

## 1989-2014: Russian-Speaking Jews 25 Years Later

On November 9, 1989 the Berlin Wall fell. The event came as Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev's policies of glasnost and perestroika had steadily led to a loosening of Moscow's rigid control over its subject peoples. Yet the breaching of this stark symbol of the communist East's self-enforced isolation was a climactic sign that change of historic proportions was taking place.

The change took the world, and Jews everywhere, by surprise. A great superpower and an implacable foe was dying. It was not defeated on the battlefield of a cataclysmic war. Rather, like MacArthur's old soldiers, it just faded away, its ebbing decline barely perceptible until suddenly it was plain to all.

For the Jewish world, the change was monumental. After decades of separation from the rest of the Jewish people, after Western Jewries' years of intense struggle on their behalf, millions of Jews in the Soviet Union, and tens of thousands more in Central and Eastern Europe, were now free to reconnect to their fellow Jews. And their fellow Jews were now free to reach out to them.

Having rallied for so long behind the slogan "Let My People Go," they now found themselves

faced with the practical realities of realizing what had hitherto been only a distant hope. Amid the headiness of a miraculous time, each began the hard work of developing concrete responses to a challenge of unanticipated proportions.

From 1989 and throughout the following 25 years, world Jewry invested massively in meeting the two main elements of this challenge: facilitating the emigration of almost two million people and their resettlement, preferably in Israel and, if not, elsewhere; and responding to the needs – cultural, spiritual, material – and aspirations of the Jews who, out of choice or necessity, remained in the region.

Of the estimated 2-3 million Jews and their relatives who lived in the Soviet Union in 1989, the overwhelming majority emigrated, leaving only several hundred thousand in the region today. While push factors played a decisive role in this mass migration – one of the largest in Jewish history – policy interventions at critical junctures helped produce the following:

- **60% of the migrants went to Israel.** Although, initially, as many as 80% of the Soviet Jewish émigrés expressed a preference to resettle

in the United States, pressure from Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir combined with the U.S. government's reluctance to fund the cost of refugee resettlement limited migration to the United States and ensured that a million-plus olim reached Israel. This immigrant wave transformed Israel, socially, economically, politically, and even strategically. Not least, the influx reinforced Israel's Jewish majority and provided an economic boost, bringing the infusion of highly skilled workers that made the "Start-Up Nation" possible. Although Israel was often not the preferred destination, 25 years later, most feel comfortable with their lives in Israel and want their children to remain in the country.

- **Successful integration in Israeli economic, social, and political settings.** Israel's ability to maximize this windfall should not be taken for granted. More than at any time in Israel's history, thoughtful and timely policy decisions enabled the country to utilize the immigrants' human potential effectively, and provided a model for the integration of future migrations. These decisions reflected the immigrants' numerical clout as reflected in their successful political self-empowerment, which enabled them to influence the allocation of government funding for retraining and social-mobility programs. This political movement also produced several individuals who emerged as promising future Israeli political leaders.
- **Personal integration in other countries.** Some 750,000 Russian-speaking Jews live today in the United States and some 300,000 more in Germany and elsewhere. Overall, these

immigrants have integrated successfully on a personal level – and, indeed, their economic achievements in North America are generally more impressive even than those in Israel. Yet while they display a strong commitment to Israel and the Jewish people as a whole, few bring with them a sense of community as it has existed in the West. The immigrants' integration into organized Jewish communal life in their host countries has, thus, been extremely limited, and assimilation among them appears rapid. Although they have the potential to play a significant role in making Judaism relevant to a growing sector of Jews with limited or no religious beliefs and practices, it is unclear whether it is possible for either the new arrivals or their veteran counterparts to preserve Jewish identity in a free society without a sense of religion and its coalescing community effect, or the coercive power of the state.

