



המכון לתכנון מדיניות עם יהודי
(מיסודה של הסוכנות היהודית לא"י) בע"מ

The Jewish People Policy Planning Institute
(Established by the Jewish Agency for Israel) Ltd.

2008

המחר tomorrow

פונים אל המחר Facing Tomorrow
ועידת נשיא ישראל 2008

Jewish Demography and Peoplehood: 2008

By Sergio DellaPergola

Jewish Demography and Peoplehood: 2008

By Sergio DellaPergola

Demography is a fundamental existential process present in the daily experience of every society at the individual and collective levels. More than once throughout history, the existence of the Jews was radically modified by events that embedded elements of demographic change. This was the case with the repeated instances of massive coerced and voluntary migrations and relocation of Jews across seas and continents; the major increase in Jewish population size – mostly in Eastern Europe – from the late middle ages to the early decades of the 20th century; the massive destruction of Jewish communities through the Shoah; and the emergence of contemporary America and Israel as major Jewish population centers. In each instance, demographic change itself was not only the dependent variable but also played an important independent role in shaping those historic transformations.

The current Jewish scene is perhaps changing less dramatically than in those past occurrences. Nonetheless, the imperceptible daily impact of demographic change has deep consequences for the Jewish corporate and individual existence. Jews constitute the majority of the total population in the State of Israel, but this majority is being challenged by the more rapid growth of the non-Jewish population within the state and in its proximate surroundings. Jewish populations in the Diaspora are diminishing numerically, becoming older, and constitute a decreasing share of the surrounding

society. Population projections to the year 2020 and beyond provide disquieting scenarios of the deterioration in the Jewish demographic balance that is expected if current trends continue unchanged. In light of these developments in Israel and in the Diaspora, policy planning and operational suggestions are needed to provide insights to decision-makers concerned with the facts, outlook and emerging challenges for Jewish peoplehood.

1. General Patterns

At the beginning of 2008, world Jewish population was estimated at 13,225,000 – 70,000 more than the previous year – reflecting a growth of 80,000 in Israel and a decline of 10,000 in other countries. The overall growth in 2007 was 0.5%, resulting from a 1.5% increase in Israel and a -0.2% decrease in the Diaspora. These trends continued the well established patterns of past years of minimal growth in world Jewry mostly determined by Israel's natural increase.

The Jews' unique and peculiar experience in the 20th century was tragically marked by the Shoah and followed by rather stagnant demographic patterns in a context of rapid global population growth. Since 1970, world Jewry has grown by only 4%. As a consequence, at the beginning of the 21st century Jews represented about 2 per 1000 of the world's total population – a significant decline as against 3.5 per 1000 in 1970, 4.7 per 1000 in 1945, and 7.5 per 1000 in 1938.

TABLE 1. WORLD JEWISH POPULATION^a BY MAJOR REGIONS, 1948-2008

Region	Number (thousands)			Percent			Percent change		
	1948	1970	2008	1948	1970	2008	1948–1970	1970–2008	1948–2008
World total	11,500	12,662	13,225	100.0	100.0	100.0	+10	+4	+15
Israel	650	2,582	5,472	5.7	20.4	41.4	+297	+112	+742
Total Diaspora	10,850	10,080	7,753	94.3	79.6	58.6	-7	-23	-29
Europe, West ^a	1,035	1,119	1,146	9.0	8.9	8.6	+8	+2	+11
Europe, East and Balkan ^b	765	216	21	6.7	1.7	0.2	-72	-90	-97
Former USSR in Europe ^b	1,950	1,906	313	17.0	13.9	2.4	-2	-83	-84
Former USSR in Asia	350	262	20	3.0	3.1	0.1	-25	-92	-94
Other Asia	275	100	20	2.4	0.8	0.1	-64	-80	-93
North Africa ^c	595	83	4	5.2	0.6	0.0	-86	-94	-99
South Africa	105	124	73	0.9	1.0	0.6	+18	-42	-30
North America	5,215	5,686	5,649	45.3	45.0	42.7	+9	-1	+8
Latin America	520	514	392	4.5	4.1	2.9	-1	-24	-25
Oceania	40	70	115	0.3	0.5	0.9	+75	+64	+188

^a Core definition, not including non-Jewish members of households.

