

EMIGRATION OF JEWS FROM THE SOVIET UNION IN 1989¹

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A. General

In 1989 the largest number of Jews left the Soviet Union since the beginning of the exodus in 1971. The number of emigrants totalled 71,238 compared with the 19,251 who emigrated in 1988, an increase of 270%. In 1989 was registered also a new peak in the number of emigrants from one locality: 11,218 emigrated from Kiev, surpassing the previous recorded peak of 9,833 in 1979, also from Kiev. Another unique phenomenon recorded in 1989 was that from Belorussia a greater number of Jews emigrated than during the entire intercensal period 1979-1988. Particularly outstanding was the city of Gomel' from which in 1989 emigrated approximately twice as many Jews as during this last intercensal period. All in all more than 1,000 Jews emigrated from thirteen different localities. As a result, the Jewish population in the USSR as a whole dropped to approximately 1,350,000 at the end of 1989.

In 1989, 12,277 Soviet Jews immigrated to Israel, an increase of 450% over the previous year, while 58,961 migrated to other destinations as against 17,020 in 1988, an increase of 246%. Some 56% of the immigrants to Israel (*olim*) arrived during the last three months of the year in the wake of the United States government's decision to cease granting entry permits to Jews who leave the Soviet Union with visas for Israel.

It is also to be noted that in 1989 the number of Jews emigrating from Georgia and the Caucasus region was again particularly low. At the time of the writing of this paper (summer 1990), it appears that there is yet no significant change in this regard.

B. Age and Sex Composition

Despite the considerable increase in the number of emigrants, no significant changes were observed in regard to its composition by age. The median age of all emigrants was 33.5 years, as compared with 33.7 years in 1988. Although the median age of those immigrating to Israel fell from 34.9 years to 33.2, that of the Jews migrating elsewhere was just about the same (it fell slightly from 33.7 years to 33.5).

Table 1
Soviet Emigrants by SSR

Republic	Total emigrants	Olim	"Dropouts"	Percent Olim	Jewish Population (1989 census) ¹	Percent Emigrating	Pct. Increase in Emigrants 1989/88
Total	71,238	12,277	58,961	20.8	1,450,700	4.9	270.0
RSFSR	13,784	2,615	11,169	19.0	551,000	2.5	182.9
Ukraine	32,547	3,672	28,875	11.3	488,000	6.7	271.1
Belorussia	10,269	1,057	9,212	10.3	112,000	9.2	376.1
Uzbekistan	4,358	1,655	2,703	38.0	94,900	4.6	320.7
Moldavia	4,304	1,521	2,783	35.3	66,000	6.5	507.9
Azerbaidzhan	1,981	430	1,551	21.7	30,800	6.4	564.8
Georgia	488	259	229	53.1	24,800	2.0	73.7
Larvia	1,588	299	1,289	18.8	23,000	6.9	231.5
Kazakhstan	220	91	129	42.4	19,900	1.1	1,733.3
Tadzhikistan	535	208	327	38.9	14,800	3.6	577.2
Lithuania	780	319	461	40.9	12,000	6.5	156.6
Kirgizia	178	103	75	57.9	6,000	3.0	456.3
Estonia	169	33	136	23.2	4,600	3.7	-18.8
Turkmenia	20	8	12	40.0	2,500	0.8	-
Armenia	17	7	10	41.2	700	2.4	21.4

¹ According to data published in the Soviet Yiddish-language newspaper. Some of the data may include slight inaccuracies.

As to the child-woman ratio of children of age 0-4 to women of child-bearing age, despite the fact that the fertility of women immigrating to Israel was somewhat larger than that of those who migrated to other countries, the gap between these ratios diminished considerably. Among the immigrants to Israel the child-woman ratio was 317 per thousand as compared with 285 per thousand among their counterparts who migrated elsewhere. Among the former this was a significant drop (from 296 per thousand the previous year). *In toto*, 4,593 children migrated together with 15,803 women between the ages of 20-44, giving the ratio of 291 children per thousand women. It should be noted here that the emigration of approximately 16,000 women of child-bearing age must have a significant effect on the number of expected births to Jews still living in the Soviet Union.

