



The Jewish People Policy Institute (JPPI)

An Integrated Jewish World Response to Israel's Migrant Challenge

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The 38,000 illegal migrants currently in Israel pose a dilemma between Jewish humanitarian values on the one hand and Israel's *raison d'être* as the nation state of the Jewish people on the other. World Jewish decision makers should consider their first priority to be ensuring Israel's capacity for future Jewish immigration given expected mass migration waves from distressed countries to the West.

The decision regarding the illegal migrants creates a conflict. Mass deportation is perceived to contradict the ethos, legacy and tragic lessons of the Jewish experience. At the same time, their absorption could establish a precedent and be perceived as an open invitation to further waves of migration, family reunification, and Palestinian claims. This would challenge Israel's Jewish character, given its limited geography and demographic profile.

After analyzing steps taken by Western countries, this paper recommends balanced policy options to navigate the interests and values so essential to Israel and the Jewish People. Finding the right balance between Jewish humanitarian values and Israel's Jewish character is critical and urgent for Israel and for many in the Jewish Diaspora. For this reason, JPPI's operational policy recommendations seek to engage and partner world Jewry with the Government of Israel in their implementation.

Policy Challenges, Considerations and Goals

Israel must contend with roughly 40,000 illegal migrants currently in the country.

Key policy considerations:

1. In principle, **Israel does not bear the responsibility** to provide a permanent home to **illegal employment seekers**, nor does it require them for its own small market. At the same time, **Israel does bear the responsibility to shelter refugees** (according to international norms) and to properly treat and provide solutions for the illegal migrants already in the country.
2. **Absorbing the illegal migrants** *en masse* represents a potential threat to Israel's Jewish character, given Israel's small size and because this will invite future pressure to accept non-Jewish immigration into Israel – whether illegal migrants, family reunification petitioners, or Palestinian refugees.
3. Based on these two primary considerations, it is incumbent upon Israel to **strike the right balance**, one that will maintain its Jewish values and character.
4. It is extremely important to seek policy solutions based on partnership between Israel and world Jewry, rather than allowing the issue to become a bone of contention, especially with liberal Jewish communities and organizations.
5. While Israel represents a singular case due to its unique character and challenges, it should **consider and draw lessons from other countries' migration policies**.
6. The migration challenge is especially sensitive given its **potential to damage Israel's image** in the world.

Background and Statistics

There are currently 37,288 migrants who illegally entered Israel (the Israeli government refers to them as *mistananim*, which translates into the freighted term “infiltrators”). The majority are from Eritrea (26,563) and Sudan (2,628). There are some additional 4,000 children born to them in Israel. These migrants entered primarily between 2006 and 2012, when Israel began construction of a border barrier with Egypt. Since its completion (2014), virtually no new migrants have crossed this border. In all, 64,850 African migrants entered Israel illegally; 26,000 have left voluntarily.

There are an additional 74,000 tourists who have overstayed their visas, mostly from Eastern Europe, seeking to remain in Israel; some have submitted asylum requests. As they entered Israel legally, the Immigration Authority categorizes and treats them separately. Between 2015 and 2017, Israel deported 5,260 Ukrainian nationals and 1,788 Georgians, and efforts continue to deport those who overstay their visas. These numbers do not include some 88,000 legal foreign guest workers, another 18,000 illegal foreign guest workers and legal and illegal Palestinian workers. (See Appendix 1.)

Israel's Migrant and Refugee Policy

In all, 15,205 asylum requests were submitted to the Immigration Authority through an official Refugee Status Determination process (RSD). Of the 6,514 examined so far, 12 individuals received refugee status, and another roughly 500 individuals from Darfur and minors in Israel without their parents received A5 humanitarian visas. 8,588 requests have yet to be adjudicated. The government no longer accepts applications after January 1, 2018.¹

