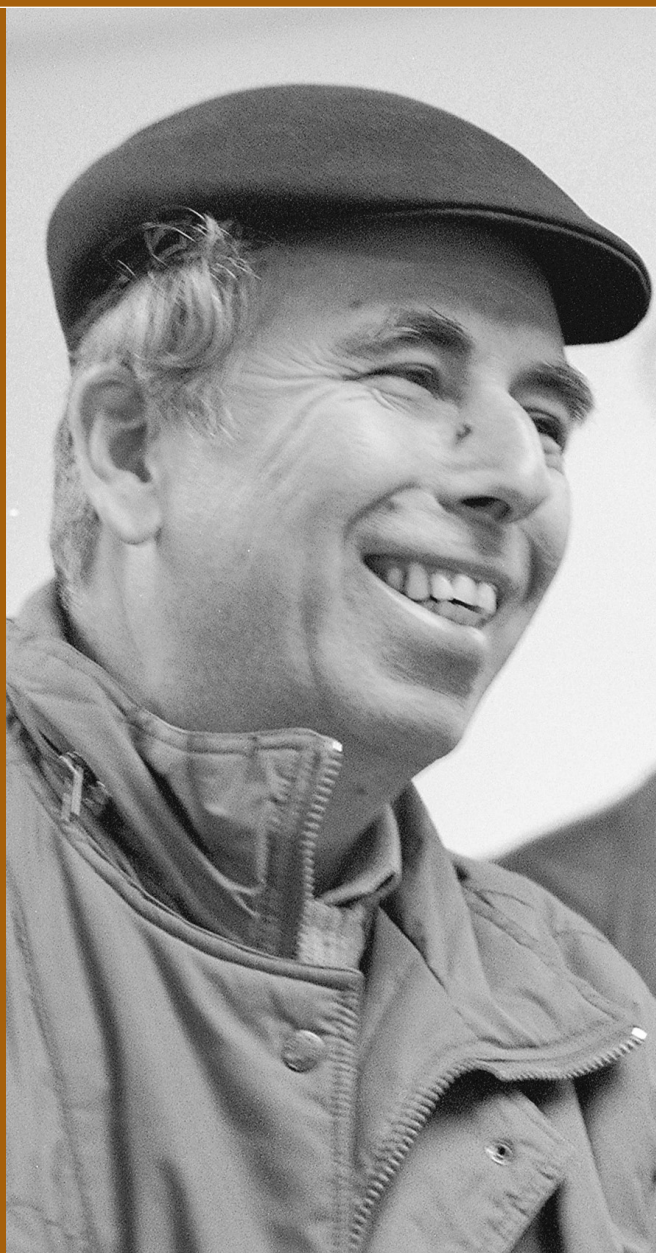


United Jewish Communities
Report Series on the
National Jewish Population Survey 2000-01



Jewish
Immigrants
in the United States

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United Jewish Communities

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report 7

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INTRODUCTION¹

IMMIGRANTS HAVE PLAYED A CENTRAL ROLE IN THE HISTORY OF THE AMERICAN JEWISH COMMUNITY SINCE ITS

BEGINNINGS IN 1654. Repeated waves of Jewish immigrants to America have brought new ideas, experiences, institutions and needs to their adopted country. Immigrants have also traditionally garnered considerable concern and support from U.S.-born Jews – all of whom trace their own families’ American origins to the immigrant experience. These dynamics continue, with new Jewish immigrants transforming the nature of today’s American Jewish community and the communal system placing a high priority on immigrant well-being and social integration.

This report utilizes data from the National Jewish Population Survey 2000-01 to examine today’s Jewish immigrants in the United States. The report’s first section discusses the central demographic features of the immigrant community, including total population, age, and regional distribution. The second section is devoted to economic vulnerability, health and social service needs of immigrants. The final section addresses key Jewish characteristics of immigrants: how they define and express their Jewishness, and how these patterns differ from those of other Jews. The report concludes by discussing policy implications that arise from the findings.

