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**Zeev Rosenhek**

***Migration-Related Institutions  
and Policies in Israel***

Analytic and Synthetic Notes 2005/07 - political and social module

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**CARIM**  
**Euro-Mediterranean Consortium**  
**for Applied Research on International Migration**

**Analytic and Synthetic Notes – Political and Social Module**  
**CARIM-AS 2005/07**

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**Migration-Related Institutions and Policies in Israel**

**Section I –State Institutions and Policies**

**Basic principles of the Israeli migration regime**

The most basic principle of the Israeli migration regime is explicit and formal demarcation between Jews and non-Jews. With respect to Jews, Israel is a “settler regime” seeking to attract new members through immigration. This is reflected at the ideological, institutional and policy levels. Historically, the Zionist project of state- and nation-building was founded on Jewish immigration flows. Albeit less intensively than in the past, the immigration of Jews to Israel is still conceived as a crucial component of Zionist ideology and as the *raison d’être* of the state. Thus, state and quasi-state agencies are directly involved in the encouragement of Jewish immigration and in the execution of migration operations. Jewish immigrants (and their family members) arriving through the Law of Return (“*olim chadashim*” -- literally “new immigrants”) are automatically granted Israeli citizenship upon their arrival in the country, and state agencies implement diverse programs with the goal of promoting their social, economic and political incorporation.

In contrast, with respect to non-Jewish labor migrants Israel represents a “guest-worker regime” that refuses to consider them as prospective members of society. This is manifested in the highly restrictive policy concerning their entry and settlement, as well as in the largely exclusionist practices with respect to the economic, social and political status and rights of those already residing in the country (both documented and undocumented).

## **Ministry of Immigrant Absorption**

<http://www.moia.gov.il/languages/languages.asp>

The Ministry of Immigrant Absorption is responsible for providing government assistance to new immigrants and returning residents - from their first steps in the country to their incorporation into every area of life in Israeli society.

In order to meet this goal, the Ministry's main fields of activity are:

- Formulation of regulations and procedures, which define the new immigrant's eligibility for assistance.
- Provision of special services in the areas of housing, employment, culture, etc.
- Cooperation with various non-governmental organizations, which allow them to provide assistance to new immigrants during the absorption process.
- Participation with other government ministries and public organizations in special joint projects for new immigrants.
- Coordination of assistance to new immigrants from government ministries and local authorities.

## **Categories of eligibility for assistance from the Ministry of Immigrant Absorption and other Ministries**

- **New Immigrant**

A new immigrant is a person who came to Israel and received the status of "new immigrant" from the Ministry of Interior, according to the Law of Return - 1950. The Law of Return states that every Jew, his/her spouse, his children and grandchildren and their spouses are entitled to immigrate to Israel.

- **Immigrant Citizen**

An immigrant citizen is a person who was born abroad to an Israeli citizen, and would be eligible to immigrate to Israel under the Law of Return if they did not already hold Israeli citizenship.

- **Returning Citizen**

A returning resident is an Israeli citizen who spent at least two years abroad.

## **Main assistance programs**

- Financial assistance for initial absorption during the first six months in the country.
- Intensive Hebrew studies.
- Housing (rental fee assistance, subsidized mortgages, provision of public housing).
- Professional licensing, training and retraining courses.
- Guidance, professional counseling and loans for business entrepreneurship.

- Tuition fees and loans for university and college students.
- Special assistance programs to immigrants serving in the army.

### **Ministry of Interior**

<http://www.moin.gov.il/>

The Ministry of Interior is responsible for assessing the eligibility of immigrants to status of “new immigrant” and access to citizenship under the Law of Return (conditional on the immigrant’s Jewish origins or family links to a Jewish person), and their registration as such.

The Ministry is responsible also for providing special temporary residence permits to labor migrants. These permits are conditional on the work permits issued by the Ministry of Labor, and do not entitle the migrants to access to legal status of “temporary resident”, “permanent resident”, or citizenship. The ministry is responsible for enforcing the law and regulations concerning illegal residence in the country. It is involved in the deportation of undocumented labor migrants and their families (including children that were born in the country but lack any legal status).