^b Countries in East Europe that joined the European Union were included in Western Europe in 2008.

^c Including Ethiopia.

Source: DellaPergola (2008).

Estimates reported in Table 1 cover the 60-year period between 1948 and 2008, based on the concept of *core Jewish population*. This mostly includes self-reporting Jews as well as people without religion but with at least one Jewish parent. In the U.S. persons of Jewish origin who hold a non-monotheistic religion were also included. In countries such as the FSU, Jewish population estimates reflect declared ethnic affiliations. The concept of *enlarged Jewish population* also comprises non-Jews in Jewish households. Demographic change reflects not only the varying intervening changes within each community, but also the willingness of Jews to identify as such.

Israel's share of world Jewry increased from 5.7% in 1948, to 20.4% in 1970, and 41.4% in 2008. The Jewish population of Israel has more than doubled since 1970. This reflects large scale immigration during the 1990s. A comparatively young age composition and a persisting preference for nuclear families with 3-4 children explain an annual natural population increase of 80,000, to 5,472,000 Jews at the beginning of 2008. Adding another 308,000 non-Jewish members of Jewish households, Israel hosts an enlarged Jewish population of 5.8 million. Jews constitute 76% of Israel's total population of 7.2 million in 2008. Another 4% are non-Jewish members of Jewish households.

Jewish population estimates in the United States have been the subject of a high-profile debate. Our estimate of 5,275,000 represents the middle range between two large national surveys conducted in 2001, the National Jewish Population Survey (NJPS) and the American Jewish Identity Survey (AJIS). In spite of some limitations, these surveys still provide the most authoritative national sources. Both pointed to effective Jewish population reduction since the early 1990s; the causes for this negative trend are: later and less frequent marriages, low fertility, continuing increases in out-marriage rates, population aging, and declining numbers of immigrants from other countries.

Some population growth in Canada and Australia was offset by more significant losses in the FSU, Eastern Europe, Western Europe, Latin America, and Africa. In Western Europe, the number of Jews in Germany has stabilized after nearly twenty years of steady increase, but France and the United Kingdom are recording declines.

Exposure of individual Jews to political and socioeconomic constraints and opportunities within national societies has crucial consequences for international migration. Based on the latest available data (2004), Israel kept its 23rd place out of 177 world countries according to the Human Development Index (HDI) developed by the UN, which can be viewed as an operational measure of life quality at the country level. Israel was 9th best in terms of health, 26th in income per capita as measured by real purchasing power (but only 62nd in income distribution equality), and 34th in educational enrollment. At the same time, inasmuch as 85% of Diaspora Jewry live in countries with an HDI higher than Israel's, the impetus for international migration, including *Aliyah*, is low.

The role of changing Jewish identification is of course very important in determining not only population estimates but the whole thrust of Jewish life. A weakening in ethnic and community oriented expressions of Jewish identification among younger Jewish adults competes with the resilience of religious components of Jewish identification. Perceptions of Judaism change, increasingly moving from one's own religion to a broader spectrum of secular, cultural, or undetermined modes of identification. These changes are connected with declining rates of communal affiliation in secular as well as religious Jewish organizations; declining rates of ethno-religious homogamy, specifically, Jewish in-group marriages; declining rates of Jewish neighborhood concentration; declining rates of predominantly Jewish social networks; declining percentages of Jews among the total population in their countries, cities, and neighborhoods.