DEMOGRAPHY

FOR THE PURPOSES OF THIS REPORT, THE TERM “IMMIGRANT” REFERS TO JEWISH ADULTS WHO HAVE IMMIGRATED TO THE U.S. SINCE 1980.² Just over 8% of today’s American Jewish adults are

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1. UJC thanks Zvi Gitelman of the University of Michigan for his helpful comments on the penultimate version of this report. UJC retains sole responsibility for the analysis presented here.
 2. The year 1980 is a useful benchmark for analyzing more recent immigrants from the former Soviet Union (FSU). A first major wave of Jewish emigration from the Soviet Union occurred earlier, starting in 1970 and culminating in 1979.

immigrants, corresponding to over 335,000 people.³ Of these new arrivals, 227,000 – a little over two-thirds – emigrated from one of the republics of the former Soviet Union (FSU), and in turn more than three-fourths (77%) of all FSU immigrants were born in Russia or Ukraine. The remaining 109,000 non-FSU immigrants hail from 30 other countries, with Israel, Canada and Iran accounting for more than half (56%) of them. These figures do not include thousands of adult immigrants who arrived in the U.S. after 1980 and subsequently died.⁴ For a more detailed listing of immigrant origins, see Table 1.

The impact of these figures extends well beyond the adults who immigrated to America. Many other people – both Jewish and non-Jewish, and both adults and children – live in households where adult Jewish immigrants reside. Overall, in fact, nearly half a million adults and children live in the 193,000 households where Jewish immigrants reside (see Table 2).

Jewish immigrants, as shown above, have come to America from every corner of the globe. But analyzing them as one, undifferentiated group blurs important demographic distinctions among them. After examining the data on immigrants according to many criteria, it became evident that the most fundamental distinction in the immigrant population is country of origin, particularly FSU vs. non-FSU. Indeed, the distinction between FSU and other immigrants explains many other differences between them. As Table 3 demonstrates, for example, the demographic profiles of FSU and non-FSU immigrants differ dramatically from one another, as well as from other Jewish adults.⁵

3. A total of 618,000 Jewish adults currently residing in the U.S. were not born here, including the 335,000 who have arrived since 1980 and 283,000 who immigrated before 1980. The total of 618,000 foreign-born adults represents 15% of the U.S. Jewish adult population.

4. Population estimates of FSU Jews by the Hebrew Immigration Aid Society (HIAS) use different criteria. When the differences between NJPS and HIAS criteria are accounted for, the two population estimates become very similar. See “Jews from the Former Soviet Union: Reconciling Estimates from NJPS and the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society,” available by going to www.ujc.org/njps and clicking on NJPS Methodology Series Index.

5. FSU and non-FSU immigrants also differ among themselves. FSU immigrants come from a variety of republics and non-FSU immigrants come from a variety of (mostly western) countries. Due to the small sample sizes of Jews from many of the FSU republics and many of the non-FSU countries, internal differences within each group cannot be explored.

TABLE I.

Country of birth of adult Jewish immigrants to the U.S. since 1980.

	Estimated number of adult immigrants	% FSU immigrants	% Non-FSU immigrants	% Total immigrants
Former Soviet Union (FSU)				
Ukraine	112,000	49		33
Russia	63,000	28		19
Belarus	21,000	9		6
Uzbekistan	11,000	5		3
Moldova/Bessarabia	10,000	5		3
Other (Azerbaijan, Georgia, Latvia, Lithuania, Tajikistan)	10,000	5		3
FSU Total	227,000	101¹		67
Non-FSU				
Israel/Palestine	34,000		31	10
Canada	14,000		13	4
Iran	13,000		12	4
Great Britain/UK	6,000		6	2
South Africa	6,000		6	2
Other (25 additional countries)	36,000		33	11
Non-FSU Total	109,000		101¹	33
Grand Total	336,000			100

¹ Totals do not add to 100% due to rounding.

In general, FSU immigrants are an older population than non-FSU immigrants. As indicated in UJC’s main report on NJPS 2000-2001,⁶ the American Jewish population on the whole is aging, but an older age structure is particularly characteristic of the FSU immigrant population. The median age of the adult Jewish population is 48, while among FSU immigrant adults the median age rises to 53 and among non-FSU immigrants it declines to just 33. In addition, less than one-quarter of all

6. UJC’s main NJPS report, entitled *Strength, Challenge and Diversity in the American Jewish Population*, is available at www.ujc.org/njps.