- **The development of communal infrastructure for those who remained in the FSU.** A large and impressive communal infrastructure has been developed aimed at meeting the Jewish cultural, spiritual, communal, and material needs of those who did not emigrate. Jewish programming is plentiful and reaches significant numbers in absolute (though not relative) terms. Here too, however, the lack of a community tradition in the FSU has hampered the revival of Jewish communal life there, a factor that reinforces the absence of a philanthropic culture to keep this infrastructure – and particularly its welfare system – heavily

dependent on outside funding. Moreover, while the removal of the state's coercive influence freed Jews to reconnect to the Jewish people by either emigrating or reclaiming their Jewish heritage at home, it has also freed them to integrate more freely into general society. Nevertheless, Jewish programming is helping mold a younger generation whose Jewish identities have been formed in the post-Soviet era. This generation can be expected, in the coming decades, to give rise to a new

local leadership capable of forging the kind of authentic indigenous vision of Jewish life needed to build recognizable communities and to cultivate levels of Jewish identity necessary to stem assimilation and sustain Aliyah. The task of reestablishing self-sustaining communities in an environment with strong centrifugal influences and the need to provide for Jews in need, therefore, are long-term enterprises that require the continued commitment of Israel and the Jewish world.

**Table 1. Emigration of Jews and their Relatives from the FSU, 1970-2006 (thousands)<sup>1</sup>**

Year	Total	By destination:			% of total to Israel
		Israel	U.S.A	Germany	
1970-1988	291	165	126	...	57
1989	72	12.9	56	0.6	18
1990	205	185.2	6.5	8.5	90
1991	195	147.8	35.2	8	76
1992	123	65.1	45.9	4	53
1993	127	66.1	35.9	16.6	52
1994	116	68.1	32.9	8.8	59
1995	114	64.8	21.7	15.2	57
1996	106	59	19.5	16	56
1997	99	54.6	14.5	19.4	55
1998	83	46	7.4	17.8	55
1999	99	66.8	6.3	18.2	67
2000	79	50.8	5.9	16.5	64
2001	60	33.6	4.1	16.7	56
2002	44	18.5	2.5	19.3	42
2003	32	12.4	1.6	15.4	39
2004	25	10.1	1.1	11.2	40
2005	18	9.4	0.9	6	52
2006	10	7.5	0.6	1.1	75
1989-2006	1,607	979	325	219	61
1970-2006	1,898	1,144	...	...	60

## The Russian Aliyah

### A Leadership Moment that Shaped the “Global Jewish Future”

Within a decade of 1989, Israel's population surged from 4.6 million to 6.2 million in large part due to the immigration of almost a million Russian-speaking Jews. The impact of this influx was transformational. It changed virtually every facet of Israeli life, from its culture and economy to its

politics and international affairs.

### Shamir pressed the United States to cancel political refugee status for the Soviet Jewish emigres

Yet as the Jewish emigration wave began, it was not at all clear that Israel would benefit from such a population windfall. In 1988, 88.5% of the Jews who left the USSR in 1988 did not choose Israel as their final destination. Instead, on their arrival at Western

transit stations after leaving the Soviet Union, they changed their destination from Israel to other countries, most notably the United States.

In what he later described as the most significant event of his life, Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir decided Israel's position in 1988. At a meeting with U.S. Secretary of State George Shultz in May of that year, he pressed for the United States to cancel political refugee status for Soviet Jewish émigrés and to stop issuing them refugee visas, arguing that since they already held Israeli visas, they were not really refugees.<sup>2</sup>

This policy determination was remarkable, not least because of the clash of values and interests between Israel's national needs and the émigrés' freedom to choose. What distinguished Shamir's perspective was that it was motivated by concern for the country's future, even though this ran contrary to his own political self-interest. A report by the Israeli “Liaison Bureau” that he received a few weeks before the Schultz meeting indicated that mass Aliyah would almost certainly result in Shamir's electoral defeat, as indeed transpired when Yitzhak Rabin was elected in 1992 thanks in part to the massive “Russian vote.”

In September 1989, with thousands of émigrés leaving each week, concern grew in the United States that allowing unfettered immigration of Soviet Jews would create a precedent for future mass migrations. The United States therefore decided it would allow up to 40,000 Soviet Jews a year to enter the country as refugees, but that it would provide funding only for 32,000, leaving American Jewry to fund the remainder. With this additional financial burden unsustainable for the American Jewish establishment, the dispute between Israel and the Diaspora over Soviet Jewish emigration was laid to rest.

With the U.S. refugee option now largely off the table, the tide turned virtually overnight. The dropout rate of 88.5% in 1988 fell to 19.6% in 1990. Moreover, this shift in the migration flow created a dynamic. More and more, Jewish émigrés showed a preference for joining their families and friends in Israel, such that by 1995 even the limited U.S. refugee quota was no longer fully subscribed (see Table 1).