On the other hand, the Jewish school-age population comprises a growing share of the Orthodox and of children who are receiving full-time Jewish education; Jewish studies courses and programs on college and university campuses continue to grow; as does the publication of Jewish books by both Jewish and general publishers; levels of Jewish ritual observance and Hebrew literacy have risen among the more traditional segments of the Jewish population in the U.S. and elsewhere; and the proportion of Jews who have visited Israel at least once increases over time.

2. Leading Drivers

Figure 1 outlines the main drivers of Jewish demographic change, the intervening operational variables, and the final results in terms of three dependent variables that constitute the main targets of policy planning: Jewish population size and composition, and the share of Jews out of total population.

The main drivers of Jewish demographic change operate at several levels: the broader societal (macro) level, the Jewish communal (intermediate) level, and the individual (micro) level. Jews, besides being studied here, provide a general case of the demography of a subpopulation whose existence and development over time is determined by demographic-biological factors, *and* by cultural-ideational factors.

FIGURE 1. FRAMEWORK OF JEWISH POPULATION TRENDS AND POLICY CONCERNS

Main drivers	Operational variables	Dependent variables
1. Global inequalities and geopolitical changes	1. Main demographic aspects: a. Group’s boundary definition: Accessions/ Secessions b. International migration: Immigration/Emigration c. Family and Fertility d. Health and Survivorship e. Territorial boundary definitions	1. Jewish population size 2. Jewish population composition 3. Share of Jews out of total population
2. National societal contexts and interventions		
3. Jewish institutional interventions		
4. Personal characteristics: a. Gender b. Socioeconomic c. Identificational		

Jewish population trends primarily reflect:

1. Long established patterns and sudden changes in **global society**, including unequal opportunities and constraints across different countries and regions in the world, and major geopolitical events of international relevance;

2. **The national country context** of Jewish communities, including the main socio-cultural patterns of the relationship between the majority of society and the Jewish part of it, main gaps within society, and main policy interventions that may affect demographic trends at the national level;
3. The interventions of **Jewish organizations** internationally and locally;
4. The **personal characteristics** of individual Jews, in particular gender, socioeconomic status, and Jewish identification.

Five main operational variables determine the eventual Jewish population size and composition, and the share of Jews out of the total population in each country:

1. Definition of the Jewish group's boundary and the balance of accessions to and secessions from the group These issues are often, but not exclusively, dealt with under the heading of *conversions*. A growing gap emerges between the large number of non-Jewish individuals comprised under the enlarged Jewish population definition, and the actual numbers handled by recognized conversion authorities and formally admitted within the Jewish fold. A growing gap is also emerging between subjective feelings of belonging to Jewish peoplehood (no matter how specified), and formal Jewish definition categories as established by legal authorities or by researchers. Jewish organizations that operate within the broadly defined Jewish community adopt different criteria in accordance with their own mandate and targets.

2. International migration (the balance of immigration and emigration) International migration between Israel and the rest of world Jewry is recently playing a diminishing role in global Jewish population redistribution. Most Jews already left the countries where their conditions, economic and political, were less attractive, and the vast majority reside today in fairly developed and democratic societies where the pressures to leave are not overwhelming. In 2007, a total of 18,000 new immigrants arrived in Israel – a decrease of 5% versus 2006. Migration to Israel includes a growing share of non-Jews under the Law of Return. Most of these come from the FSU, but the whole Falashmura immigration from Ethiopia as well as other smaller groups such as the Bnei Menashe from India or the Bnei Avraham from Peru

consist of people who undergo conversion to Judaism in the course of their transfer to Israel. Emigration from Israel is quite stable, around 10-15,000 a year. Due to diminishing immigration, Israel's net international migration balance now consists of just a few thousands a year. Jewish migration from the FSU to Germany and to the U.S. has steadily declined, while attention to possible future moves has been growing among Jews in France and the UK. Current international migration includes a growing share of people who maintain family and economic links with their countries of origin and whose life effectively functions in a bi-local or multi-local context. This affects the patterns of absorption of Jewish migrants and should be drawing greater attention.