METHODOLOGICAL NOTE

The National Jewish Population Survey 2000-01 is a nationally representative survey of the Jewish population living in the U.S. The survey was administered to a random sample of approximately 4500 Jews. Interviewing for NJPS took place from August 21, 2000 to August 30, 2001 and was conducted by telephone. The sample of telephone numbers called was selected by a computer through a Random Digit Dialing (RDD) procedure, thus permitting access to both listed and unlisted numbers in all 50 states and the District of Columbia. The margin of error when the entire sample is used for analysis is +/- 2%. The margin of error for subsamples is larger.

The NJPS questionnaire included over 300 questions on a wide variety of topics, including household characteristics, demographic subjects, health and social service needs, economic characteristics, and Jewish background, behavior and attitudes.

The NJPS questionnaire was divided into long-form and short-form versions. The long-form version was administered to respondents whose responses to selected early questions indicated stronger Jewish connections; these respondents represent 4.3 million Jews, or over 80% of all U.S. Jews. The short-form version, which omitted many questions on Jewish topics and social services, was given to respondents whose answers on the same selected early questions indicated Jewish connections that are not as strong; they represent an additional 800,000 Jews.

The most important implication of this design decision is related to findings on Jewish connections. Descriptions of Jewish involvement and identity that are restricted to the more engaged part of the Jewish population (4.3 million Jews) would, in many cases, be somewhat less strong if they had been collected from all respondents representing the entire Jewish population.

In this report, questions that were asked of respondents representing the more engaged segment of the Jewish population (4.3 million Jews) are indicated by asterisks in Tables 4-6.

For further methodological information, see the Methodological Appendix in *The National Jewish Population Survey 2000-01: Strength, Challenge and Diversity in the American Jewish Population*, A United Jewish Communities Report (available at www.ujc.org/njps.)

TABLE 2.

Total population in households containing a Jewish immigrant.	Adults	387,000
	Jewish	343,000
	Non-Jewish	44,000
	Children	101,000
	Jewish	96,000
	Non-Jewish	5,000
	Total Population	488,000
	Jewish	439,000
	Non-Jewish	49,000

American Jewish adults are age 65 or older, but that proportion increases to over one-third among FSU immigrant adults and plummets to just 7% among non-FSU immigrants. One further illustration of age differences between the immigrant groups can be seen in the youngest adult cohort. Fifty-five percent of non-FSU immigrant adults are age 18-34, twice the proportion of FSU adult immigrants.⁷

Age differences in the immigrant populations have consequences for other demographic factors such as household size, the presence of children and marital status. FSU immigrant household sizes are relatively small, averaging 2.4 individuals per household. Eighty-four percent of them contain 3 or fewer people, and only 11% of FSU immigrants live in households with children. In contrast, non-FSU households – which are younger – are larger. The average non-FSU household size is 2.8 individuals, and close to 30% of all non-FSU immigrants live in households with children. Looking at marital status, non-FSU Jews are twice as likely to be single and never married than FSU Jews, while FSU Jews are ten times as likely to be widowed as non-FSU Jews. As would be

7. As old as FSU immigrants are, Jews remaining in the FSU are even older. See Mark Tolts, “The Post-Soviet Jewish Emigration,” paper presented at the European Population conference, Helsinki (June 7-9, 2001); Mark Tolts, “Demography of the Jews in the Former Soviet Union: Yesterday and Today,” in Zvi Gitelman, ed., *Jewish Life after the USSR: A Community in Transition* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003).

TABLE 3.

Demographic characteristics of
immigrants and non-immigrants.