In regard to composition by sex, the gap between the sexes increased among both groups, those migrating to Israel and elsewhere. Particularly exceptional is the excess of women aged 20-35 which is difficult to explain. While in regard to young people in their early 20s this may be attributed to the fact that young men are serving in the Red Army and are thus unable to emigrate, this explanation does not hold for those above military age and, particularly, for those 31-35.

¹ See Yoel Florsheim, "Emigration of Jews from the Soviet Union in 1988," *Jews and Jewish Topics in the USSR and Eastern Europe*, 2(9) (summer 1989), pp. 30-35. The author wishes to thank the Immigration Department of the Jewish Agency for the material that served as the source for this analysis.

Altogether in 1989 the sex ratio for those emigrating was 930, as compared with 957 in 1988. Among the immigrants to Israel the ratio was 899 compared with 960 in 1988 and among the other migrants the ratio was 936, as compared with 957 in 1988.

Table 2a
Emigrants by Age and Sex: All Emigrants, 1988

Age	Total		Males	Females	Sex Ratio
	Number	Percent			
Total	71,238	100.0	34,324	36,914	930
0-4	4,593	6.4	2,382	2,211	1,077
5-12	9,877	13.9	5,153	4,724	1,091
13-19	6,632	9.3	3,531	3,101	1,139
20-24	3,073	4.3	1,287	1,786	721
25-30	7,398	10.4	3,344	4,054	825
31-35	8,116	11.4	4,002	4,114	973
36-45	12,474	17.5	6,625	5,849	1,133
46-55	5,581	7.8	2,689	2,892	930
56-65	6,740	9.5	2,676	4,064	658
66+	6,754	9.5	2,635	4,119	640

Table 2b
Emigrants by Age and Sex: Olim

Age	Total		Males	Females	Sex Ratio	% of Migrants
	Number	Percent				
Total	12,277	100.0	5,811	6,466	899	20.8
0-4	821	6.7	428	393	1,089	21.8
5-12	1,855	15.1	927	928	999	23.1
13-19	1,228	10.0	623	605	1,030	22.7
20-24	574	4.7	259	315	822	23.0
25-30	1,116	9.1	501	615	815	17.8
31-35	1,232	10.0	575	657	875	17.9
36-45	2,104	17.1	1,102	1,002	1,100	20.3
46-55	843	6.9	399	444	899	17.8
56-65	1,109	9.0	414	695	596	19.7
66+	1,395	11.4	583	812	718	26.0

Table 2c
Emigrants by Age and Sex: "Dropouts"

Age	Total		Males	Females	Sex Ratio
	Number	Percent			
Total	58,961	100.0	28,513	30,448	936
0-4	3,772	6.4	1,954	1,818	1,075
5-12	8,022	13.6	4,226	3,796	1,113
13-19	5,404	9.2	2,908	2,496	1,165
20-24	2,499	4.2	1,028	1,471	699
25-30	6,282	10.7	2,843	3,439	827
31-35	6,884	11.7	3,427	3,457	991
36-45	10,370	17.6	5,523	4,847	1,139
46-55	4,738	8.0	2,290	2,448	935
56-65	5,631	9.6	2,262	3,369	671
66+	5,359	9.1	2,052	3,307	621

By the end of 1989 approximately 50,000 children born in the 1960s had emigrated, as well as 41,000 children born in the 1970s, and 15,000 children born in the 1980s. We do not know what the original size of these cohorts were, but we estimate that approximately 30% of those born in the 1960s, about 25% of those born in the 1970s and more than 10% of those born in the 1980s have emigrated.