The policy implemented towards non-Jewish immigrants is highly restrictive, attempting at reducing their number and impeding their settlement in the country. This is reflected in the severe regulations and bureaucratic obstacles implemented with respect to non-Jews (especially Palestinians from the occupied territories) requiring status of permanent residence or citizenship on the basis of marriage with Israeli citizens.

### **Immigration Authority (Immigration Police)**

<http://www.hagira.gov.il/ImmigrationCMS/>

The Immigration Authority (Immigration Police) was established in 2002 as a joint agency of the Ministry of Interior, the Ministry of Labor, and the Police. It functions as a Police unit with the aim of reducing the number of undocumented migrant workers residing in the country through deportation. According to its website, during its first year of existence it deported more than 65,000 undocumented immigrants.

### **Ministry of Industry, Commerce and Labor**

<http://www.tamas.gov.il/>

The Ministry’s Department of Professional Training and Manpower Development run special training courses for “new immigrants”.

The Employment Service provides special assistance to “new immigrants” and “returning citizens” searching for employment, including giving them preference in employment allocation and in referring them to courses of professional training.

The Ministry’s Unit for Foreign Workers is responsible for issuing and providing employers with permits for hiring migrant workers according to the quotas assigned by the government to different sectors (construction, agriculture, care services, manufacturing, and tourism). It is responsible also for enforcing the labor laws that apply on labor migrants.

## **Ministry of Social Affairs**

<http://www.molsa.gov.il/>

The Ministry runs special programs to assist the absorption and integration of “new immigrants” under the Law of Return. Different assistance programs focus on the community level and leadership development, strengthening of the family and family violence prevention, and early identification and treatment of risk groups.

The Ministry recruits and trains volunteers that participate in the activities of the welfare agencies at the local level. Many of these volunteers participate in assistance programs specifically directed to “new immigrants”. The Ministry also recruits and trains volunteers among the “new immigrants” to work in their own communities.

## **The National Insurance Institute**

<http://www.btl.gov.il/>

“New immigrants” under the Law of Return are automatically covered by all social security programs upon arrive in the country. In contrast, migrant workers, both documented and undocumented, are covered by only three of the social insurance programs operated by the National Insurance Institute – work injuries, employer’s bankruptcy and maternity – and they are excluded from all other social security programs, such as unemployment benefits, old age and survivors pensions, and children’s allowances.

## **Ministry of Foreign Affairs**

<http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA>

Matters relating to immigration under the Law of Return are usually handled by the immigration emissaries of the Jewish Agency. The Israeli mission will issue the immigration visa on the recommendation of the Jewish Agency representative, after the latter has concluded his part of the process.

## **Ministry of Health**

<http://www.health.gov.il/>

“New immigrants” under the Law of Return are covered by the National Health Insurance Program automatically upon arrive in the country. In contrast, neither documented nor undocumented migrant workers are covered by this program. In the case of documented migrant workers, employers are required by law to provide their employees with private health insurance. The enforcement of this regulation by the state agencies, however, is extremely deficient. Undocumented migrant workers can insure themselves in private health insurance programs, but very few of them have done that. Since 2002, they have the option of insure their children in a special medical insurance plan regulated by the government (equivalent to the National Health Insurance Program).

The Ministry operates special preparation courses to assist immigrant dentists in passing the habilitation tests.

### **Ministry of Housing**

<http://www.moch.gov.il/Moch/>

The Ministry provides special assistance for housing to “new immigrants” under the Law of Return, consisting of subsidized mortgages and loans, rental fee assistance and preferential access to public housing.

### **Ministry of Education**

<http://cms.education.gov.il/EducationCMS/Units/olim>

The Division of Immigrant Absorption in the ministry formulates and finances special programs of Hebrew study for immigrant pupils (under the “Law of Return”) in elementary and secondary schools (including individualized study plans, additional teaching hours and specialized personnel). It runs also training courses for teachers who teach Hebrew as a second language to immigrant pupils.

Though significant numbers of migrant workers’ children attend public schools (especially in South Tel-Aviv), they are not recognized by the ministry as immigrants and hence they are not entitled to these special assistance programs.