	FSU immigrants (1980+)	Non-FSU immigrants (1980+)	U.S. born & pre-1980 immigrants	Total Jewish population
Median adult age	53	33	48	48
Adult age distribution				
18-34	28%	55%	27%	28%
35-54	26	35	37	36
55-64	13	3	13	12
65+	34	7	24	24
Total	101 ¹	100	101	100
Mean household size (total people)	2.4	2.8	2.3	2.3
Household size distribution				
1 person	24%	23%	31%	30%
2 persons	43	36	39	39
3 persons	17	13	13	13
4+ persons	16	28	19	18
Total	100	100	102*	100
Live in households with children (age 17 or younger)	11%	28%	15%	15%
Marital status				
Married	68%	58%	57%	57%
Divorced/separated	5	5	11	10
Widowed	10	1	8	8
Single and never married	17	35	25	25
Total	100	99	101	100
Gender				
Men	52	51	47	48
Women	48	49	53	52

	FSU immigrants (1980+)	Non-FSU immigrants (1980+)	U.S. born & pre-1980 immigrants	Total Jewish population
Regional distribution of adults				
Northeast	59%	39%	40%	41%
Midwest	8	8	13	12
South	9	23	25	24
West	24	30	23	23
Total	100	100	101	100
Educational attainment				
High school or below	26%	25%	20%	21%
Some college	15	28	24	24
College degree	43	27	31	31
Graduate degree	17	21	25	24
Total	101	101	100	100
Employment status				
Employed	45%	73%	62%	61%
Unemployed	9	5	3	4
Disabled and unable to work	26	3	3	4
Retired	14	3	23	22
Homemaker	2	10	5	5
Student	4	7	5	5
Total	100	101	101	101

¹ Totals may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

expected of an older group, more than two thirds (68%) of FSU Jews are married, compared to 58% of non-FSU Jews. The higher prevalence of divorce in American society is also reflected in comparisons between recent immigrants and other American Jews. Only 5% of immigrants, both FSU and non-FSU, are currently divorced, less than half the proportion of non-immigrant American Jews (11%).

Immigrants to America have frequently been disproportionately male, reflecting a traditional pattern in which men would often come first, find a job and settle into a community, and then send for their family members at a later date. Jewish immigrants to America, however, have been much more likely to have equal proportions of males and females. This trend continues among recent American Jewish immigrants, with only small differences compared to all other U.S. Jews. Women are a slight majority of the overall adult Jewish population (52%) and of U.S. Jews who are not recent immigrants (53%). By comparison, there are slightly more men than women in both the FSU group (52% vs. 48%) and the non-FSU group (51% vs. 49%).

The two immigrant groups have distinctive regional distributions. Most FSU Jews live in the Northeast, with over half of the remainder residing in the West. Relative to the American Jewish population as a whole, FSU Jews are significantly under-represented in the South and heavily over-represented in the Northeast. In contrast, the regional distribution of non-FSU immigrants more closely resembles that of American Jewish adults as a whole. Many non-FSU Jews live in the Northeast, but 30% live in the West and almost one-quarter live in the South, with fewer than 10% residing in the Midwest.

Levels of education among immigrant groups generally reveal strong commitment to higher education. American Jewish adults are known for high educational attainment; UJC's main NJPS report revealed that more than half of all American Jewish adults (55%) have earned at least a college degree and a quarter have received a graduate degree. For FSU Jews, six in ten adults have received at least a college degree, a higher figure than for

American Jews overall. At the same time, a relatively low proportion of FSU Jews (17%) possess a graduate degree. This suggests the possibility that the most recent wave of FSU immigrants, although still well educated compared to most other American immigrants, may not be as well educated as the 1970-79 wave of Soviet Jewish immigrants; NJPS 2000-01 and NJPS 1990 data both suggest that close to 30% of Soviet Jewish immigrants from the 1970s had graduate education. Non-FSU Jews have a higher proportion attaining a graduate degree (21%), a figure that is even more impressive given the low median age in this immigrant group. At the same time, non-FSU Jews are less likely than FSU Jews overall to have at least graduated college, and 7% received their highest degree from a technical, trade or vocational school.

Finally, employment status reveals important differences between the two immigrant groups, again reflecting the age distributions described earlier. While 61% of the overall American Jewish population is currently employed, that figure jumps to 73% for the younger, non-FSU immigrant population and declines to 45% for the older, FSU immigrant group. Over a quarter of FSU Jews (representing 56,000 adults) say they are disabled and therefore unable to work, a considerably higher proportion than the other groups. Many of these FSU adults who cannot work due to a disability are elderly and almost all are age 55 or older. Unemployment also seems to run higher among immigrants than others, and higher among FSU than non-FSU immigrants.⁸ Nine percent of FSU immigrants and 5% of non-FSU immigrants are unemployed, compared to 3% of all other Jewish adults.