## The Demographic and Economic Contribution to Israel

The approximately 40% of former Soviet Jews who live in Israel today comprise more than 15% of the general Israeli population and 17% of the country's Jews.<sup>3</sup> These figures led Dr. Zeev Khanin, chief scientist at the Ministry of Absorption and an immigrant himself, to conclude:

- "Due to immigration from the former Soviet Union, Israel succeeded in preserving the traditional demographic balance between its Jewish and non-Jewish sectors at a ratio of 80:20. This balance is seen as a critical factor for ensuring the status of Israel as a Jewish, liberal, democratic and Western state.
- "Russian Jewish immigration of the 1990s and 2000s strengthened the national defense capacity of the State of Israel, both directly and indirectly. New immigrants constitute a significant proportion of enlisted soldiers and, in recent years, of the officers in the IDF, and are overrepresented in combat and technical units. Thus, the extent of their contribution to the maintenance of the country's security is hard to overestimate."<sup>4</sup>

Ironically, this was a legacy that the Soviet Union left to the Jewish state. As Vladimir Koblancko, the Ukrainian consul to Israel noted in 1996, the value of the education that immigrants from Ukraine alone brought was \$40 billion. In January 2010, marking the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Aliyah wave, Absorption Minister Sofa Landver summed up the contribution in human capital the immigrants brought: "[T]raining a physician doctor costs

\$200,000 and we have absorbed during these years 25,000 doctors. The savings to the state amounts to \$5 billion. We absorbed a further 100,000 engineers and scientists, artists, athletes and others. The overall net economic contribution of the olim to Israel economy amounts 181 billion shekels."<sup>5</sup>

Furthermore, the mass Aliyah substantially decreased the hopes of the Arab leaders of defeating Israel or damaging it as a Jewish state. Declassified Soviet archival documents show that the Soviet authorities' inability to stop this emigration was one of the most important factors in the PLO leadership's acceptance of the idea of the "two-state solution" in 1988.<sup>6</sup> At the same time, Israel's need for U.S. loan guarantees to fund the newcomers' resettlement led the U.S. administration to feel comfortable enough to pressure Israel to make political concessions, ultimately leading to the signing of the Oslo Accords in 1993. An additional geopolitical impact of the massive presence of Israeli citizens of Soviet origin has led the Jewish state to special relations with post-Soviet countries.

**The Soviet Aliyah preserved the traditional demographic balance between Jewish and non-Jewish sectors at a 80:20 ratio**

## Three Lessons from the Russian Aliyah – Policy Implications

As noted above, Jewish policy decisions and leadership were influential in diverting the bulk of this migration to Israel and in the decision of the Russian olim not to re-emigrate. We have identified four key elements that allowed this to happen: (1) Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir's role in influencing the U.S. policy shift on immigration quotas; (2) the

**Israeli policy facilitated the immigrants' social mobility and thereby limited re-emigration**

convergence of internal and international factors that made this diversion to Israel possible; (3) the critical role of the Russian olim's political self-empowerment in their successful integration in Israel; and (4) the Israeli policy decisions that facilitated the immigrants'

social mobility and therefore limited re-emigration. The lesson arising from all this is that intervention by policy-makers is an important component in a successful Aliyah process. Understanding the actions and events involved in this Aliyah may be instructive in responding to future Jewish migrations, such as the current possibility of significant emigration from Europe.

### **Lesson 1: Aliyah is a strategic asset for Israel and should be actively promoted.**

Considering the huge contribution of the FSU Aliyah to Israel as regards the country's demographic balance, human capital, and economy, and considering

further the contribution of olim throughout Israel's history, Aliyah is clearly a strategic asset for the Jewish State. Furthermore, mass Aliyah from the USSR and its former satellite states substantially decreased Arab leaders' hopes of defeating Israel or damaging it as a Jewish state. Given Prime Minister Netanyahu's observation that the Russian Aliyah was "one of the greatest miracles that happened to the state", we should ask ourselves what can be done to allow future such "miracles" to happen. We should also reexamine the adequacy in the 21<sup>st</sup> century of the old Aliyah paradigm which assumes that most olim come from distressed communities and have no alternative but to come to Israel.