For the 24,000 individuals who did not request asylum, temporary 2A5 visas were granted, to be renewed every two months, no longer renewed as of February 1, 2018. The current plan is to voluntarily resettle 20,000 single men, with a \$3,500 payment, in a cooperating third country over the next two years, reportedly, Rwanda and Uganda. This plan does not presently include women, children, families and those awaiting an asylum decision. While there is considerable criticism over this, especially the chaotic manner in which it is executed, Israel's High Court unanimously ruled that it is legal, as there is no danger to the migrants' lives in the third countries. Furthermore, the Israeli government will not currently forcibly deport the migrants to these third countries (as it does with Eastern European nationals), although this was similarly deemed legal. The court decision also limited the government's use of detention as a method of pressuring those who refuse to leave. Two-thirds of Israelis support the deportation policy, claiming such large numbers of single men in Tel Aviv have led to increased crime rates and have made the lives of locals untenable.

Global Comparison

Countries that take in larger numbers of refugees and migrants generally do so in light of their large land mass and aging populations to fulfill labor requirements (U.S., Canada, Germany, Australia, etc.). While the average rate for refugee recognition among EU countries stands at over 60% (considerably higher for Eritreans), small countries are, naturally, more limited in this capacity, and the effects on their national character is felt

¹Until 2013, Eritreans and Sudanese asylum seekers received group protection. The government allowed these individuals to request asylum from 2013 until 2018, noting that those who did not had ample time to do so. Asylum seekers and human rights groups claim many did not do so, as they did not believe the government was fairly considering applications.

more quickly. Thus, smaller countries like Denmark, Austria, the Czech Republic and Hungary have all clamped down on refugee intake in recent years.(See Appendix 2.)

The Rationale behind Israel's Immigration and Refugee Policy

Israel, like all sovereign states, has the right to determine immigration policy according to its national interests and limitations. Israel is a small country, with natural population growth and little need for immigration to fill gaps in its labor force. The government's first obligation is to ensure the needs of its own citizens (עניי עירך קודמים). More importantly, Israel was founded as the nation-state of the Jewish people, both as a homeland and a refuge, and has absorbed huge numbers of Jews under the Law of Return – including significant numbers from distressed countries. Israel's immigration policies are also closely tied to its unique security challenges.

As a signatory to the 1951 UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and the subsequent 1967 Protocol, Israel is committed to sheltering and assisting those designated as refugees. However, Israel has no legal or moral responsibility for absorbing migrant workers, nor for allowing illegal immigrants to remain. Thus, to fill gaps in the labor force without affecting its Jewish character, Israel established an effective system of foreign guest workers (currently 88,000) who come to Israel for a limited time. (See Appendix 3.)

Policy Alternatives - Toward a Balanced, Integrated Policy Plan

The following table presents three categories of policy options: two favored by the sides of the current debate and a third, novel and integrative option proposed by JPPI.

JPPI's proposal has the potential to provide a realistic solution to this challenge, turning a point of contention between Israel and world Jewry to one of partnership. If implemented effectively, this effort could capture the moral imagination of new philanthropists, and better engage with liberal Jews, especially the young generation.

We examine each option according to the following considerations: upholding Israel's Jewish character and interests as well as Jewish and universal values, and implications for Israeli-Diaspora relations and for Israel's image. We then describe the expected complementary roles and implications for the Government of Israel (GOI) and world Jewry.

Alternative 1 – Amnesty and Absorption in Israel

Policy	Demographics / Israel as the Nation-State of the Jewish People	Jewish and Universal Values and Israel's Image	Implications for Israel and the GOI's Role	World Jewry's Role
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<p>Amnesty for all 38,000 migrants/asylum seekers</p>	<p>Little immediate effect on Israel's demographics – if spread out over Israel, properly integrated.</p> <p>Follow up pressure for family reunification—could lead to hundreds of thousands over a number of years.</p> <p>Sends message that Israel accepts illegal migrants.</p> <p>Sends message that Israel among countries who receive refugees and migrants.</p> <p>May invite pressure vis-a-vis hundreds of thousands of Palestinian potential returnees in any peace plan.</p>	<p>Provides immediate solution to challenge – in line with Jewish and universal values.</p> <p>Positive for Israel's relations with Diaspora and image in world.</p> <p>In the long term, may diminish Jewish character and raison d'être of the state.</p>	<p>Politically unpopular (2/3 of citizens opposed). The GOI will need to develop absorption plans.</p> <p>Some strain on social services, but will work menial jobs that benefit economy.</p> <p>In the long term, may harm the country's social unity.</p>	<p>World Jewry can help fund absorption.</p>
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Alternative 2 – Absorb Few + Humane, Phased Deportation of Most + Resettlement Help

