



European
University
Institute

Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies

DEMOGRAPHIC ASPECTS OF IRREGULAR IMMIGRANTS IN ISRAEL

Yinon Cohen

CARIM Analytic and Synthetic Notes 2008/62

Irregular Migration Series

Demographic and Economic Module

Cooperation project on the social integration
of immigrants, migration, and the movement
of persons (CARIM)

Co-financed by the European University Institute
and the European Union (AENEAS Programme)



CARIM
Euro-Mediterranean Consortium
for Applied Research on International Migration

Analytic and Synthetic Notes – Irregular Migration Series
Demographic and Economic Module

CARIM-AS 2008/62

Demographic Aspects of Irregular Immigrants in Israel

Yinon Cohen

Columbia University and Tel Aviv University

This publication is part of a series of papers on the theme of Irregular Migration written in the framework of the CARIM project and presented at a meeting organised by CARIM in Florence: "Irregular Migration into and through Southern and Eastern Mediterranean Countries" (6 - 8 July 2008).

These papers will also be discussed in another meeting between Policy Makers and Experts on the same topic (25 - 27 January 2009). The results of these discussions will be published separately. The entire set of papers on Irregular Migration are available at the following address: <http://www.carim.org/ql/IrregularMigration>.

© 2008, European University Institute
Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies

This text may be downloaded only for personal research purposes. Any additional reproduction for other purposes, whether in hard copies or electronically, requires the consent of the Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies.

Requests should be addressed to forinfo@eui.eu

If cited or quoted, reference should be made as follows:

[Full name of the author(s)], [title], CARIM AS [series number], Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies, San Domenico di Fiesole (FI): European University Institute, [year of publication].

THE VIEWS EXPRESSED IN THIS PUBLICATION CANNOT IN ANY CIRCUMSTANCES BE REGARDED AS THE OFFICIAL POSITION OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

European University Institute
Badia Fiesolana
I – 50014 San Domenico di Fiesole (FI)
Italy

<http://www.eui.eu/RSCAS/Publications/>
<http://www.carim.org/Publications/>
<http://cadmus.eui.eu>

CARIM

The Euro-Mediterranean Consortium for Applied Research on International Migration (CARIM) was created in February 2004 and has been financed by the European Commission. Until January 2007, it referred to part C - “*cooperation related to the social integration of immigrants issue, migration and free circulation of persons*” of the MEDA programme, i.e. the main financial instrument of the European Union to establish the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership. Since February 2007, CARIM has been funded as part of the AENEAS programme for technical and financial assistance to third countries in the areas of migration and asylum. The latter programme establishes a link between the external objectives of the European Union’s migration policy and its development policy. AENEAS aims at providing third countries with the assistance necessary to achieve, at different levels, a better management of migrant flows.

Within this framework, CARIM aims, in an academic perspective, to observe, analyse, and predict migration in the North African and the Eastern Mediterranean Region (hereafter Region).

CARIM is composed of a coordinating unit established at the Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies (RSCAS) of the European University Institute (EUI, Florence), and a network of scientific correspondents based in the 12 countries observed by CARIM: Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Palestine, Syria, Tunisia, Turkey and, since February 2007, also Libya and Mauritania. All are studied as origin, transit and immigration countries. External experts from the European Union and countries of the Region also contribute to CARIM activities.

The CARIM carries out the following activities:

- Mediterranean migration database;
- Research and publications;
- Meetings of academics;
- Meetings between experts and policy makers;
- Early warning system.

The activities of CARIM cover three aspects of international migration in the Region: economic and demographic, legal, and socio-political.

Results of the above activities are made available for public consultation through the website of the project: www.carim.org

For more information:

Euro-Mediterranean Consortium for Applied Research on International Migration

Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies (EUI)

Villa Malafasca

Via Boccaccio, 151

50133 Firenze (FI)

Italy

Tel: +39 055 46 85 878

Fax: + 39 055 46 85 755

Email: carim@eui.eu

Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies

<http://www.eui.eu/RSCAS/>

Abstract

This paper focuses on traditional groups of irregular migrants in Israel, especially the various types of unauthorized labor migrants, and to a lesser extent on refugees. Estimates for the sizes of the various groups of unauthorized labor migrants – Palestinians from the Occupied Territories and unauthorized labor migrants from overseas – have been presented using diverse sources and calculations. Their demographic characteristics, mostly age and sex, as well as trends regarding their economic impact on the Israeli economy and deportations have been developed in a concluding part.