3. Family formation and fertility levels, affecting the birth rate The global Jewish collective is currently characterized by two extremely different behavioral models, one in Israel and the other throughout the Jewish Diaspora. In Israel well established patterns of family formation result in a stable Total Fertility Rate of 2.6-2.7 children per woman (regardless of marital status), and an ideal family size above 4 among married Jewish couples at reproduction ages (3.8 if excluding *Haredi* families). These values are uniquely high for a developed society, although they are still markedly lower than those among Israel's Arab citizens and the West Bank and Gaza Palestinians. In Israel too, like the prevailing trends in the West, there emerges a trend to later, somewhat less frequent, and somewhat less stable marriages. Out of Israel, Jews are affected by the continuing erosion in conventional family patterns expressed by far lower frequencies of marriage, higher rates of divorce, lower marital fertility (usually lower than 1.5 Jewish children per woman), and the continuing expanding rate of out-marriage. Out-marriages create a virtual opportunity of expanding the Jewish population pool, but in reality constitute a primary factor of erosion in the younger Jewish population component, and a likely chain of transmission of further assimilation in the future. Contrary to the situation in Israel, Jewish generations in the Diaspora not only do not reproduce but rather undergo a constant process of shrinking.

4. Health and survivorship In developed societies where most contemporary Jews live, health patterns generally follow a course of slow and gradual improvement. However epidemiological events mostly related to behavioral

patterns, as well as large-scale disruptions related to natural or technological causes need to be carefully monitored. Of growing general interest – and of interest for specific Jewish communities – is the emerging body of research relating health patterns to specific characteristics of the human genome.

5. Definition of the territory considered. In Israel, given the presence of a large Arab minority, demographic trends may quite crucially affect the extent and stability of a Jewish majority. The actual size of that majority plays a crucial role in determining the very essence of society, its adherence to rules of democracy, and its cultural identity. Jewish and Palestinian populations grow at quite different rates, and the Jewish population edge is being daily eroded by these differential trends. Alternative definitions of the boundaries of the State of Israel, with the eventual inclusion or exclusion of significant numbers of Palestinians through withdrawal from areas kept since the 1967 war, and swaps of sovereignty over relevant portions of the land, could result in radically different population compositions.

In addition, the **intensity and quality of Jewish identification** plays a significant role in Jewish demographic patterns – as the likelihood of occurrence of demographic events such as a birth, a conversion, or even geographical mobility strongly reflect Jewish beliefs, tastes, and opportunities.

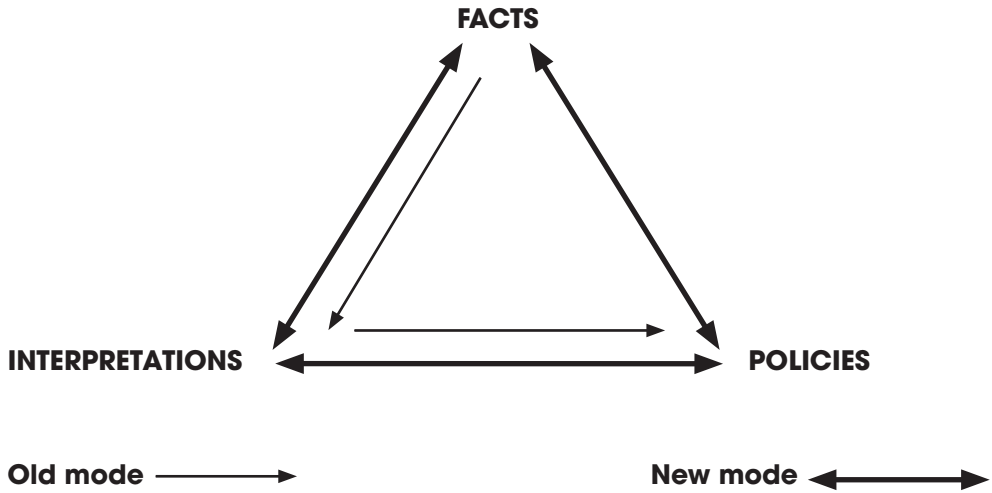
3. Current Debates: Agreements and Disagreements

