Haaretz, 5.9.2007; 29.1.2008; 18.2.2008.
- 25 Cf. Physicians for Human Rights. Israel – A Safe Haven? Report and Position Paper, September 2003 ([http://www.phr.org.il/Phr/downloads/dl\\_161.pdf](http://www.phr.org.il/Phr/downloads/dl_161.pdf), 21.11.2007).
- 26 Cf. Sicron (2007); Peled (2007)
- 27 Cf. Aix Group: »Economic Dimensions of a Two-State Agreement Between

Israel and Palestine« ([http://www.aixgroup.org/economic\\_dimensions\\_english\\_website.pdf](http://www.aixgroup.org/economic_dimensions_english_website.pdf), 22.02.2008)

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Khanin (2007).

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Semyonov and Lewin-Epstein (2004)

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Publisher: Hamburg Institute of International Economics (HWWI), Heimhuder Strasse 71, 20148 Hamburg, Tel.: +49 (0)40 34 05 76-0, Fax: +49 (0)40 34 05 76-776, E-Mail: [info@hwwi.org](mailto:info@hwwi.org)  
In cooperation with: The German Federal Agency for Civic Education (bpb) and Network Migration in Europe e.V.

Editorial staff: Barbara Bils (head), Tanja El-Cherkeh, Jennifer Elrick, Gunnar Geyer, Rainer Münz, Antje Scheidler (Network Migration in Europe e.V.), Jan Schneider

focus Migration country profiles (ISSN 1864-6220) and policy briefs (ISSN 1864-5704) are published with the support of the German Federal Agency for Civic Education (bpb).

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