Résumé

Ce document met l'accent sur les groupes traditionnels de migrants irréguliers en Israël, en particulier sur les différents types de travailleurs migrants non autorisés et, dans une moindre mesure, sur les réfugiés. Des estimations sur la taille de différents groupes de travailleurs migrants non autorisés – Palestiniens des territoires occupés et travailleurs migrants provenant d'ailleurs – ont été présentées en utilisant des données produites par différentes sources et des calculs de l'auteur. Les caractéristiques démographiques, principalement l'âge et le sexe, aussi bien que les tendances dans leur déplacement et leur impact sur l'économie d'Israël, ont été développées dans une partie conclusive.

Introduction

In Israel, where Jewish immigration is the norm, all immigrants who are not Jewish are in some senses “irregular”. Thus, the 300,000 relatives of Jews who immigrated to Israel from the Former Soviet Union (FSU) are irregular immigrants, as are all non-Jewish labor migrants, Palestinians and others, whose share in Israel’s labor force has been around 10-12 percent in the past 15 years.

Notwithstanding the unique problems associated in Israel with being a non-Jewish migrant, I will focus in this paper on the traditional groups of irregular migrants, especially the various types of unauthorized labor migrants¹, and to a lesser extent on refugees (there are no immigrants in transit in Israel). In the following pages I will present estimates for the size of the various groups of unauthorized labor migrants (Palestinians from the Occupied Territories and unauthorized labor migrants from overseas), their demographic characteristics (particularly age and sex), as well as trends in their deportations and their economic impact on the Israeli economy.

1. Measurements and Numbers - How many?

Israel, like most Western countries, does not know how many unauthorized migrants it has. There are accurate counts of Jewish migrants (and their non-Jewish family members) reported by the Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS), but only a few of these immigrants are unauthorized. Likewise, there are credible estimates for the *flow* of authorized labor migrants entering Israel each year and these figures, too, are published by the CBS. With respect to the *stock* of authorized labor migrants, and the stock and flow of *unauthorized* labor migrants, however, the situation is more complex. Estimates, if available, are neither accurate nor precise, and are based on a variety of sources and estimation methods. I will, nevertheless, attempt to present below the best available estimates for the various groups of unauthorized labor migrants in Israel.

1.1 Palestinian workers from the Occupied Territories

The first group are those Palestinian workers who were recruited to work in Israel following the 1967 war. Starting in 1968, Israel granted Palestinians work authorizations that enabled many to work in Israel, but not to reside there or even to stay overnight. The number of authorizations increased over the years, reaching a peak of 71,800 in 1992 (Table 1). Starting in 1993, when Israel decided to replace these Palestinian workers with non-Arab, labor migrants from overseas, the number of authorizations declined, reaching 37,000 in 1998. Following the second *intifada* and Israel’s general policy of “separation”, the number of work authorizations granted to Palestinian workers from the occupied territories further declined to less than 4,000 in 2001. The number of authorization rose again to around 10,000-15,000 in the second half of the 2000s, and to 27,500 in 2007.

¹ There are other types of irregular immigrants, for example, family members including children born to labor migrants, and Palestinian spouses of Arab-Israelis who are no longer allowed to reside with their spouses in Israel and must return to the West Bank or Gaza (Gans, 2008).

Table 1. Employee Jobs of documented and undocumented Non-citizen Palestinian workers from the West Bank and Gaza in Israel by status of worker 1998-2007 (thousands)

	<u>Total (1)</u>	<u>Authorized (2)</u>	<u>Unauthorized (3)</u> <u>≡ (1) - (2)</u>	<u>% Unauthorized (4)</u> <u>≡ [(3)/(1)] x 100</u>
1986	97.6	41.8	49.5	50.1
1988	109.4	44.4	65.0	59.0
1990	107.7	35.6	72.1	66.9
1992	115.0	71.8	43.2	37.6
1994	70.0	38.3	31.7	45.2
1998	106.0	36.9	69.1	65.2
1999	113.6	35.0	78.6	69.2
2000	96.0	27.7	68.3	71.1
2001	47.8	3.8	44.0	92.1
2002	30.3	6.4	23.9	78.9
2003	38.8	12.6	26.2	67.5
2004	37.4	8.5	28.9	77.3
2005	46.3	11.4	34.9	75.4
2006	47.1	13.0	34.1	72.4
2007	49.4	27.5	21.9	44.3