### **Lesson 2: Policy interventions to overcome resistance are needed.**

As a matter of policy analysis, the famous sentence "Israel loves Aliyah but doesn't like olim" reveals a kind of market failure in which long-term national interest does not conform with powerful sectorial interests. In such situations of establishment resistance, there is a need for a regulator's intervention, which in the case of FSU Aliyah, came from Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir and other senior Israeli decision-makers. While analysts agree that olim are good for the country's development, there are forces among veteran Israelis who feel threatened by the newcomers, especially if they are well educated and not powerless. In the past, this paradox was not as sharp because the vast majority of potential olim came from distressed countries and had limited choices.

Yet, today's Diaspora Jews, even in the FSU, are no longer in abject distress. Even if, as in Europe

today, push factors are gaining strength, Jews have the option to move to alternative destinations. If Israel wants to attract them, it has to compete and offer acceptable conditions. Hence, to bring highly educated and accomplished olim from developed countries who have migration alternatives, policy-makers should remove obstacles to their successful absorption placed by sectorial interests.

### **Lesson 3: An Aliyah paradigm shift is required.**

For much of its history, Israel was accustomed to welcoming Aliyah from countries in distress. Since immigrants from these countries generally had few alternatives, Israel could afford an absorption model that put the country's needs first, often offering relatively little recognition of the immigrants' individual needs and aspirations.

Many question, though, whether this old, paternalistic model is up to the challenge of the more competitive reality for Jews from developed countries, such as those in Europe, who have career and lifestyle expectations, and, more importantly, choices. Even those willing to compromise on living standards and favor Israel over Canada or the United States, must overcome numerous needless hurdles to making the desirable actually happen. As hundreds of thousands of highly educated Jews consider emigration, Israel with its promising economy can compete for European Jews.

Yet Israel is not the only destination available to the potential émigrés. The United States, for example, has growing Franco-Jewish hubs, and both Canada and Australia offer a real object lesson: They

positively entice skilled professionals who can help strengthen their economies by offering attractive immigration schemes.

For Israel to translate the impetus to migrate into actual Aliyah, therefore, it must become a more appealing destination. Above all, this means decreasing the objective risks that a move to Israel entails by making it easier for migrants to transfer their businesses or professional lives and ensure their families find promise in the Promised Land.

For Israel, and indeed for the Jewish people as a whole, the question is how to take an integrated view of the goals we seek to achieve – and what obstacles exist to achieving them. Then, developing a system that removes as many of these obstacles as possible is the obvious and necessary next step.

This includes removing bureaucratic barriers to professional and business relocation; making the compulsory military draft more flexible; and coopting the experience of organizations that have proactively attracted and absorbed North American immigrants.

Adopting a market-oriented approach through such steps is likely to achieve a high degree of success in bringing, if not a flood of immigration from Europe, then at least a steady flow where there is now but a trickle.

**To bring olim who have migration alternatives, policy-makers should remove obstacles to their successful absorption**

## The Odd Israeli pro-Aliyah Coalition that Made a Miracle Possible

Mass migration could, of course, not occur without political will in Israel. National interest alone is not enough to lead to action without a coalition of political and economic actors and a determined leader. Yet, traditionally, educated newcomers threaten the short-term interests of veterans, as we can see in the bureaucratic barriers that sectorial professional guilds erect to discourage the Aliyah from developed countries. What aided the policy of bringing the immigrants to Israel was an unusual convergence of perceived interests on the part of both the left and right in Israel. The left was convinced that the secular educational profile of the immigrants would draw them into the peace camp, and the right was certain – based on the political tendencies of the Soviet immigrants of the 1970s – that they would be getting "natural human reinforcements."

## The Resettlement of Russian-Speaking Jews in the United States

The goal of the Soviet Jews who arrived to North America was, like that of so many before them, to succeed in their new homeland and to push their children to succeed even more.<sup>7</sup> This desire to become part of the American mainstream, what sociologists call a "host-country orientation," has been a distinguishing feature of Russian-speaking Jewish immigrants from the beginning. Few expressed any desire to return to the FSU; the rate of re-migration by Russian-speaking Jews in the United States is, by all indications, very small. Many of those immigrants enjoyed rapid mobility. On average, within a decade or so of their arrival, the median income of Russian-speaking Jews exceeded the American national average. Despite a disproportionate number of Russian-speaking poor Jews (especially among those who arrived later in life), the community as a whole is advancing

economically. Unsurprisingly, second-generation Russian-speaking Jews, the bilingual children of immigrants, are often wealthier and more economically secure than their parents. Sergey Brin, the co-founder of Google, who immigrated to the United States with his parents at the age of six, and Dmitry Salita, the successful Orthodox Jewish boxer who immigrated with his parents at the age of nine, are prime examples. Their success helps to explain why the community of Russian-speaking Jews in the United States is seen to have "come of age."