Table 3
Emigrants to Israel by Birth Cohorts

Year of Birth	1989		1971-1989	
	Number (thousands)	Percent	Number (thousands)	Percent
Total	71.2	100.0	361	100.0
1985-1989	4.6	6.4	6	1.6
1980-1984	6.5	9.1	9	2.5
1975-1979	5.5	7.8	16	4.5
1970-1974	4.5	6.4	25	6.8
1959-1969	10.5	14.7	54	14.9
1954-1958	8.1	11.4	31	8.6
1950-1953	5.6	7.9	25	6.9
1940-1949	8.6	12.1	54	14.9
1930-1939	6.0	8.4	44	12.1
1920-1929	7.2	10.0	42	11.7
1910-1919	3.1	4.4	31	8.6
1909-	1.0	1.5	25	6.9

As to those children born in the 1980s, it is only natural that there is no quantitative similarity in the emigration of those who were born in the first half of the decade with those born in the second half. By the end of 1989 over 9,000, i.e. approximately 15%, of those born between 1980–1984 had emigrated. The evident conclusion is that if this rate of emigration continues or even increases, then one can expect a very rapid decrease of the young age cohorts in the Soviet Union.

Table 4
Emigrants Born in the 1980s, by Year of Birth
(1980–1989)

Year of Birth	Number	Year of Birth	Number
<i>1980–1984</i>		<i>1985–1989</i>	
Total	9,068	Total	5,768
1980	1,824	1985	1,719
1981	1,800	1986	1,579
1982	1,737	1987	1,303
1983	1,893	1988	943
1984	1,814	1989	224

C. Immigration to Israel and Elsewhere

In 1989, the percentage of those choosing to migrate to countries other than Israel declined to 79.2%, as compared with 88.4% the previous year. The main decrease occurred in the last months of the year when migration of Soviet Jews to the United States was curtailed. For the first nine months of 1989 the “dropout” rate was 87.1%, while in the last three months of the year it declined to 76.4%, and in the final month to 60.1%.

Table 5
Olim and “Dropouts” (1979–1989)

Year	Total	Olim	“Dropouts”	Pct. “Dropouts”
1979–88	116,601	32,794	83,807	71.9
1979–81	82,242	26,475	55,767	67.8
1982–86	6,961	2,024	4,937	70.9
1987–88	27,398	4,295	23,103	84.3
1989	71,238	12,277	58,961	79.1
I–IX	42,257	5,441	36,816	87.1
X–XI	20,394	3,414	16,980	83.3
XII	8,587	3,422	5,165	60.1

D. Geographical Distribution

In 1989, 4.9% of Soviet Jews emigrated, based on the census count of the Jewish population taken in the early part of the year. This is a significant percentage when compared with the 6.4% who emigrated during the entire prior intercensal period, and even when compared with the 8.4% who emigrated during the inter-censal period of 1970–1978.

As shall be indicated below, there are significant differences in the number of migrants by region of residence.

RSFSR

In 1989, 13,784 Jews left the Russian Republic, as compared with 4,873 in the preceding year and 27,409 between 1979–1988. Some 85% of the emigrants came from Moscow and Leningrad, although the residents of these cities represent only slightly more than half of the Jews in the entire republic.

On the other hand, the number of emigrants from Dagestan, located by the Caspian Sea, declined to 107. It is to be recalled that during the last intercensal period more than 1,200 Jews migrated from this region.

If there was no real change in the share of migrants from the two main cities, it means that there was a certain increase in the proportion of migrants from other areas of the republic, but still only from two other cities were there more than 100 emigrants.

In toto, although the largest Jewish population lives in the RSFSR, the number of Jewish migrants was considerably less than from the Ukraine, as will be described below, and, in fact, the percentage of Jews emigrating from the RSFSR was among the lowest of all republics. In this respect there was no significant change from the past.