Sources:

- Total (column 1): Bank of Israel, *Annual Report, Statistical supplement*, 2008.
- Documented (column 2): CBS - *Israeli Statistical Abstract* 2007, Table 12.34; data for 2007 – Bank of Israel, *Annual Report*, 2008, page 193.
- Undocumented (column 3) and % Undocumented (column 4): my calculation.

The number of non-citizen Palestinian workers who are authorized to work in Israel is known and is reported by various agencies, including the CBS. Likewise there are estimates for the total size of the Palestinian workforce in Israel, obtained from labor-force surveys, conducted by Israel until 1996, and since then by the Palestinian Authority. The number of unauthorized workers must be derived indirectly, by subtracting the number of work authorizations from the estimated total. In labor force surveys, people are asked for the employment of their household members, including place of employment (Israel or the territories) regardless of their legal status (if working in Israel). In 1992, when the number of authorized workers was 71,800, the total number of Palestinian workers in Israel was estimated at 115,600, implying that there were 44,000 unauthorized Palestinian workers in that year. To be sure, this estimate is bound to be too low for it assumes that all non-documented Palestinians reported their jobs in Israel to interviewers. The CBS estimated that the total number of Palestinian workers in Israel in the 1980s may have been 30-40 percent higher than estimated by its own surveys (CBS 1996).

As shown in Table 1, the total number of Palestinian workers in Israel is estimated to be significantly higher than the number of authorized workers. Apparently, most Palestinian workers in Israel are undocumented and work without authorization. The figures for 2002-2006 suggest that the total number of workers was around 40,000-50,000, and about 75% of them were undocumented. In

2007 the number of authorizations was doubled (probably as a result of the decline in terrorist attacks from the West Bank) – from 13,000 in 2006 to 27,500 in 2007, yet the total number of Palestinian workers increased by only 5%. This being the case, in 2007 the number of undocumented Palestinian workers should be estimated at 21,900, which is nearly half the number of total workers (the lowest proportion in the 2000s). Evidently, still in 2007, non-citizen Palestinians are still one of the largest groups of unauthorized workers in Israel.

Unauthorized Palestinian workers are composed of two groups: commuters who cross the green line daily, and those residing in Israel for longer spells without authorization. It is not known how many reside in Israel and how many commute daily. It is reasonable to assume that since the second *intifada* and the tight control that Israel imposes on the movements of Palestinians on the West Bank, many Palestinians that in the past commuted daily to Israel, do so less often and now permanently reside in Israel.

Finally, should Palestinian workers be considered as “migrants” or “irregular migrants”? They are not regarded as migrants by either Israel or the Palestinian authority, and their movement is governed by the intensity of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict no less than by economic needs of either migrants or the Israeli economy. Yet their unique situation suggests that the term “irregular” migrants may fit their situation as well and perhaps even better than it fits other groups.

1.2 Irregular Migrants from Overseas

Turning to labor migrants from overseas, there are some official estimates for the number of unauthorized migrants. The CBS estimated that in 2007, the number of unauthorized migrants was 84,000, about 45% of the total of 186,000 labor migrants (excluding Palestinians) residing in Israel at the end of 2006. The estimate is based on the number of visitors from non-Western countries who entered Israel since 1995 with tourist visas and had still not left the country by the end of 2006. These “tourists,” the CBS (correctly) assumes, are *de facto* unauthorized labor migrants.

Table 2. Number of migrants from less developed countries who overstayed their tourist visa

Not left until the end of:	Number
1995	46,000
1996	74,000
1997	75,000
1998	94,000
1999	102,000
2000	128,000
2001	139,000
2002	123,700
2003	104,000
2004	96,500
2005	80,000
2006	84,400

Source: Central Bureau of Statistics, Press Release, July 30, 2007; Bar Zuri, July 2, 2007.