Another reason for the perceived "coming of age" is what one author has called "the Russification of Jewish American fiction." Some of the foremost contemporary Jewish writers in the English language, including Gary Shteyngart, Lara Vapnyar, David Bezmozgis, Ellen Litman, Anya Ulinich, Sana Krasikov, Irina Reyn and Maxim D. Shrayer are Russian-born.

Russian-speaking Jews have been among the foremost proponents of a Jewish identity not based upon religion but focused upon peoplehood – the closest term to "nationality" that America

legitimates. A qualitative study of young Russian-speaking Jews quotes one who defines Jewish identity as “primarily ethnic and cultural. A level of history that I completely accept and adopt.” Another proudly associates with “the Jews and the heritage and background, and what Jewish people have gone through.” A different study quotes Jews who define their identity biologically. “The type of blood in my veins is my Jewishness.” “There is stuff in my blood that definitely says that I am Jewish.” In both of these studies, the overwhelming number of young Russian-speaking Jews interviewed express a strong “ethnic” Jewishness, “a sense of pride and belonging to a people with a rich history and culture.” The interviewees confess their befuddlement at the inability of American Jews to accept that Judaism can be based primarily on “nationality” and “blood.” “In America,” one of the interviewees admits, “it is hard to explain to others who I am, since Jewish is to them mostly a religion.”

In the long term, there is much reason for concern, for peoplehood ties, important as they are, have not historically been powerful enough to prevent intermarriage in America. Unless Russian-speaking Jews in the United States develop a strong Jewish identity and a conscious commitment to produce Jewish children, their descendants are likely to assimilate into the mainstream.

## **The Jewish Community in the Former Soviet Union**

In addition to unleashing a Jewish emigration of historic dimensions, the liberalizing policy changes in Moscow also freed the region's Jews to explore

their Jewish heritage and reconnect to each other and to the Jewish world at large. Yet very little remained of Jewish life as we know it – or of Jewish community at all. Few Jewish institutions survived, and even ascertaining the number of Jews living in the region was largely a matter of conjecture.

While the initial priority was emigration, the Jewish world's emphasis soon shifted to reconnecting with Soviet Jews in situ. This was Jewish renewal on a scale never before attempted. One of the greatest difficulties lay in the social-cultural gulf between Soviet Jews and those elsewhere. Soviet Jews had been changed and acculturated by communism in ways that were little understood. Nor were they monolithic, with those in the Belarus, Ukraine, and Russia differing widely from the indigenous Jews of the Soviet Asiatic republics.

The international Jewish organizations that returned to the region shared a noble and well-intentioned goal of reconnecting the remaining Soviet Jews to the Jewish people. Yet, they effectively embarked into a terra incognita. And unavoidably, their efforts were colored by the ideological and cultural preconceptions rooted in their own, Western experiences.

Given its mission, the Jewish Agency's massive programming in the region was candidly Israel-centric. Its camps, ulpan programs, Israel centers and other initiatives were designed to foster Zionist values, build knowledge of Hebrew and Israel, and otherwise prepare Jews for Aliyah, whether immediately or at some point in the future.

Chabad, for its part, brought its characteristic brand of Jewish outreach to those interested in

the spirituality of an Orthodox-religious form of Jewish expression. By any measure, though, the network Chabad has developed is impressive. It counts 91 institutions – Chabad Houses, Or Avner Schools, welfare services, orphanages, yeshivot, etc. – in Russia alone, with another 62 in Ukraine and smaller numbers in other former Soviet republics.

Yet it is difficult to ascertain just how extensive its reach is. While on the one hand, FSU Jews appear to regard the religious practice that Chabad represents as having authenticity (in the sense of "The synagogue I don't go to is Orthodox"), this is not usually accompanied by a willingness to subscribe to it. Not only did communism leave behind a skeptical view of religion in general, it also made many averse to dogma of any kind.