Table 6
Localities with at Least 100 Emigrants,
RSFSR

Locality	Number of Migrants
Moscow	5,909
Leningrad	5,856
Novosibirsk	144
Kursk	150

Ukraine

In absolute numbers, more Jews emigrated from the Ukraine than from any other republic; in terms of percentages it was also close to the top of the list. The number of Jews emigrating in 1989 was 32,547, as compared with 8,770 in the previous year, and 43,860 in the decade 1979–1988. As noted above,

the number of emigrants from the Ukrainian capital, Kiev, was a record for a single year. However, there were other regions from which a large proportion of Jews emigrated. We estimate that close to 15% of the Jewish residents migrated from Chernovtsy *oblast'*, as well as more than 10% from Kiev and Odessa. There were also localities from which the number of emigrants in 1989 was greater than the number who left during the entire previous ten years—e.g., Kharkov, Zhitomir, and Vinnitsa. In all, in 1989 6.7% of the Jews of this republic migrated, with 100 or more Jews emigrating from 16 different localities.

Table 7
Localities with at Least 100 Emigrants, Ukraine

Locality	Number	Locality	Number
Kiev	11,218	Dnepropetrovsk	560
Odessa	9,575	Donetsk	391
Kharkov	3,204	Zaporozhe	332
Chernovtsy	2,504	Simferopol	160
Vinnitsa	961	Poltava	157
L'vov	887	Chernigov	137
Zhitomir	813	Nikolaev	109
Khmel'nitskii	672	Cherkassy	107

Belorussia

The largest percent of all migrants from any republic, 9.2%, was those who migrated from Belorussia. The total number in 1989 amounted to 10,269, or 3% more than during the entire previous intercensal decade, when 9,955 migrated from this republic. From the city of Gomel', more than twice as many people migrated as during the entire decade 1979–1988 (3,013 as compared with 1,512). If this pace of emigration continues, the number of Jews in this Republic will decline to fewer than 100,000 during the current year. There were more than 100 emigrants from five localities in Belorussia.

Table 8
Localities with at Least 100 Emigrants, Belorussia

Locality	Number
Minsk	4,984
Gomel'	3,013
Bobruisk	1,742
Mogilev	249
Vitebsk	101

Uzbekistan

In 1989, 4,358 Jews migrated, compared with 1,036 in 1988 and 6,931 in the decade 1979–1988. While 41% of all the emigrants from the Soviet Union in 1989 left during the last three months of the year, approximately 59% of the emigrants from this republic were concentrated in the last period, and 23% of them in the last month. It appears that the Islamic and national awakening in this republic encouraged Jews to emigrate, thus increasing significantly the number of those leaving. This awakening was manifest in Tashkent, in the Samarkand area, and in the eastern, Fergana region. Nevertheless, the percentage of Jews leaving Uzbekistan was relatively smaller than the percentage of Jews leaving the Soviet Union as a whole (see Table 1).

In Uzbekistan, there were five localities from which more than 100 Jews emigrated.

Table 9
Localities with at Least 100 Emigrants, Uzbekistan

Locality	Number
Tashkent	2,739
Samarkand	772
Fergana	218
Bokhara	183
Katakurgan	121

Moldavia

In 1989, 4,304 Jews emigrated from Moldavia, compared with only 708 in 1988 and 10,816 in the intercensal decade. Nevertheless, it is to be noted that 86% emigrated from Kishinev, the capital, despite the fact that, according to the census of 1970, the Jews of this city amounted to only 51% of the Jewish population of the republic. Although Jews emigrated from more than 24 localities, their total number amounted to only 602. A significant number of Jews emigrated only from Beltsy (200) and from Bendery (100).

Azerbaijan

A total of 1,981 Jews emigrated in 1989, compared with a mere 298 in the previous year and 3,433 in the intercensal decade. From this republic, too, 53% emigrated during the last three months of the year, including 15.5% in the last month. Around 97.5% (1,933) of the emigrants came from Baku, the capital, although only 72% of the Jews of this republic lived there according to the 1970 census.