As shown in Table 2, the number of such unauthorized labor migrants was at its peak in 2001, then declined until 2005, but increased again in 2006. The decline since 2001 reflects Israel's deportation policy, a policy that was carried out most aggressively in 2003-04 when almost 40,000 unauthorized labor migrants were deported. The increase since 2005 is also said to be due to deportation, but this time to the *decline* rate of deportation, an issue to which we will return.

The CBS emphasizes that 84,000 is a maximum estimate for the 2007 stock of unauthorized labor migrants who entered Israel with a tourist visa, for some of them, especially those from the Former Soviet Union (23% of the total, see Table 3), may have applied for residency and may have changed their status over the years. Unfortunately, it is not possible to estimate how many "tourists" from the former Soviet Republics changed their status and were authorized to work.

Table 3. Countries of origin for migrants from less developed countries who had entered Israel as tourists since 1995, overstayed their visas, and were residing in Israel in 2006

Countries of Origin	Number	Percent
<u>All</u>	<u>84,400</u>	<u>100</u>
The Former Soviet Union	19,100	23
Jordan	11,000	13
Mexico	6,000	7
Brazil	5,100	6
Romania	4,400	5
Columbia	4,300	5
Turkey	3,600	4
Poland	3,200	4
The Philippines	2,900	3
Egypt	2,500	3
The Czech Republic /Slovakia	2,000	2
Hungary	1,800	2
Others	18,500	22

Source: Central Bureau of Statistics, Press Release, July 30, 2007.

Tourists who overstay their visa are only one type of unauthorized, irregular, labor migrant. The other type are workers who enter with work visas, but either overstay their visas or violate the terms of the visas, normally by leaving their authorized employers and working for employers for whom they are not authorized to work. They are "regular" labor migrants until they overstay their visa or switch employers with no authorization, at which point they become undocumented, unauthorized, and "irregular" migrants subject to deportation.

As shown in Table 4, in 2006, there were 102,300 labor migrants in Israel who entered the country with work authorization. There are no official estimates how many of these immigrants became unauthorized by overstaying their visas or switching employers. Since Israel rarely allows a stay of over 5 years on a work visa, it is reasonable to assume that the vast majority of those who entered between 1995 and 2001, and were still in Israel at the end of 2006, did so without a valid work visa, and were thus unauthorized labor migrants.

Based on CBS estimates, there were 27,200 such labor migrants. If we take a more conservative measure – entering during 1995-2000 (hence staying in Israel over six years, rather than only five years), the estimated number drops to 19,300 (CBS 2007).

Table 4. Stock of labor migrants who entered Israel with work visas by year of entry

<u>Year of entry</u>	<u>In Israel at end of 2006</u>
1995	2.6
1996	3.2
1997	2.0
1998	3.4
1999	3.5
2000	4.6
2001	7.9
1995-2000	19.3
1995-2001	27.2
2002	6.3
2003	6.2
2004	15.0
2005	19.6
2006	28.0
Total	102.3

Source: Central Bureau of Statistics, Press Release, July 30, 2007.

The number of the second type of unauthorized work migrants, those entering with a work visa but violating its terms, is more difficult to estimate. Here we must rely on estimates by various NGOs or semi-official surveys. One large survey of over 4,400 unauthorized labor migrants, conducted in the early 2000, reported that 41 percent of them entered Israel with a work visa, and 59 percent with a tourist visa (Ministry of Trade, Industry and Employment, 2005). To the extent that this survey is representative of the population of unauthorized labor migrants, and applying these proportions to 2007, where 84,000 immigrants is only 59 percent of the total, we get, as the total number of unauthorized immigrant workers, 142,000. 84,000 will have entered as tourists, and 58,000 as authorized labor migrants, but eventually became unauthorized when they overstayed their work visa or violated its conditions. Subtracting from this estimate of 58,000 the 27,200 (or 19,300) who overstayed their work visas, we are left with 30,800 (or 38,700) who became unauthorized because they switched employers without authorization.

Taken together, the number of unauthorized labor migrants, Palestinians and others, who may be classified as irregular migrants in 2007 is well over the 125,000 estimated by the Ministry of Finance

(Basok, 2008), and may be as high as 164,000² out of a total of 236,000 labor migrants (Bank of Israel, 2008). Thus, the claim of various NGOs that roughly two-third of all labor migrants in Israel are unauthorized is credible.