The whole approach to Jewish demographic and identificational trends obviously reflects the empirical evidence and the theories and models available at present, which can rely on quite a large number of different sources. However, the final judgment about the size and composition of a Jewish population rests on decisions made by researchers and data users about population definitions. It should be stressed again that the *core*, *enlarged*, or *Law of Return* Jewish population concepts result not only in different numbers but also in opposing diagnoses about the main thrust of population growth or diminution. In addition, it is interesting to

ascertain how policies may be affected by different definitions and new emerging evidence.

In the past, conventional wisdom was that ascertained facts affected interpretations, which in turn affected the process of policy decision making and implementation. In the more recent realities, a more complex and reciprocal interplay of facts, interpretations and policies has emerged. In Jewish population research, the reading of basic findings is increasingly affected by pre-existing interpretative assumptions, such that a positive or negative interpretation of the trends often precedes in-depth analyses. In fact, if one sweeping critique can be put forward of the more recent research efforts, it is the underutilization of the data, thus lending a very shallow factual basis to most of the debates around the findings. In turn, policies tend to directly affect both the interpretations and the very results – in particular the different choices made by various large scale Jewish organizations in determining their target constituencies (see Figure 2). The logic and mandate of organizations is very much oriented by the pressing requests of “here” and “now”, whereas good research requires historical perspective and geographical comparisons. The latter should be based on stable definitions and research questions along with constant innovation. But organizational policies sometimes require a re-invention of the subject matter as a function of changing contingencies. The consequences for the seriousness of the debate about trends, their causes and consequences are detrimental.

**FIGURE 2. CONTEMPORARY JEWISH POPULATION:
FACTS, INTERPRETATIONS AND POLICIES**



Two different ongoing debates are worth mentioning in this respect. In the United States, the discussion about Jewish demography, rather than tackling substantive realities in the perspective of the last decades, has instead focused on numbers and on the quality of sources of data, none of which can be conclusively rated better than others. As against the estimates of 5.2-5.3 million core Jews mentioned above, an estimate of 6.2 million Jews was issued in the 2006 *American Jewish Year Book* based on a compilation of Jewish population surveys and other sources obtained in local Jewish communities. An even higher estimate, reaching up to 7.5 million Jews, was suggested by Len Saxe and his associates at the Steinhardt Center at Brandeis based on a meta-analysis of general national social surveys, each of which included small samples of Jews identified by religion, complemented by assumptions about the share of Jews who do not declare a religion. These compilations of disparate surveys – local or national – do rely on better response rates than large national Jewish population surveys. However, they are spread over many years, are collected with different and not always random methods by different investigators, rely on different definitions of who is a Jew, are not comparable in their topical contents – sometimes not even regarding the

same variable – and any one source is inadequate to portray the whole of American Jewry in isolation from other cognate sources. Jewish population estimates suggested by these research efforts, higher by one or even two million as against the *core Jewish population* used in the estimates presented above, evidently reflect a broader definition of the Jewish collective.

While the evidence of a deficit of Jewishly identified births versus Jewish deaths – inherent in an aging Jewish age composition – suggests that in the U.S. the *core Jewish population* is past its peak, there exist at least another 1.5 million people who do not see themselves as Jewish but are of Jewish parentage. In addition, about the same number of persons of non-Jewish origin live in mixed Jewish households, thus creating an enlarged Jewish population of about 8.3 million. The population theoretically eligible for Israel’s Law of Return would be considerably above 10 million, also including non-Jewish grandchildren and non-Jewish spouses of Jews, children of Jews, and grandchildren of Jews. All in all, one detects a shrinking core and an expanding periphery. The identificational stratification of American Jewry is reported in Table 2.