Georgia

The dimensions of emigration from this Republic remained small: 448 Jews, a mere 2% of the republic's Jews, emigrated in 1989. Only from Tbilisi, the capital, was there any appreciable emigration (318 emigrants). As in Dagestan and the Caucasus, it appears that in this Republic too the influence of the renewed emigration movement on the Jews living there is minimal.

The Baltic Republics

According to the last census (1989), approximately 40,000 Jews were living in this region. Nevertheless, 2,537 or 6% emigrated: 1,588 or 6.9% from Latvia; 780 or 6.5% from Lithuania; plus a small number, 169 or 3.7%, from Estonia. The majority of emigrants came from the capital cities—from Riga (1,536), from Vilnius (743), and Tallin (164), altogether accounting for 96% of the total.

Tadzhikistan

In 1989, 535 Jews emigrated, compared with only 79 the previous year. In this case, too, 56% of them emigrated in the final quarter of the year, but only 13% in December. Almost all (505 or 94%) of the emigrants came from the capital city, Dushanbe, despite the fact that only 78% of the republic's Jews live in that city.

The Remaining Central Asian Republics (Kazakhstan, Kirgiziia, Turkmenia, and Armenia)

According to the census of January 1989, 29,000 Jews resided in these republics. Nevertheless, only 435 Jews (1.5%) emigrated during the past year. Still, this number was greater than the 359 who emigrated during the whole intercensal period. More than 100 Jews emigrated from only two localities—Frunze, capital of Kirgizia (175), and Alma Ata, capital of Kazakhstan (118).

In conclusion, although the dimensions of emigration increased greatly in 1989, from the point of view of the geographical distribution there were no dramatic changes. The majority of the localities and regions from which there were a large number of emigrants in the past were those from which there was considerable emigration in the last year, with the exception of Georgia and the Caucasus and other areas of minor importance. On the other hand, from those areas where there was a limited number of migrants in the past, even if there was a small increase overall last year, their share in the migratory movement remained quite small.

In regard to the composition by age, too, no dramatic changes were observed; the age distribution remained basically the same as in the past. Nevertheless, it may be expected that with the increase in the dimensions of emigration over time there will be a decrease in the proportion of children, due to the emigration of many women of child-bearing age.

Appendix Localities with at least 500 Emigrants

Locality	Republic	Total Emigrants	Olim	"Dropouts"	Pct. Olim	Emigrants 1979-88
Kiev	Ukraine	11,218	488	10,730	4.4	16,852
Odessa	Ukraine	9,575	500	9,075	5.2	11,391
Moscow	RSFSR	5,909	935	4,974	15.8	13,188
Leningrad	RSFSR	5,856	783	5,073	13.8	10,861
Minak	Belorussia	4,984	322	4,662	6.5	6,043
Kishinev	Moldavia	3,702	942	2,760	25.4	6,920
Kharkov	Ukraine	3,204	433	2,771	13.5	2,624
Gomel'	Belorussia	3,013	373	2,640	12.4	1,511
Tashkent	Uzbekistan	2,739	602	2,137	22.0	4,187
Chernovtsy	Ukraine	2,504	1,033	1,471	41.3	4,043
Baku	Azerbaijan	1,933	383	1,550	19.8	2,736
Bobruisk	Belorussia	1,742	140	1,602	8.0	1,299
Riga	Latvia	1,536	252	1,284	16.4	5,250
Vinnitsa	Ukraine	961	181	780	9.2	841
L'vov	Ukraine	887	92	795	10.4	3,419
Zhitomir	Ukraine	813	85	728	10.5	583
Samarkand	Uzbekistan	772	439	333	56.9	1,183
Vilnius	Lithuania	743	282	461	38.0	2,052
Khmel'nitskii	Ukraine	672	101	571	15.0	340
Dnepropetrovsk	Ukraine	560	76	484	13.6	477
Dushanbe	Tadzhikistan	505	205	320	40.6	1,030