ECONOMIC VULNERABILITY, HEALTH, AND SOCIAL SERVICE NEEDS

THIS SECTION OF THE REPORT EXAMINES THE ECONOMIC VULNERABILITY OF IMMIGRANTS, as well as their health and social

8. The unemployed include only those who, when given the option, specifically told survey interviewers that they were unemployed. It does not include those who selected other employment status options, such as retired, homemaker, student and disabled/unable to work.

service needs. It is important to note that many questions in this section, as well as in the next section on Jewish connections, were asked only of more Jewishly-connected respondents representing approximately 80% of the Jewish population; these questions are indicated with asterisks in Tables 4-6 (see the Methodological Note on p. 6 for further details).

Economic vulnerability sharply distinguishes FSU and other immigrant groups (see Table 4). Significant levels of poverty apparently characterize the FSU immigrant population, with 38% of this group living in households with incomes below the federal poverty line. This is more than twice the rate of poverty among non-FSU immigrants (14%) and seven times the poverty rate in non-immigrant Jewish households (5%). The same disparity is found when utilizing a broader measure of low income – approximately 160%, on average, of the federal poverty threshold – that many believe is more appropriate for analyzing economic vulnerability in the U.S. Jewish population.⁹ Half of FSU immigrants live in low-income households, two and a half times the rate of non-FSU immigrants (19%) and five times the rate of non-immigrant Jews (11%).¹⁰

Among FSU immigrants, the association between age and economic vulnerability is readily apparent when the group is divided between those who are 54 and younger and those 55 and older. In the younger FSU group, the poverty rate is just 5% and the low-income rate is only 16%, equal to or less than the rates among non-FSU immigrants of the same age (14% poverty, 16% low income). Among FSU Jews age 55 and over, however, the rates skyrocket to 75% for poverty and 91% for low income,

9. For a detailed explanation of how low income is defined and computed, see *Economic Vulnerability in the American Jewish Population*, Report 5 in the UJC Report Series on the National Jewish Population Survey 2000-01, available at www.ujc.org/njpsreports. The poverty and low-income rates in this report are calculated by excluding the 27% of respondents who refused to tell survey interviewers their household income. While it is likely that some respondents who refused to reveal their income fall below the poverty and/or low-income thresholds, the actual proportion is unknown.

10. The 2002 Jewish Community Study of New York found similarly high levels of economic vulnerability among FSU immigrants. See Jacob B. Ukeles and David A. Grossman, 2004, *Report on Jewish Poverty* (New York: Metropolitan Council on Jewish Poverty and UJA-Federation of New York).

TABLE 4.

Economic vulnerability, health, and social service needs of immigrants and non-immigrants.

	FSU immigrants (1980+)	Non-FSU immigrants (1980+)	U.S. born & pre-1980 immigrants	Total Jewish population
	%	%	%	%
Economic vulnerability				
Poverty*	38	14	5	7
Low income	50	19	11	14
Health assessment				
Excellent	12	65	43	42
Good	41	31	41	41
Fair	31	3	12	13
Poor	16	2	4	4
Total	100	101 ¹	100	100
Health condition limits daily activities*	21	5	16	16
Social service needs*				
Financial assistance for basic needs	8	8	5	6
Job assistance or career counseling ²	10	12	9	9
Home health care ³	28	-	15	16
Nursing home care ³	4	-	6	6
English as a second language ⁴	7	#	#	#

¹ Total does not sum to 100% due to rounding.

² Asked of respondents age 18-64.

³ Asked in households where someone is age 65+.

⁴ Asked of respondents who were interviewed in Russian.

* Indicates base is the 4.3 million Jews with stronger Jewish connections

- Indicates too few cases for analysis

Indicates not applicable for analysis

both of which are much higher than the rates for non-FSU immigrants of the same age (17% poverty, 44% low income). The data clearly indicate that economic vulnerability is concentrated among older FSU Jews, while younger FSU immigrants are faring much better economically.¹¹

Although more prevalent among FSU households, poverty and low income are also serious issues facing other Jewish immigrants. As noted above, non-FSU households report a 14% poverty rate, nearly triple the rate of non-immigrant Jews. And one out of every five non-FSU immigrants lives in a low-income household, compared to one out of every ten non-immigrants.