Policy	Demographics / Israel as the Nation-Atate of the Jewish People	Jewish and Universal Values and Israel's Image	Implications for Israel and the GOI's Role	World Jewry's Role
<p>1 Amnesty for children, limited number of families</p>	<p>Limited impact on Israel's Jewish character, as long as family unification prohibited and they are well integrated.</p> <p>Will limit encouragement of potential migrants.</p>	<p>Will help mitigate perceived abandonment of Jewish humanitarian values, damage to Israel's image and connection with world Jewry.</p>	<p>Minimal cost to absorb and provide social benefits.</p> <p>Will be politically acceptable.</p>	<p>Opportunity for World Jewry to support absorption.</p> <p>Reinforces JAFI Youth Village efforts.</p>
<p>2 Relocation and private sponsorship in Canada (or U.S. – HIAS)</p>	<p>No impact on Israel's Jewish character.</p> <p>May encourage additional migrants wishing to reach Canada (or U.S.).</p>	<p>Will provide best-case scenario for Jewish and humanitarian values.</p> <p>Will help mitigate perceived abandonment of Jewish humanitarian values, damage to Israel's image and connection with world Jewry.</p>	<p>GOI will coordinate with UN and Canadian Government.</p> <p>Will be politically popular.</p>	<p>World Jewry will play lead role in funding and coordinating.</p> <p>Estimated cost per person – USD 12,000 (a family of 4 costs around USD 25,000).</p> <p>HIAS can assist in bringing some to the U.S.</p>
<p>3 Vocational training in Israel – 3rd country resettlement</p>	<p>No significant impact – deportation delayed.</p> <p>Participants commit to leave Israel within 1 year. Can work in meantime.</p> <p>Risk participants do</p>	<p>Will position Israel as an innovator in solving global migration challenges.</p> <p>Will help mitigate perceived abandonment of Jewish humanitarian values, damage Israel's image and its connection with world Jewry.</p> <p>Will likely meet resistance from</p>	<p>Initially unpopular politically.</p> <p>GOI provides vocational training and coordinates resettlement.</p> <p>Likely more</p>	<p>World Jewry will help fund and coordinate costs and resettlement as skilled workers.</p> <p>Opportunity to engage Diaspora Jews in Tikkun</p>

	not leave. May encourage additional migrants.	human rights organizations who see them as refugees, not migrant workers.	affordable than current GOI plan.	Olam projects with Israeli NGOs.
4 Agricultural training and resettlement outside of Israel for select individuals	Will preserve Israel's Jewish character, participants must leave to begin program. Will likely discourage potential migrants from coming to Israel.	Will position Israel as an innovator in solving global migration challenges. Will help mitigate perceived abandonment of Jewish humanitarian values, damage to Israel's image and connection with world Jewry.	GOI provides agricultural training (MASHAV) in 3rd country + land purchase+ starter kit. GOI fully coordinates with 3rd country. Politically popular.	World Jewry will play significant funding role. Costs ~10-20,000 USD per participant. Opportunity to engage Diaspora Jews in Tikkun Olam projects with Israeli NGOs.