TABLE 2. U.S. JEWISH POPULATION, BY DIFFERENT IDENTIFICATION CRITERIA

Jewish Identification	Millions
Law of Return eligibles	> 10.0
Total in Jewish households	> 8.0
Have Jewish parent/s	6.7
Core Jewish population	5.2-5.3
Declare to be Jewish	4.3-4.4
Jewish organization affiliated	3.0
Devote time to Jewish community	1.5
Denomination Orthodox	0.5-0.6

Clearly policies aimed at the more strongly identified Jewish core and at the broader virtual collective of Jews and their non-Jewish extended families cannot be the same. In the name of integrity and efficiency, separate policy objectives and appropriate tools and strategies need to be developed for these different and relevant constituents.

The demographic balance between Israel and the Palestinians has been the object of another lively debate. Not unlike the case with the U.S. Jewish population, the available Palestinian data base is far from perfect and must be regarded with critical eyes. The 2007 Palestinian census indicated a total population of 3.5 million, without East Jerusalem which is already included in the Israeli data. When we add the West Bank (but not Gaza) to Israel's population, 5.8 million Jews including their 300,000 non-Jewish household members represent 61% of a total of 9.5 million inhabitants, including foreign workers. Some observers have suggested that Palestinian population estimates in the West Bank and Gaza should be lowered by one million. If this were true, as suggested by Zimmerman, Seid, White, and Ettinger, Jews would represent 66% of a total population of 8.8 million in Israel plus the West Bank. In other words the impact of significant variations in Palestinian population estimates on the share of Jews out of total population is quite less than might be expected.

The fundamental issue in this debate is not the specific percentage point of the extant Jewish majority, or the specific date at which Jews will or will not lose their current majority over the entire territory between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River, or even within the Green Line. Neither a difference of one or five percent, nor advancing or deferring the date of the demographic "tie" by one or by five years, is the main issue at stake. Rather, the main issue is what are the implications for the nature of Israel's civil society of this seemingly approaching shift, as well as its geo-strategic and international implications.

4. Suggested Policy Directions

With all the uncertainties and unknowns of the contemporary global scene, and their predictable or unpredictable consequences for Jews, clearly

World Jewry faces several serious demographic predicaments with profound long-term consequences. As demographic policies take effect only after a number of years, the momentum of current trends will generate more of the same for several more years. This is one reason why Jewish population issues should be constantly monitored both on the local and on the global scale, and policy programs developed for the shorter as well as the longer run.

It should be recognized that Jewish realities often depend on circumstances beyond our control. Nevertheless, a better outcome may with effort be secured by acknowledging the broader situation and focusing on specific ends. A realistic assessment of where and how Jewish individuals and their institutions can best shape their own demographic and identificational future should be combined with a willingness to make decisions and initiate processes apt to promote these goals.

Policies are needed to reverse trends perceived as dangerous and to stimulate countervailing trends. Policy interventions should aim directly at the different trends outlined here, through the intervening mechanisms that causally shape each main trend. Available data are adequate for identifying some of the urgently needed measures, but in some cases new policy oriented research is needed. We need to research and understand the demographic issues honestly, removed from old myths, new superstitions, and narrow interests. The mutual dependency and commonality of interests that tie together Israel and Diaspora should be kept in mind when considering policy planning.