Age differences between immigrant groups also mean that health issues impact FSU Jews more than other immigrants. All respondents were asked to evaluate their personal health as excellent, good, fair or poor. Since non-FSU immigrants are a young population, it is not surprising that 96% of them report that their health is either excellent or good. FSU immigrants, on the other hand, represent a population that is both older and poorer than other immigrants and other American Jews.

Consequently, only a little more than half (53%) of FSU Jews say their health is excellent or good, with nearly a third saying their health is only fair and one in six (16%) reporting it is poor. Poor health conditions among some FSU Jews extend well beyond self-evaluations. Respondents were asked if anyone in their household has a physical, mental or other health condition that limits employment, education or daily activities and has lasted for at least six months. Over one in five (21%) FSU Jews lives in a household with such an individual, four times the incidence among non-FSU immigrants (5%).

Regardless of their country of origin, immigrants more than other American Jews indicate greater needs for certain social services that could be provided through social service or health agencies. For example, 8% of

11. Some researchers suggest that FSU Jews, due to their cultural and political experiences in the FSU, may be more reticent than others to reveal sensitive information to interviewers and therefore may have underreported their household income.

all immigrants said that they required financial assistance for basic needs. The comparable rate for all other Jews was 5%. Job assistance and career counseling are also important services that immigrants need, particularly younger non-FSU Jews of working age. In addition, in households with at least one person age 65 or older, nearly twice as many FSU immigrants as non-immigrants indicated a need for home health care (too few non-FSU immigrants were asked this question for reliable analysis of the data). Lastly, respondents who opted to conduct the NJPS interview in Russian were asked whether they could have used instruction in English as a second language. Fifteen percent of FSU immigrants who completed the NJPS interview in Russian answered yes to this question; they represent 7% of all FSU immigrants.¹²

JEWISH CONNECTIONS

OVER THE YEARS, IMMIGRANTS TO THE UNITED STATES HAVE OFTEN ARRIVED WITH DIFFERENT PATTERNS OF Jewish identity and behavior than the patterns found among Jews already living in the U.S. Recent Jewish immigrants over the past twenty years, both from the FSU and other countries, demonstrate continued evidence of this trend (see Table 5).

Ethnicity as measured by strong social networks and an emphasis on Jewish peoplehood is an important foundation of immigrant Jewish identity. This is especially the case for FSU Jews. Almost two-thirds (63%) of non-FSU immigrants and nearly three out of four (71%) FSU immigrants say that half or more of their closest friends are Jewish, compared to only half (51%) of all other Jews. Immigrants are also more likely to be married to other Jews. Of currently married Jews, over three-fourths (78%) of non-FSU immigrants and nearly all FSU immigrants (91%) are in-married. This is a noticeable difference from the in-marriage

12. Forty-eight percent of FSU immigrants completed the NJPS interview in Russian, so $(.48)(.15) = .07$, or 7% of all FSU immigrants indicated they needed assistance with English as a second language.

TABLE 5.

Jewish connections of immigrants and non-immigrants.

	FSU immigrants (1980+)	Non-FSU immigrants (1980+)	U.S. born & pre-1980 immigrants	Total Jewish population
	%	%	%	%
Ethnicity and Jewish peoplehood				
Half or more of closest friends Jewish	71	63	51	52
In-married ¹	91	78	67	69
Very or somewhat important that child's spouse be Jewish*	78	72	61	62
Israel				
"Very" emotionally attached to Israel	43	54	26	28
Being Jewish means caring about Israel "a lot"*	50	69	44	45
Communal affiliation/participation				
Synagogue member*	26	49	48	46
JCC member or attended/participated in JCC event during the past year*	29	49	37	37
Contribute to Federation*	14	10	33	31
Ritual observance				
Held/attended Passover Seder	57	80	68	68
Fasted all/part of day on Yom Kippur*	61	76	59	60
Lit Chanukah candles most/all nights	57	60	57	57
Keep kosher in home*	17	44	20	21
Usually/always light Shabbat candles*	32	61	27	28
Attended synagogue/temple during past year	71	73	60	61

¹ In-marriage findings for immigrants should be interpreted cautiously due to small sample size: 117 cases for FSU, 56 cases for non-FSU.