Alternative3 – Deportation of All + Development Aid Abroad

Policy	Demographics / Israel as the Nation-State of the Jewish People	Jewish and Universal Values and Israel's Image	Implication and role of the GOI	Role of World Jewry
1 Deport all but recognized refugees (similar to current GOI plan)	Will preserve Jewish character of state. Will discourage potential migrants from coming to Israel.	Damage to Israel's self-image as moral example to world. Will increase distancing trend of world Jewry from Israel. Will damage Israel's image in world.	Politically popular. Costly —USD 8500 per individual to transfer to 3rd country (~ USD 323 million). Detention facility (~USD 50 million/year).	None
2 Humanitarian aid to developing countries	Will preserve Jewish character. Can be included in any policy option.	May somewhat mitigate perceived abandonment of Jewish humanitarian values, damage to Israel's image and connection with world Jewry. Will likely be seen as attempt to distract from issue.	GOI already conducts such efforts across the developing world.	World Jewry could help coordinate and fund additional projects.

A Jewish People Response to Israel's African Migrant Crisis

To resolve this challenge, we recommend adopting **Alternative 2: Absorbing a limited number of asylum seekers, humanely deporting the majority, and actively facilitating their resettlement in 3rd countries.** To help implement this plan, we

recommend convening a world Jewry migrant assistance fund(the Fund). A number of these efforts will have a secondary effect of helping to heal rifts between Israel and world Jewry, **could capture the moral imagination of new philanthropists, and better engage with liberal Jews, especially the young generation.**

In any case, JPPI recommends the GOI review and improve upon its current procedures.

Main Recommendations for Jewish People Integrated Policy Plan -

Recommendations for the GOI:

The GOI should improve its existing policy from a procedural perspective.

- 1. The RSD process should be conducted humanely, efficiently, professionally, and transparently.** In light of claims that the process, until now, was not done so, and given that no new requests are being accepted, the GOI should consider temporarily freezing its current plans until the policy and enforcement mechanism can be reviewed. We recommend it further allow those whose requests were rejected (~6500 individuals) to resubmit them. This may entail a temporary expansion and reinforcement of PIBA – the Population and Immigration Authority. **We note that this may realistically lead to the recognition of a few hundreds or even a few thousands as refugees.**
- 2. Improve the current third-country resettlement program** – Israel should look into claims that voluntary deportees are mistreated. It should work with the respective governments to improve absorption for such individuals. That said, Israel has no responsibility for individuals who choose to leave that 3rd country.

Recommendations for the GOI together with World Jewry:

Effort1 – The GOI should grant amnesty to a limited number of families, especially those with children born in Israel. This would not significantly affect Israel's demographics. It would help mitigate some of the damage to Israel's image and its connection with world Jewry. Amnesty should be limited to those now in Israel and exclude reunification. These individuals should be resettled throughout Israel, including with the help of the Fund. Amnesty should include the 500 individuals who arrived as orphans, were raised in JAFI youth villages and are today adults.

Effort2 – Private Sponsorship and resettlement in Canada or the U.S. Canada's refugee policy allows for private sponsorship of refugees. There are already efforts underway by Canadian Jewish communities through JIAS (Jewish Immigrant Aid Society), and some 1,000 Eritreans from Israel have already been resettled in Canada this way. We recommend coordinating and assisting in funding for Jewish communities throughout Canada to absorb additional numbers from those in Israel. The cost per individual is ~USD 12,000, while a family costs ~25,000. Similarly, American Jewish groups, through HIAS (Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society) can pressure members of Congress to resettle asylum seekers in the U.S.

Effort3 – Vocational Training and Resettlement. Israel would identify select individuals for vocational training, and coordinate with the UNHCR to resettle in 3rd countries seeking such workers. This would be jointly funded by the GOI and the Fund, and can be operated by the GOI. The costs would be considerably lower than the current GOI plan. Those accepted receive a 1-year visa extension. There is a risk that individuals will not leave at the end of the extension, and this might attract additional asylum seekers to Israel. **This effort could capture the moral imagination of potential new philanthropists, and better engage with liberal Jews, especially the young generation.**