Jewish population policy options should consider each of the main areas of concern outlined above. In the following we list specific aspects without assigning priorities:

1. Jewish identity. How do we more effectively handle hundreds of thousands of non-Jewish Israeli immigrants – mostly from the Former Soviet Union but also from Ethiopia and other countries – and the modes of their incorporation within the Jewish mainstream of Israeli society? Based on the assumption that a majority are willing to be part of a Jewish society, much larger scale *giyur* (conversion) should take place of those who seriously wish to join Judaism. This in turns relates to:

- The role of institutions such as Israel's Chief Rabbinate regarding procedures for admission and the follow up of neophytes after conversion. The alternative will be witnessing a growing pool of non-Jewish children, grandchildren and other household mates of Jews in Israel;
 - A related major concern is how to bring children of out-married couples into the mainstream of Jewish society in the Diaspora;
 - The effectiveness of different Jewish educational programs, full time and part time, formal and informal, in shaping and developing an attractive and durable Jewish identity among the younger generation;
 - Creating an enhanced sense of internal coherence and a dialogue respectful of differences in the context of growing identification gaps within the Jewish collective along religious-non religious lines and Israel-Diaspora directions.
2. Migration. How do we rescue, provide assistance to, and resettle the persisting potential for Jewish international migration? This in turn calls for:
- Understanding and developing assistance to new types of *aliyah* including multi-local and time-sharing arrangements residences and other Jewish migrations. This calls for new ideas and procedures related to the whole complex of civil, economic, legal and political rights of those who are more highly mobile;
 - Evaluating geographical mobility between and within major urban areas and changing patterns of affiliation, and planning the territorial location of Jewish community services, together with enhanced use of networking with the help of information technologies;
 - Monitoring trends in economy and labor force and especially employment, welfare and equal access to opportunities, and a fair distribution of resources.

3. The family. How do we develop a more systematic approach to changes in Jewish family patterns? This involves:

- Understanding marriage and family related attitudes and behaviors among the growing pool of young unmarried adults in Israel and in the Diaspora;
- Facing up to high frequencies of out-marriage in the Diaspora, and envisaging mechanisms apt to facilitate the encounter of young Jewish adults;
- Evaluating the role of child and young adult formal and informal Jewish education in shaping Jewish identification;
- Acknowledging the existing prospects for facilitating Jewish birth rates in Israel – where the demand for children is still high – and in the Diaspora – where powerful constraints are created by the prevailing restrictive norms on family size and by comparatively weaker infrastructures and provisions for early childrearing.
- Some studies indicate that the role of social services and of financial and value oriented incentives for fertility can be significant – particularly at medium parities such as the 3rd or 4th child. Policy instruments can perhaps affect the statistical equivalent of one-half a child per family. Multiplied by millions of Jewish households in Israel and across the world, the demographic impact might eventually be significant.

4. Longevity. How do we ensure that the current fair level of personal health enjoyed by the Jewish population in Israel and throughout the world is maintained and improved where feasible?

5. Territory. What policy answers do we provide to the questions raised by the deep connection of Jewish demography with the Palestinian-Israeli conflict? This implies:

- Coming to terms with the implications of differential Jewish and Arab growth rates for population size and composition;

- Taking into account demographic factors in determining the agreed final boundaries of the State of Israel, so as to preserve a viable Jewish majority.

5. Concluding Remarks

Facing these trends and prospects, two distinct sets of issues should be at the center of the Jewish agenda in relation to Jewish population prospects.

In most Diaspora communities, the challenge is how to preserve the sense of a cohesive and meaningful Jewish community, while enjoying the full gamut of creative opportunities offered by open and non-hostile societies. From a demographic point of view, resilience of the Jewish way of life in the long term significantly rests on the primary biological foundations of family and children. A related challenge is how to reach those who do not bother nor want to belong, in order to revive in them a spark of historical memory and mutual responsibility, if not a sense of pride and mission.

One of the greatest challenges in Israel is how a clear Jewish population majority can be preserved. Differential growth, the changing population composition by ethno-religious groups – Jews and Palestinians, and territorial configurations need to be considered. Interconnections should be developed among security, the economy, the demography of international migration and family patterns, emerging identification patterns, and policy-making. These factors, each alone and in combination with others, will determine the future destiny of Israel as a Jewish and democratic state, and of world Jewry as a set of viable communities and peoplehood.