The third major player, the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC), approached the challenge somewhat differently. Though its work, too, was informed by its Western perspective, it sought to provide the region's Jews with the tools to rebuild Jewish life in ways that reflected their own values and Jewish experience – beginning with shipments of Jewish books and the creation of Jewish libraries. JDC also developed a distinctive model of the "Jewish community center" tailored to the FSU reality that was designed to draw disparate and scattered Jews together in a single Jewish location.

JDC's work differed in another critical way too. It became the Jewish world's principal agent in responding to the challenge of poverty among FSU Jews, particularly among the elderly. Significantly, JDC has sought to turn care for the elderly into a magnet for local Jews to coalesce into communities through

the Hesed system of community-based care, which today provides relief for approximately 146,000 elderly Jews.

A number of considerations should inform Jewish policymaking in ongoing efforts to rebuild Jewish life in the region.

1. **Communism's profound impact on the FSU's Jews has enduring effects.** The institutional and general anti-Semitism of the Soviet years sustained Jewish identity. However, since Jewish community institutions were all but eliminated and Jews no longer necessarily lived in geographic proximity to one other, that identity took on a national-ethnic rather than communal character.

At the same time, the paradox of communism was that its quest for collectivism instead fostered a survival-driven individualism and suspicion of the collective, particularly among Jews, who were often victimized by the Soviet state. This ran counter to the value of mutual responsibility that underpins Jewish communal life, leaving a society in which genuine (as distinct from state-approved) voluntarism and philanthropy were largely alien concepts, and hindering the reemergence of Western-style Jewish communities.

Decades of assimilation, too, have changed the character of FSU Jewry culturally, as well as demographically – so much so that it may be said to be "post-assimilationist," with significant numbers who wish to identify as Jews but who may not be recognized as such according to halacha, or even less strict criteria. There, as elsewhere, the nature of

Jewish identity is one of the Jewish world's major unresolved issues.

2. **The FSU's Jewish revival remains a work in progress.** Although a relatively small proportion of the region's Jewish population are actively involved in Jewish communal life, the level of Jewish activity is nonetheless substantial in absolute terms, and several factors suggest it will continue to strengthen:

- Academic and cultural programming has proven especially attractive to FSU's Jews and could provide fertile ground for the emergence of a new, indigenous vision of community life that can respond to the interests and needs of the region's Jews.
- The post-communist generation of Jews who have grown up with a more open and positive attitude to their Jewishness is maturing. As they begin to move into key positions in Jewish organizations, they are more likely to provide the broad vision and leadership the FSU's Jews have hitherto lacked.
- The connection to Israel is strong, dovetailing with the national-ethnic form of identity that is characteristic of Russian-speaking Jews. For FSU Jews, though, this connection is tangible as well as emotional, since many have friends or relatives in Israel. Additionally, with flights between Tel Aviv and the major FSU cities both short and frequent, a phenomenon of transnationalism has developed, with Russian-speaking Jews

dividing their time between Israel and an FSU country. This further strengthens the region's Jews' connection to Israel.

3. **Welfare needs will remain a major concern.** As in every community, there will continue to be poor Jews in the FSU who require welfare assistance. Unlike in the West, however, state-funded social and health-care services in the FSU are either rudimentary or inadequate to the needs, while local Jewish philanthropy has yet to emerge to fund supplementary Jewish welfare agencies. These services will continue to require support from the wider Jewish world for the foreseeable future, particularly as the generation who suffered from Nazi persecution passes on and restitution funds that financed their care cease to be available.

Nor is providing for the poor and elderly solely a matter of fulfilling our obligation to them, as powerful as this imperative may be. Since meeting basic needs is seen as vital, welfare services differ from most other aspects of Jewish life, which are largely discretionary. As such, Jewish welfare agencies continue to have the capacity to attract the involvement and support of local Jews and strengthen the value of mutual Jewish responsibility in a way that other Jewish programs may not.

4. **Local funding for Jewish activity will remain a challenge for the foreseeable future.** In a society that has only recently emerged from a political system in which all needs were provided by the

state, there is no tradition of philanthropy.