The ministry runs several projects to improve the academic achievements of immigrant pupils (especially immigrants from Ethiopia and the Asian ex-Soviet Republics) and to facilitate their social and cultural integration at the school and community level. Some of these programs focus on the immigrant pupils’ assimilation into the Jewish-Israeli culture and the development of Jewish-Zionist identity among them.

## **Section II- International Non-Governmental Organizations**

### **The Jewish Agency**

<http://www.jafi.org.il/index.htm>

Though formally an international non-governmental organization representing the world Jewry, the Jewish Agency functions in fact as a quasi-state agency cooperating with the Israeli state in promoting Jewish immigration to Israel. It has operated, jointly with the Israeli government, several operations of massive Jewish immigration to Israel, like Operation Moses and Operation Solomon from Ethiopia.

The Immigration and Absorption Department of the Jewish Agency assists prospective Jewish immigrants by providing them information on employment and educational options in Israel, organizing employment fairs, organizing pilot tours, etc.

The emissaries of the Jewish Agency are responsible for setting the arrangements of the immigration, including the assessment of the candidate’s eligibility to the Law of Return, and provision of a grant for the airline tickets.

In Israel, the Jewish Agency operates the Absorption Centers for “new immigrants”, provides courses for intensive Hebrew study, cooperates with governmental agencies in

the formulation and financing of special absorption programs, and supports immigrant organizations.

### **Section III - Local Non-Governmental Institutions**

#### **A- Human rights organizations**

##### **Worker's Hotline**

<http://www.kavlaoved.org.il>

Established in 1991, the Workers' Hotline is a local NGO dedicated to the protection of occupational rights of the most vulnerable groups in Israeli society: migrant workers, Palestinian workers, ethnic minorities, and workers employed via sub-contractors. Due to their nationality, legal status, socio-economic background, cultural-linguistic barriers, or gender, these workers are less likely to be familiar with their rights, and less capable to guarantee their implication.

On the individual level the Worker's Hotline provides legal aid to disadvantaged workers in cases of withheld payment, under payment, social benefits violations, transgressions of contract conditions, confinement, criminal abuse, passport confiscation, and deportation. The legal aid provided ranges from settlement mediation to Supreme Court petitions.

On the public level the Worker's Hotline acts for a systemic change in labor policies, publishing reports, initiating media exposure, conducting educational workshops and advocating for improved policies. A major advocacy campaign conducted lately has been against the mass deportation of migrant workers.

##### **The Hotline for Migrant Workers**

<http://www.hotline.org.il>

Established in 1998, the Hotline for Migrant Workers is a local NGO dedicated to promoting the civil and human rights of migrant workers in Israel, and eliminating trafficking in women.

The three main fields of action of the organization are:

**Crisis intervention:** Provision of information, advise, representation, and humanitarian support to migrant workers and trafficked women detained by the authorities.

**Legal action:** Presentation of suits and petitions concerning violations of civil and human rights of migrant workers and trafficked women to promote public accountability and enforcement of the rule of law.

**Public advocacy:** Work with the academia, the media, and policymakers to increase coverage and public awareness of violations of civil and human rights of migrant workers and trafficked women, and to promote policy changes.

## **Physicians for Human Rights - Israel**

<http://www.phr.org.il>

Established in 1988, Physicians for Human Rights - Israel (PHR-Israel) is a NGO dedicated to promoting and protecting the right to health. The growing numbers of migrant workers arriving in Israel, and the tremendous difficulties and abuse they suffered particularly in areas of social benefits and protection of health rights, led PHR-Israel to take on this issue as a major project.

PHR-Israel supports initiatives for legalization and integration of migrant workers and opposes the current deportation policy and violations of their basic human rights. PHR-Israel takes legal action both on matters of principle, as well as providing individuals with legal and medical assistance. PHR-Israel offers all migrant workers advice and support in protection of their right to health in the face of ongoing abuse and exploitation both by the state and by private companies and individuals.

PHR-Israel launched in 1998 an open clinic located in South Tel-Aviv, in order to provide medical care for migrant workers, especially for those who have no work permit, and are therefore forced to manage with no adequate health care, and usually have no medical insurance of any kind. The clinic's goal is to give basic care and refer for further treatment, but is meant to replace the duties and responsibilities of the government.