1.3 Refugees

In addition to labor migrants who are economically motivated, Israel has been a destination country for African refugees. They did not come to work in Israel, but escaped war, persecution and danger in Sudan and other parts of Africa and entered Israel by crossing the Israeli-Egyptian border. The refugee movement started at the end of 2004, intensified in 2006-2007, and continues to the present day. The main source countries for these refugees, comprising over 90% of asylum seekers in Israel, are Sudan and Eritrea. Other source countries include Côte d'Ivoire, Congo, Ethiopia, Somalia and other countries in Africa, but also some non-African countries.

The state of Israel does not publish official statistics on refugees and asylum seekers. Whatever data is available regarding these refugees is from NGOs, articles in the popular press and court cases. According to estimates of the various NGOs helping these refugees, in September 2007 there were about 3,000-4,000 Sudanese refugees in Israel, and nearly as many refugees from Eritrea (The association for civil rights in Israel, 2007). The main wave from Sudan arrived in 2006-2007, and the recent wave from Eritrea started in 2007. In addition to these two main source countries there are about 400 immigrants from Congo, and a similar number from Côte d'Ivoire. The number of refugees from other countries is smaller, but the total number of refugees in Israel is estimated to be between 6,000 and 10,000. Evidently, Israel needs to restructure its refugee policies³ and agencies. This reform should include systematic and regular data collection and reporting on the stock and flow of refugees by country of citizenship as well as by visa status in Israel.⁴

2. Demographic Characteristics of Irregular Labor Migrants

There is no systematic reporting by the CBS of the demographic characteristics of unauthorized labor migrants. Indeed, the reporting on authorized immigrants is limited to basic demographic characteristics (age, sex, and country of citizenship), and type of employment (agriculture, construction, or other) by year of arrival. The demographic characteristics of Palestinian workers are not reported whether authorized or not. Starting in 1996, all we know about authorized Palestinian workers is their work distribution: agriculture, industry or construction.

Paradoxically, while there is no comprehensive survey of the demographic characteristics of authorized labor migrants, there are several studies that include information on the demographic, social and economic characteristics of unauthorized labor migrants. The most comprehensive study was conducted by the Manpower Department of the Ministry and Trade and Industry (2005) from 1999 to 2003. The study was based interviews with over 4,400 unauthorized workers during these years. Other studies were limited to migrants from specific countries (Bar Zuri, 2006), or based on

² 21,900 Palestinians + 84,000 overstaying tourist visas + 27,000 overstaying work visas + 31,000 violating terms of work visa.

³ See Mundlak 2008 for the various legal difficulties regarding asylum seekers in Israel, including the definition of some refugees, including the Sudanese as "enemy nationals."

⁴ Another potential data source for asylum seekers is the Israeli office of UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees). Although the UNHCR does not publish statistics systematically, it is possible to get some information about asylum seekers and refugees. Thus, for example, in 2006 alone 1,348 persons applied for refugee status in Israel.

very small samples (Kemp and Raijman, 2007). Unfortunately, none of the studies conducted a systematic comparison of the demographic characteristics of unauthorized workers with their authorized counterparts. Table 5 below is designed to do this. The comparison is limited to country of origin, industry, gender and age, as these are the characteristics for which there is information for both authorized and unauthorized labor migrants.⁵

**Table 5. Countries of origin, Gender, and age:
Authorized labor migrants who entered Israel in 1999
and unauthorized labor migrants in 1999-2002**

	Percent		% Men		% Older than 44	
	<u>Autho- rized</u>	<u>Unautho- rized</u>	<u>Autho- rized</u>	<u>Unautho- rized</u>	<u>Autho- rized</u>	<u>Unautho- rized</u>
TOTAL	100.0	100.0	73	75.5	16.8	8.1
<i>Asia - total</i>	<i>48.0</i>	<i>28.2</i>	<i>69</i>	<i>75.0</i>	<i>9.1</i>	<i>6.7</i>
China	4.9	5.0	97	87.2	3.1	2.0
The Philippines	13.5	9.5	16	37.7	11.0	2.6
Thailand	15.8	7.6	94	95.4	1.0	2.9
Africa	0.10	12.7	64	72.4	13.7	5.4
The FSU	6.2	15.0	66	77.5	20.7	10.6
Romania	25.9	20.8	86	91.4	21.5	14.3
South America	0.2	19.3	58	67.4	15.7	4.0
<i>others</i>	<i>19.8</i>	<i>3.6</i>				

Source: Israeli Statistical Abstract 2001, Table 4.10; Ministry of Industry Trade, and Employment 2005, pages 13, 17.