Further, since Jews are disproportionately represented among the intelligentsia – which includes prestigious but not necessarily high-paying professions – and since there is little inherited wealth in the FSU, most Jews lack the financial wherewithal to contribute significantly to Jewish programming.

There is, of course, significant wealth among Jewish oligarchs, although their willingness to contribute to Jewish causes has, so far, been limited. This may be due in part to their relatively recent achievement of mega-wealth status (much as Steven Spielberg and Bill Gates came to their

philanthropy only later in life) and to an apparent utilitarian view of philanthropy as a means of safeguarding their business interests. They remain, nevertheless, an important potential source of funding that may develop over time.

In the meantime, the funding challenge has led JDC, for example, to develop a business-like approach to Jewish activities. This involves charging participation fees for activities and making space in JCCs available for commercial activity when consistent with the buildings' main purpose. While this approach has enjoyed some success in supporting cultural programming in major cities, it does not provide a solution to funding welfare programs.

## Contribution to the Jewish People's Collective Well-Being

JPPI's 'dashboard' representing the state of "Jewish well-being" from a global perspective, reflects the impact of the Soviet Union's collapse. Developments in each of the three main centers of Russian-speaking Jews have not had uniform collective influence. For example, the Jews who reached North America achieved greater economic and professional success than those who opted for Israel or remained in FSU, yet the impact of this success on the Jewish people as a whole has been limited.

Nevertheless, the overall impact has been enormous. The fall of the Iron Curtain restored the Jewish world's access to Russian-speaking Jews and thereby transformed inter-communal bonds. Further, the million Jews who immigrated to Israel brought unrivaled benefits to the Jewish people collective in at least three of the five JPPI-selected indicators. As a matter of *Jewish demography* (through greater in-marriage, increased birth rate, etc.), *Jewish resources* (through their contribution to Israel's economic development and by helping lay the ground for the "Start-Up Nation"), and in *geopolitics* (through their role in the IDF, by strengthening Israel's Jewish majority, facilitating a special relationship with Russia, and – according to some – by providing an impetus for the Oslo process). Moreover, since several key Israeli political leaders are from FSU backgrounds, their contributions to *Jewish leadership* may also be substantial.

To summarize: In Israel, Russian-speaking Jews have made enormous enormous economic, demographic, cultural, and political contributions. In the U.S. and other migration destinations they achieved personal economic success and are making cultural contributions to Jewish life, though at the risk of assimilation. In the FSU itself, we see the beginnings of communal life, though here too there is a significant chance of assimilation.

## Endnotes

1. Tolts, Mark, "Post-Soviet Aliyah and Jewish Demographic Transformation," <http://bjpa.org/Publications/downloadPublication.cfm?PublicationID=11924>
2. This public policy affair provides insight into the ways in which humanitarian impulse, public policy, and civic society come together in American Jewry and in the Israel-diaspora relationship. See Fred A. Lazin, *The Struggle for Soviet Jewry in American Politics: Israel versus the American Jewish Establishment*, Lexington Books, 2005. See also <http://cis.org/RefugeeResettlement-SovietJewry>
3. Tolts, Mark (2009) "Demographic Changes among Post-Soviet Migrants in Israel," *Diasporas* (Moscow), 2009, No 2, pp. 91-113.
4. Vladimir (Ze'ev) Khanin, *Aliyah from the Former Soviet Union: Contribution to the National Security Balance*, Herzliya Conference 2010, pp.6-7. [http://www.herzliyaconference.org/\\_Uploads/3046Aliyah.pdf](http://www.herzliyaconference.org/_Uploads/3046Aliyah.pdf)
5. Quoted by Lily Galili and Roman Bronfman, *The Million that Changed the Middle East: Russian Immigration to Israel*, Matar publishers, 2013 (Hebrew). p. 181.
6. Morozov, Boris (1999) *Documents on Soviet Jewish Emigration* (London: Frank Cass, 1999)
7. JPPI has published recently an in-depth policy paper about Russian Speaking Jews in North America: Sarna, Jonathan D., *Toward a Comprehensive Policy Planning for Russian-Speaking Jews in North America*, in collaboration with Dov Maimon and Shmuel Rosner, JPPI, 2014. We refer the interested reader to this publication and reproduce here only few insights that will help us to integrate the main findings that are relevant to our multi-continental integrated assessment.