## **Association for Civil Rights in Israel**

<http://www.acri.org.il>

Established in 1972, the Association for Civil Rights in Israel (ACRI) is a local NGO with the goal of protecting human and civil rights in Israel and in the territories under Israeli control. ACRI works to protect the rights of diverse individuals and sectors of society including men and women, religious and secular, Jews and Arabs. Those on the political right and left, new immigrants and veteran citizens, the unemployed, and foreign workers. ACRI has been involved in several public campaigns and legal actions to protect and promote the civil rights of both documented and undocumented migrant workers in the fields of social services, occupational rights, access to medical care, police violence, deportations, etc.

## **B- Immigrant organizations**

Immigrant organizations (of immigrants who arrived under the Law of Return) receive financial and organizational support from the Jewish Agency and the Israeli government, and focus their activities on providing social and cultural services and assistance to new immigrants, aiming at easing their absorption. Their general approach is integrative and cooperative with state agencies.

## **The Association of Americans and Canadians in Israel (AACI)**

<http://www.aaci.org.il>

AACI is dedicated to the successful absorption of North Americans into Israeli society. It actively encourages Jewish immigration, helps newcomers acclimate, provides

ongoing services to immigrants, provides social activities and works towards building stronger ties between North American Jewry and Israel.

It provides counseling and information to new immigrants on topics including employment, health services, education, housing, and immigrant rights. It organizes a variety of cultural and social activities, including clubs, lectures, outings, and entertainment.

### **The United Jewish Israel Appeal-Israel (UJIA-Israel)**

<http://www.ujia.org.il>

UJIA-Israel is committed to the successful absorption of immigrants into Israeli society and offers pre- and post-immigration advice and help, including information on immigrant rights, employment and financial assistance. In addition to British immigrants, UJIA-Israel offers its services to Australians, New Zealanders, South Africans, and Scandinavians.

### **English-Speaking Residents Association (ESRA)**

<http://www.esra.org.il>

ESRA aims are helping the integration of English-speaking families and new immigrants by providing social, cultural, educational, and civic activities; encouraging English-speakers to volunteer in the community; and initiating and running projects in the community to aid immigrants from distressed countries and other disadvantaged sectors of Israeli society.

### **The Zionist Forum**

<http://www.zforum.org.il>

The main goal of the Zionist Forum is to assist Russian-speaking new immigrants to cope with the multitude of interrelated problems caused by immigration. Its activities include projects related to absorption assistance to needy and underprivileged immigrants, psychological assistance, promotion of Jewish identity, legal and civil rights protection, cultural activities, and integration programs.

### **Israel Association for Ethiopian Jews (IAEJ)**

<http://www.iaej.co.il>

The IAEJ advocates for the full and rapid integration of Ethiopian Jews into mainstream Israeli society through an informed and empowered Ethiopian citizenry. It focuses primarily on education as the key to integration and mobility within Israeli society. IAEJ accomplishes its mission through direct advocacy in government ministries and the parliament, as well as by providing information to the community, policy makers and the media. It initiates community empowerment projects that provide Ethiopian citizens in Israel with knowledge and tools that enable them to bridge the social and cultural gaps they face, and access the social and legal rights to which they are entitled.

### **The United Ethiopian Jewish Organization (UEJO)**

<http://www.uejo.org.il>

UEJO is the umbrella organization of the Ethiopian Jewish community in Israel. It organizes the two annual main events of the community: the Sigd -- the Beta Israel holiday, and the Memorial Ceremony for those who died on their way to Israel. UEJO provides a large range of personal services for all members of the community, like information and consultation, translation of documents, professional legal advice, and modes financial assistance in extreme cases. It guides and counsels in matters concerning children education, promotes parents involvement in the schools and encourages youngsters to excel and persist in their studies. UEJO encourages the preservation of Jewish-Ethiopian culture and traditions by contributing to traditional dance groups, artisans, and writers.