Effort4 – Agriculture Training outside Israel and Resettlement. Select volunteers would be resettled in a cooperating third country where they receive agricultural training, room and board. Graduates further receive assistance in purchasing land and a starter-kit. This would be funded by the GOI and the Fund, in cooperation with the host country, coordinated by the PMO and operated by Mashav. A pilot program could begin immediately, as Mashav infrastructure in place in Rwanda. Costs would be comparable to the current GOI plan (USD 10-20,000 per participant), and would ensure individuals leave Israel before receiving benefits. **This effort could capture the moral imagination of potential new philanthropists, and better engage with liberal Jews, especially the young generation.**

Public Relations Effort:

Any policy option chosen should be accompanied by an effective and comprehensive public relations campaign, highlighting Israel's and the Jewish people's efforts to aid migrants, Israel's humanitarian aid efforts globally, as well as Israel's unique character and challenges, including its small size and geographic location. This effort should include Israel's absorption of millions of impoverished Jewish migrants and refugees since its creation. The public pressure campaign on Israel's current policy are largely misleading and out of context.

As many European countries face similar predicaments, Israel's efforts should be put into terms and context with which they can identify.

Appendix 1 – Israel's Migrant and Refugee Statistics and Policy

According to PIBA, Israel's Population and Immigration Authority, there are currently 37,288 migrants from Africa who entered Israel illegally. The majority, 26,563 are from Eritrea, 7,624 are from Sudan, 2,628 are from other countries throughout Africa and 473 are from other parts of the world. There are an additional 4000 children of these born in Israel. The government refers to all the above as "infiltrators"(mistananim).²

At its peak, there were 64,850 such African migrants in Israel. Those who left all did so voluntarily and returned either to their own countries (such as when South Sudan gained independence) or to a third country.

These illegal migrants began entering Israel in 2006 in larger numbers (2,766), and steadily rose – 5,179 in 2007, 8,844 in 2008, 5,197 in 2009, 14,630 in 2010, 17,281 in 2011 and began dropping off as Israel began construction of the border fence - 10,445 in 2012. Since, only a handful have managed to enter Israel each year. ³

Separately, there are 88,171 foreign guest workers in Israel legally, and another 18,059 foreign workers operating illegally. There are also 74,000 tourists who have overstayed their visas. The majority of the latter group are from the Ukraine, Georgia and the former Soviet Union. Some applied (and were rejected) for asylum. Between 2015 and 2017, Israel deported 5,260 Ukrainian nationals and 1,788 Georgians, and efforts continue to deport those who overstay their visas. These statistics do not include Palestinian workers in Israel, legally or illegally.

²https://www.gov.il/BlobFolder/generalpage/foreign_workers_stats/he/foreigners_in_Israel_data_2017_2.pdf

³<https://www.ha-makom.co.il/post-keren-shemesh-asyluminfo>

Asylum seekers who enter Israel illegally are handled by the Population and Immigration Authority. Individuals submit a request, and undergo a RSD (Refugee Status Determination) process, which determines, if the applicant can be considered a refugee. In all, 15,205 such requests were submitted. 6,514 requests were examined and either rejected or closed. Twelve requests were accepted while 8,588 have yet to be examined. Additionally, Israel granted two hundred A5 humanitarian visas to individuals from Darfur, and to some three hundred orphaned children, akin to granting refugee status. As of January 2018, Israel announced it is no longer accepting asylum requests from the African migrants currently in Israel.⁴ According to the government, asylum seekers had ample time (2013-2018) to submit such a request, while the migrants and human rights groups claim that those who did so as they did not believe the government was fairly considering their requests.

Relative to other countries, Israel, until now, did not recognize Eritreans fleeing military service (the majority of those in Israel) as refugees. A recent (Feb 15, 2018) court decision recognizing an individual Eritrean deserter as a refugee may change this and invite further appeals by Eritreans in Israel.