* Indicates base is the 4.3 million Jews with stronger Jewish connections.

rate of all other American Jews, which is only two out of three (67%). Besides their behavior, immigrants are also distinguished from other Jews in their attitudes towards in-marriage. While 72% of non-FSU Jews and 78% of FSU immigrants say that it is somewhat or very important that their child's future spouse be Jewish, this attitude is shared by only 61% of non-immigrant Jews.

The robust sense of Jewish peoplehood among recent immigrants also extends to their attitudes towards Israel. Here, too, immigrant attachments are stronger than those of other American Jews. For example, more than half (54%) of non-FSU immigrants and a significant minority (43%) of FSU Jews say they are "very" emotionally attached to Israel, compared to a little over a quarter (26%) of all other Jews. Moreover, nearly seven in ten non-FSU immigrants and half of all FSU immigrants report that being Jewish means caring about Israel "a lot," compared to 44% of all other Jews.

In contrast, immigrants vary in their connections to Jewish communal institutions, with non-FSU immigrants more involved than FSU immigrants. About half (49%) of non-FSU immigrants live in households that belong to synagogues, nearly double the rate (26%) of FSU Jews. Religion and the synagogue – as opposed to Jewish ethnicity and people – were not central elements of Jewish identity for Jews raised in the former Soviet Union, which helps explain the contrast between the two immigrant groups. In addition, about half (49%) of non-FSU immigrants either belong to a Jewish Community Center (JCC) or attended a JCC event in the year prior to the survey. This is an appreciably higher rate than that of FSU Jews (29%). While social connections among Jews were strong in the FSU, the concept of voluntary, dues-paying membership to an organization did not exist. Consequently, measures of formal affiliation with the organized Jewish community in America tend to be low among FSU immigrants. Finally, both immigrant groups contribute to Federation at low rates (10% for non-FSU immigrants, 14% for FSU Jews)

compared to other U.S. Jews. As Federation giving is concentrated among Jews with high socioeconomic status, the relatively few number of recent immigrants with high incomes helps to explain this immigrant pattern.

Immigrants also incorporate numerous religious observances into their lives as Jews. In general, non-FSU immigrants are a more “traditional” group on measures of Jewish religion and ritual compared to both FSU Jews and all other American Jews. A significant number of non-FSU immigrants come from countries such as Iran, South Africa and Israel, where observance of and familiarity with basic Jewish religious practices was much more common than in the FSU. Differences between non-FSU immigrants and all other Jews are particularly evident for rituals that are observed daily or even weekly, such as always or usually lighting Shabbat candles and keeping kosher at home.

FSU Jews are often thought to lack attachments to Jewish religious and ritual life. While it is true that their cultural background in the FSU made it easier to identify with Jewish peoplehood than with Judaism as a religion, Jews from the former Soviet Union perform some Jewish rituals just as often as non-immigrant Jews do, if not more so. For example, 61% of FSU Jews fasted all or part of the day during the Yom Kippur before their NJPS interview, slightly higher than the rate for non-immigrants (59%). And although FSU Jews do not join synagogues as often as other Jews, they are more likely to attend; 71% of FSU Jews attended synagogue or temple at least once during the year before their NJPS interview, a higher rate than that of non-immigrants (60%).

A closer examination of selected adolescent and adult Jewish connections reveals a marked increase in the Jewish attachments of FSU immigrants over time, while the non-FSU immigrant group has remained fairly steady and all other Jews have experienced a decline (see Table 6). Respondents were asked a number of questions relating to their Jewish activities at age 10-11, such as lighting Shabbat candles and attending synagogue. Eight in ten non-FSU immigrants reported that Shabbat candles were lit on some occasion during that period of their life, as did over two-thirds (68%) of non-immigrants. Only a little over one-half (54%) of FSU immigrants,

TABLE 6.