### **The Association of Latin-American Immigrants in Israel (OLEI)**

9 Marmorek St.  
Tel-Aviv, 64254  
Tel: 972-3-685-1144  
e-mail: [olei\\_cen@netvision.net.il](mailto:olei_cen@netvision.net.il)

OLEI provides information and advice to new immigrants, financial assistance through loans, assistance to newcomers in the airport, and assistance in searching employment. It organizes social and cultural activities, like lectures, panels, theater plays, movies, seminars, concerts, outings, Hebrew courses, etc.

### **The National Association of Immigrants from the Soviet Union in Israel**

34 Kibbutz Galuyot St.  
66150, Tel-Aviv  
Tel: 972-3-518-9592

### **Bulgarian Immigrants Association in Israel**

63 Yerushalayim Blvd.  
Tel-Aviv – Jaffa, 68180  
Tel: 972-3-683-3738

### **Bukharan Immigrants – Israel Alliance**

2 Hacongress St.  
Tel-Aviv, 66044  
Tel: 972-3-639-3448

### **Bukharian Jewish Congress**

28 Bezalel St.  
Ramat Gan, 52521  
Tel: 972-3-612-4322

**Association of Czechoslovakian Jewry in Israel**

15 Ahad Haam St.  
Tel-Aviv, 65141  
Tel: 972-3-517-2792

**Egyptian Immigrants in Israel Union**

56 Pinsker St.  
Tel-Aviv, 63568  
Tel: 972-3-528-5534

**Jews from France and Northern Africa (UNISAN)**

33 King George St.  
Tel-Aviv, 63299  
Tel: 972-3-629-1669

**Iranians in Israel Umbrella Organization**

16 Haaliya St.  
Tel-Aviv, 66061  
Tel: 972-3-681-5581

**Association of Jews from Kurdistan in Israel**

111 Agrippas St.  
Jerusalem, 94513  
Tel: 972-2-624-0850

**Moroccan Immigrants in Israel**

176 Ibn Gvirol St.  
Tel-Aviv, 62032  
Tel: 972-3-605-4241

**Dutch Immigrants Association**

56 Hamasger St.  
Tel-Aviv, 67016  
Tel: 972-3-691-0921

**Association of Romanian Immigrants in Israel**

3 Alexander Yanai St.  
Tel-Aviv, 62382  
Tel: 972-3-546-6502

**Association of Jews from Damascus**

3 Rosh Pina St.  
Tel-Aviv, 66058  
Tel: 972-3-639-2463

**Association of Jews from Turkey in Israel**

24 Rothschild St.  
Bat Yam, 59382  
Tel: 972-3-613-7871

**C- Labor Migrant Associations**

Some communities of migrant workers, especially the undocumented ones, have developed an impressive and varied network of associations with diverse orientations, types of activities and degrees of formalization. There are numerous clubs organized on basis of common ethnic membership, towns and villages of origin and extended kin links. Those relatively informal frameworks, composed generally of small numbers of male members, focus on social and recreational activities and self-help action. Some of them function also as rotating credit associations.

A second tier of associational life developed around the more than thirty churches established by the migrant workers in Tel-Aviv. These churches have emerged in Israel as a central locus of community formation both at the organizational and identity levels. Besides socio-religious activities such as praying, Bible learning and celebrations of life-cycle ceremonies – like weddings and naming of newborn babies – the churches function as centers of social and recreational activities and as frameworks for exchange of information about job opportunities, housing and other aspects of the migrants' interaction with the host society. Another important role of the churches is the provision of economic and social assistance during personal crisis, such as accidents, acute illness and death cases. A more formalized pattern of associations is represented by national organizations established on basis of country of origin, such as the Association of Nigerians in Israel and the Association of Sierra-Leonians in Israel. These organizations engage mainly in social and recreational activities, like commemoration of national independence days and celebration of holidays.

The African Workers Union, which was established in 1997, have assumed the representative role of the African community *vis-a-vis* the host society, acting as a vehicle for claims-making and attempting to negotiate with Israeli agencies the conditions under which African migrants' are incorporated. This has been the only association of labor migrants registered as a non-profit organization in the Ministry of Interior. Other umbrella organizations have been established by the Latin-American and the Philippine communities. The associations established by the migrant workers are not recognized by the state as representative of their communities, and do not enjoy any financial or other support from state agencies.