For the 24,000 individuals who did not request asylum, temporary 2A5 visas were granted, to be renewed every two months. As of February 1, 2018, the government no longer renews them. The current plan is to voluntarily resettle 20,000 single men, with a \$3,500 payment, in a cooperating third country over the next two years, reportedly, Rwanda and Uganda. This plan does not presently include women, children, families and those awaiting an asylum decision. While there is considerable criticism over this, especially the chaotic manner in which it is executed, Israel's High Court unanimously ruled that it is legal, as there is no danger to the migrants' lives in the third countries.⁵ Furthermore, the Israeli government will not currently forcibly deport the migrants to these third countries (as it does with Eastern European nationals), although this was similarly deemed legal. The court decision also limited the government's use of detention as a method of pressuring those who refuse to leave. Two-thirds of Israelis support the general deportation policy, claiming the concentration of thousands of young, single men has led to a spike in crime rates and made life untenable for residents of those neighborhoods.

Appendix 2 – Global Comparison

The UNHCR estimates 65.6 million forcibly displaced people, 22.5 million of them refugees and 10 million stateless people. Europe, nearest to Africa and the Middle East, bore the brunt of these refugee and migration waves – which stem from political instability, violent conflict, climate change, desertification and failed economies.

Countries that take in larger numbers of refugees and migrants do so in connection with their large land mass and aging population, which requires immigration to fulfill the workforce (US, Canada, Germany, etc.). Small countries are limited in this scope, while the effects on their national character is felt more quickly. Thus, EU countries like Denmark, Austria, the Czech Republic and Hungary have all clamped down on immigration and refugee intake in recent years.

Within the EU, the average rate of acceptance for refugee applications stands at 62% - slightly lower for Sudanese (56%),⁶ and much higher for Eritreans (90%).⁷ Germany,

⁴<https://www.ynet.co.il/articles/0,7340,L-5077210,00.html>

⁵<http://www.maariv.co.il/news/law/Article-597167>

⁶<https://www.usnews.com/news/slideshows/10-countries-that-take-the-most-immigrants?slide=10>

which took in the single greatest number of refugees, accepted 59% of requests overall and 75% of requests from Eritreans. We note that Germany is a large country with an aging population who generally seeks in-migration to make up for this.

The UK saw 30,000 refugee applications in 2016, and accepted 9,000 of them. Spain's acceptance rate is 43% while Italy's is 38% who either received refugee status or were granted some form of humanitarian protection.

Switzerland, a country of 8.5 million with an already large immigrant population, had 27,000 applications in 2016, as many refugees went from Italy and Greece northwards to the more developed Switzerland. The Swiss accepted 35% of the asylum requests, while another 40% were granted a temporary admission. However, much like Israel and other countries in central Europe, these numbers dropped off significantly, after the Swiss closed off the land route for Middle Eastern and African refugees moving northwards.⁸ We note that a Swiss court recently ruled that returning to Eritrea may no longer prove life-threatening as the country is no longer in a general state of violence.⁹

Denmark (5.7 million) is known for its strict immigration policies. After accepting 21,000 asylum seekers in 2015, Denmark tightened its refugee and immigration policies in 2016 and 2017 in order to repel asylum seekers from wanting to reach Denmark. Thus, in 2017, asylum applications decreased by 84% (from 2015), and the acceptance rate dropped by 85% to 35%. Denmark further introduced policies such as confiscating valuables of asylum seekers exceeding \$1600. We note that among Eritreans, the asylum acceptance rate remains over 90%. Even if accepted as refugees, Denmark maintains some of the strictest naturalization policies among EU countries.¹⁰¹¹

Hungary (9.8 million), received among the highest amount of asylum applications relative to its size (29,000 in 2016). However, Hungary rejected over 90% of its applicants, and is considered among a number of European countries including the Czech Republic and Poland who refuse to take in their agreed upon share of refugees.¹²

Austria (8.7 million), after taking in 90,000 asylum seekers in 2015, decided to significantly lower its intake in the succeeding years. Austria announced it will cap refugee acceptance at 1.5% of its population (127,000) over a four year period.¹³

Outside the EU, it is worthwhile to note that Japan, a country of 125 million that does not welcome immigration, accepted only a handful of asylum requests and receives almost no immigrants while placing an emphasis on humanitarian activity abroad. Australia, which does welcome immigration, is currently placing asylum seekers who arrive illegally in offshore refugee camps on surrounding islands, a policy subject to much criticism.