Comparisons of adolescent and adult Jewish connections.

	FSU immigrants (1980+)	Non-FSU immigrants (1980+)	U.S. born & pre-1980 immigrants	Total Jewish population
	%	%	%	%
Ever lit/light Shabbat candles*				
Age 10-11	54	80	68	67
Currently	80	79	52	55
Ever attended synagogue				
Age 10-11*	35	82	88	85
Past year	71	73	60	71
Half or more of closest friends Jewish				
High school	54	63	51	52
Currently	71	63	51	52
Level of Jewish activity compared to 5 years ago				
Increased	38	31	27	27
Same	58	53	59	59
Decreased	4	16	14	14
Total	100	100	100	100

* Indicates base is the 4.3 million Jews with stronger Jewish connections.

however, could make that claim. In 2000-01, however, 80% of all FSU Jews reported lighting Shabbat candles on some occasion, which represents a significant increase. By comparison, the non-FSU immigrant figure remained steady at 79% while the rate for all other Jews declined to a little more than half (52%).

Similar trends over time among these three groups can be seen for synagogue attendance and Jewish friendship networks. In both these cases, FSU Jews exhibit sharp increases in these measures over time while other Jews display stability or decline on these indicators. In addition, FSU Jews

are more likely to report increased Jewish activity during the five years preceding the survey than non-FSU immigrants and all other Jews. In sum, these data suggest that FSU Jews, given the freedom in America to explore their Jewish heritage, are indeed choosing to pursue new (at least to them) venues of Jewish participation. The numerous opportunities afforded to them in America include exploring what it means to be Jewish, and many are doing so.

CONCLUSION

AS THE PRECEDING ANALYSIS HAS SHOWN, RECENT JEWISH IMMIGRANTS ARE DISTINCT IN A VARIETY OF WAYS FROM OTHER AMERICAN JEWS. Their social and demographic characteristics, as well as their Jewish connections, often differ – sometimes dramatically – from the rest of the U.S. Jewish population. In addition, immigrants have different needs. From a policy perspective, therefore, the profile of immigrants raises several important questions.

First, does one view this population as one group of immigrants or as two distinct groups of FSU and non-FSU immigrants? The two immigrant groups are alike in some ways, especially when compared to other Jews, but the data show that on many demographic characteristics, service needs and Jewish connections – especially as those connections have changed over time – FSU and non-FSU immigrants exhibit important differences that are worthy of attention.¹³ For example, two crucial differences between the groups are the inter-related characteristics of age and the presence of children in households. These factors, in turn, have differential implications in terms of providing health and social services (more likely among FSU immigrants) and access to Jewish education (more likely among non-FSU immigrants).

Second, poverty and low income are major issues that disproportionately

affect all immigrants, though especially older immigrants from the FSU. Economic vulnerability makes it more likely that social and health problems will emerge in the future, particularly for older immigrants. Poor Jews are also less likely to join Jewish institutions and participate in Jewish communal life. While U.S. Jews as a whole enjoy higher than average socio-economic status, this is not the current experience of many recent Jewish immigrants. Indeed, for many Jewish immigrants, economic vulnerability is often a vital issue that requires immediate attention.

Third, findings on Jewish connections rebut common perceptions that Jews from the FSU are indifferent to participating in Jewish life in America. To the contrary, the data indicate that measures of Jewish ethnicity and selected ritual observances are relatively strong among FSU Jews, and that Jewish activity among FSU Jews is increasing over time. The ways in which FSU Jews identify Jewishly, as well as their increasing Jewish activity, have important implications for communal organizations involved in issues of Jewish identity and continuity in the United States.

The American Jewish community has had a long history of helping Jewish immigrants adapt to their new surroundings. No two waves of immigrants have been identical; each wave has seen different institutions and services emerge in America, depending on the demographic and Jewish characteristics of the immigrant group involved. Understanding the general and Jewish characteristics of the latest wave of immigrants is crucial as the communal system continues to help them integrate into their new communities.

13. As mentioned in footnote 5, differences are likely to exist among FSU immigrants by republic of origin and among non-FSU immigrants by country of origin, but small sample size makes it difficult to investigate these differences within each group.



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