Many of the unauthorized immigrants come from countries that did not send authorized labor migrants to Israel. Immigrants from Africa and South America, which are together less than one percent of the authorized labor migrants arriving in 1999, are nearly one third (32%) of the unauthorized immigrants. Most authorized immigrants entered Israel with a permit to work in agriculture, construction, or as care-takers for the elderly. Among unauthorized immigrants, only 2% are in agriculture, 35% in construction, and over 40% work in two industries which hardly get permits to employ migrant workers: restaurants and personal services in private homes. Among immigrants from South America and Africa, the vast majority of whom came with tourist visas, the concentration is greatest in the cleaning and restaurant industries: 70 percent of Africans and 58 percent of South Americans worked in these two industries. Evidently, they fill a demand in the Israeli economy that is not met by native or authorized migrant workers. With respect to gender and age, the data suggests that Asian and Romanian immigrants (who came with work permits) have a similar profile to African and Latin American immigrants (who entered with tourist visas).

⁵ The survey of unauthorized migrants includes additional information on the immigrants: their marital status, educational level, employment in the source country, reasons for becoming unauthorized (for those who entered with a work permit) and even wages. However, no such information is available for authorized workers,

Are labor migrants who came with work visas and eventually became unauthorized appreciably different from their counterparts who remain authorized? With respect to gender, it appears that men and women are as both as likely to become unauthorized, with the exception of Filipino men who are twice as likely as Filipino women to become unauthorized. Unauthorized immigrants are somewhat younger than their authorized counterparts (unless they are from Thailand). Possibly, young workers violate the terms of their visas more easily because they are less afraid of becoming unauthorized. Notwithstanding these small differences in demographic characteristics, it seems that the risk of becoming an unauthorized worker in Israel cuts across age and gender groups. It is not migrants' characteristics that transform them from regular to irregular migrants, but rather the regulations governing their employment in Israel.

3. Deportations of Irregular Labor Migrants

As the number of authorized and unauthorized labor migrants reached a peak of around 250,000 in 2001, and unemployment levels among less-skilled Israelis increased, the Israeli government decided to decrease the number of labor migrants. The new policy had two main components. The first was "closed skies", whereby the number of new work permits would be reduced. The second component called for the implementation of an aggressive deportation policy against unauthorized labor migrants.

**Table 6. Deportations of labor migrants,
1995-2006**

Year	Number
1995	900
1996	900
1997	2,800
1998	4,000
1999	4,600
2000	700
2001	1,900
2002	5,000
2003	21,000
2004	17,200
2005	6,500
2006	3,600

Sources: Bar Zuri, 2007; Bank of Israel, 2008.

As shown in Table 6, the number of deportations increased in 2005, reached a peak in 2003 and 2004, but by 2006 declined to pre-2001 levels. The decline in the number of deportations since 2005 is not due to any official decision. For reasons which are not entirely clear, in 2005 law enforcement agencies detained and deported fewer immigrants. The number of male detainees declined from 19,000 in 2003 to less than 3,000 in 2006. Of the detainees, 83 percent were deported in 2003, but only 57 percent in 2006. The decline in deportation reflects relaxation in enforcement for a variety of

reasons (Bank of Israel 2006, 2008).⁶ It is possible, however, that the decline in deportation was due to factors other than less aggressive enforcement. It is plausible that as time passed unauthorized immigrants learned how to avoid detention, and that a greater proportion of the detainees were authorized workers, and therefore that the rate of detainees who were deported declined. However, there are indications that part of the decline in deportation reflects a new phenomenon that began in 2005 and 2006: the practice of not deporting all unauthorized workers who violated the terms of their visas, but rather reinstating some of them and turning them into regular migrants once again (Bar Zuri, 2007).

One major source region for deportees is the Former Soviet Union.⁷ This is understandable, given that 23% of those overstaying their tourist visas are from the former Soviet Republics (Table 4). But the other source countries for deportees – China, Thailand, and Romania, accounting for over half the deportees in 2005 and 2006 and over 40 percent in 2003 and 2004 (data not shown), are countries from which the vast majority of labor migrants had work permits. Most of the deportees from these countries were migrants who entered with work permits and apparently overstayed their visa or left their employers. Deportation of immigrants who entered with work permits reflects yet another practice, that of the “revolving door”, whereby veteran labor migrants are replaced by new labor migrants in a trade which is highly profitable for private employment agencies supplying immigrants to Israeli employers.

Not much is known concerning the demographic characteristics of the deportees. The number of women among them was very low before 2000 – about 50 per year, and most entered with tourist visas or without inspection, including women who were trafficked to Israel to work in the sex industry.⁸ Gradually, the proportion of women deportees increased, reaching 24% of the 2006 cohort of deportees. The main source countries for women deportees in 2004-2006 were the Philippines (about 20%), Moldova, Russia, Georgia, Ukraine, and China. The vast majority of women from the Philippines and China entered Israel with a work permit, while women from the former Soviet Republics entered as tourists or without inspection.

4. Economic Impact of Irregular Migrants on the Israeli Labor Market

There is no substantial difference between the effect of regular and irregular labor migrants on the employment and wages of natives or on other economic indicators. Therefore, most studies on the economic effect of immigrants in Israel do not distinguish between the two types of migrants, although the economic incentives to become unauthorized migrants in Israel are acknowledged.

Labor migrants in Israel were found to depress employment levels and the wages of low skilled Israelis (Gotlieb, 2002), as well as to contribute to rising earnings inequality (Kristal and Cohen, 2007). But labor migrants have no effect on the employment and the wage level of highly-skilled, high-school educated workers. This is not surprising given that migrant workers (from both the Palestinian authority and from overseas) are mostly unskilled, less-educated workers. Even highly educated labor migrants (10 percent of unauthorized workers have over 13 years of schooling) who

⁶ Bar Zuri (2007) maintains that the decline in numbers of deportees came about in part because law enforcement agencies were busy with other tasks, including preparing for Israel’s disengagement from the Gaza strip.

⁷ This section is based on Bar Zuri (2007).

⁸ Since the 1990s, Israel had become a destination country for human trafficking, mostly for prostitution. In the past 20 years, thousands of women, mostly from the Former Soviet Union, were traded in Israel. Some enter Israel with a tourist visa, while other were subjected by their traders to a long journey in the Sinai desert, illegally crossing the Israeli-Egyptian border where they are handed over to their Israeli traders (Dahan and Levenkron, 2003).

worked in white collar occupations in their source countries, work in Israel in low skilled jobs. In short, labor migrants in Israel are not substitutes for highly-educated (or white-collar) native workers. Indeed highly educated natives benefit from migrant labor as they lower the cost of services used by the Israeli middle and upper-middle classes.

That labor migrants depress wages and employment of low skilled native Israelis would theoretically be expected. Labor migrants come to Israel from low income countries, and are willing to work for lower wages and longer hours than Israeli workers (often below the minimum wage) who benefit from the (declining) Israeli welfare state. The effect of migrant workers on employment levels appears to trouble the Israeli authorities more than any effect on the wages of unskilled workers, despite the fact that the latter effect is stronger than the former. This is because labor-force participation rates in Israel, especially among men, are 5-10 percentage points lower than in most countries in Europe and America and, consequently, pushing low skilled Israelis from welfare to work is a major goal of the Israeli Finance Ministry. That is why the Ministry together with the Bank of Israel is asking the government to increase the costs of employment for labor migrants, so as to limit permits for new immigrants, and to intensify the rate of deportations.⁹

5. Conclusion: Demography, Israel, and Labor Migrants¹⁰

In the past 60 years Israel has been very successful in implementing its demographic goals: increasing the number and proportion of Jews in the population, as well as its share of world Jewry that resides in Israel. It has attracted about 3 million Jewish immigrants and has managed to keep them and their offspring in the country.

Since the early 1990s, however, the demographic picture in Israel has become more complex. Most troubling for the Zionist mission of Israel is the monotonic rise in the proportion of non-Jews among immigrants from the former Soviet republics (whose relatives are Jews), as well as the non-Jewish labor migrants who were recruited by Israel since 1993. Thus far, however, it seems that Israel has been more successful in dealing with non-Jewish immigrants from the FSU, than with labor migrants and refugees. The main Israeli socialization agents, most notably the educational system and the military, “convert” non-Jewish immigrants from the FSU – not necessarily according to Jewish religious law – but rather socially and culturally, and integrate them, and especially their children, into the Jewish (or Jewish-Russian) community in Israel.

By contrast, Israel’s ability to deal with labor migrants, regular and irregular alike, proved more limited, and it is hard to predict if their number will grow or decline in the near future. We have seen that about two-thirds of the estimated one-quarter of a million labor migrants are unauthorized, that is, *de facto* permanent residents, who do not leave Israel despite the hardships that they face as unauthorized, non-Jewish residents. Taking the past as our guide, it is hard to imagine that Israel will adopt a policy granting labor migrants (or refugees) legal status as permanent residents, never mind citizenship. More probably the “relaxation in the enforcement and deportation activities aimed at reducing the number of undocumented workers,” that was worryingly identified in the Bank of Israel’s annual reports for the past three years (e.g. 2005, page 181), will be reversed, and Zionist values, together with economic reasoning will be used for the institutionalization and justification of a harsher deportation policy, similar to the policy that prevailed in 2003-04. Alas, past experience suggests that enforcement of a harsh deportation policy has not been very effective. It has hardly lowered the total

⁹ Last month the Finance Minister revealed his plan to deport all 125,000 unauthorized labor migrants until 2013 and limit the number of work authorizations granted to low-skilled workers (Basok, 2008).

¹⁰ This section is based on Cohen (2002)

number of labor migrants, and did not at all affect the rate of the unauthorized among them: revolving door immigration – recruiting new labor migrants to replace those who have left (willingly or unwillingly) – keeps their number high. Past experience, however, also suggests that Israel has an impressive ability to get around such demographic problems. We can therefore expect that eventually creative solutions will be found, and this dilemma, too, will be resolved.

References

- The Association for Civil Rights in Israel, 2007. *Asylum Seekers and Refugees in Israel*. Position paper, September (in Hebrew).
- Bank of Israel, 2008. *Annual Report*. Jerusalem (in Hebrew).
- Bank of Israel, 2005. *Annual Report*. Jerusalem (in Hebrew).
- Basok, Haim. De Marker (Haaretz), April 6, 2008.
- Bar Zuri, Roni. 2007. *Labor migrants who were detained and deported from Israel, 2005-2006*. Research and Economics Section, Ministry of Industry, Trade and Employment. Jerusalem (in Hebrew).
- Central Bureau of Statistics, 1996. *National Accountability: Judea, Samaria and the Gaza Strip, 1968-1993*. Tel Aviv, publication 1012 (in Hebrew).
- Central Bureau of Statistics. Different Years. *Statistical Abstracts of Israel*. Jerusalem.
- Central Bureau of Statistics. 2007. *Press Release 139/2007*, July 30. Jerusalem.
- Cohen, Yinon. 2002. "From Haven to Heaven: Changing Patterns of Immigration to Israel." Pp. 36-56 in Levy D. and Y. Weiss (eds) *Citizenship and Identity. Germany and Israel in Comparative Perspective*. New York: Berghahn Books.
- Dahan, Yossi, and Naomi Levenkron. 2003. *Trafficking in Women in Israel*. Tel Aviv: Adva Center.
- Gans, Haim. *Just Zionism*. 2008. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Gordon, Neve. 2008. *Israel's Occupation*. CA: UC California Press.
- Gotlieb, Daniel. 2002. "The effect of non-Israeli workers on employment, wages and inequality, 1995-2000." *Economic Quarterly* 49, 4 (in Hebrew).
- Kemp Adriana, and Rebeca Raijman. 2008. *Migrants and Workers. The Political Economy of Labor Migration in Israel*. Jerusalem: Hakibbutz Hameuchad (in Hebrew).
- Kristal, Tali, and Yinon Cohen, 2007. "Decentralization of Collective Wage Agreements and Rising Wage Inequality In Israel". *Industrial Relations*, 46: 613-635.
- Ministry of Trade, Industry and Employment. 2005. *Unauthorized labor migrants in Israel – Tables*. Research and Economics Section, Ministry of Industry, Trade and Employment. Jerusalem (in Hebrew).