Canada accepts just over half of those who apply, with full government sponsorship (GAR), full private sponsorship (PSR) or a mix. Refugees must be provided with 1 year of resettlement and absorption costs (~USD 12,000 for an individual and ~25,000 for a family

⁷<https://www.haaretz.com/world-news/asia-and-australia/explained-israel-s-mass-deportation-of-asylum-seekers-1.5792570>

⁸https://www.swissinfo.ch/eng/asylum-seekers_swiss-asylum-requests-plunge-36--in-first-half-of-2017/43344240

⁹https://www.swissinfo.ch/eng/asylum_swiss-court-rejects-risks-for-eritrean-returnees/43483780

¹⁰<http://refugees.dk/en/facts/numbers-and-statistics/what-are-the-chances-of-being-granted-asylum/>

¹¹<https://qz.com/1171331/asylum-seekers-in-denmark-number-of-applications-has-fallen-by-84-since-2015/>

¹²<http://www.asylumineurope.org/reports/country/hungary/statistics>

¹³<https://www.nbcnews.com/storyline/europes-border-crisis/refugee-crisis-austria-limits-asylum-1-5-percent-population-n500326>

of 4). In 2016, Canada took in 24,000 under the government program, and around 16,000 in the private program.

The United States too has traditionally been a top resettlement destination for refugees, accepting 85,000 refugees in 2016 and 110,000 in 2017. These numbers have been cut during the Trump administration's first year by about half, although the US still takes in significant numbers of refugees for repopulation. Over the past year, the U.S. reportedly took in only half (~25,000) of its allotment of refugee slots, leaving another ~25,000 available.

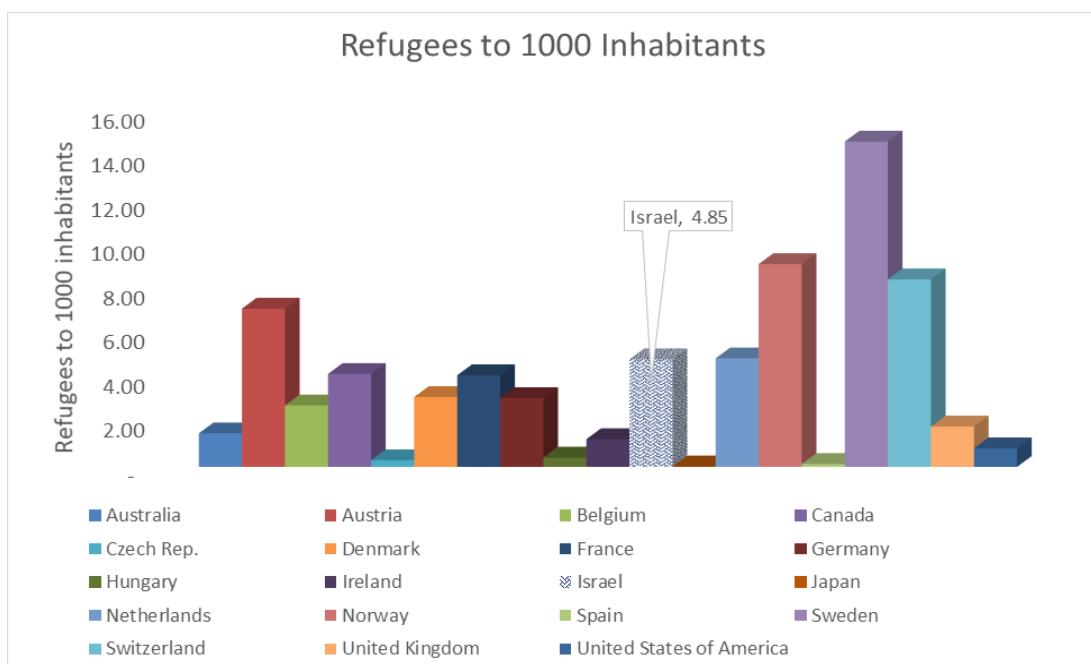
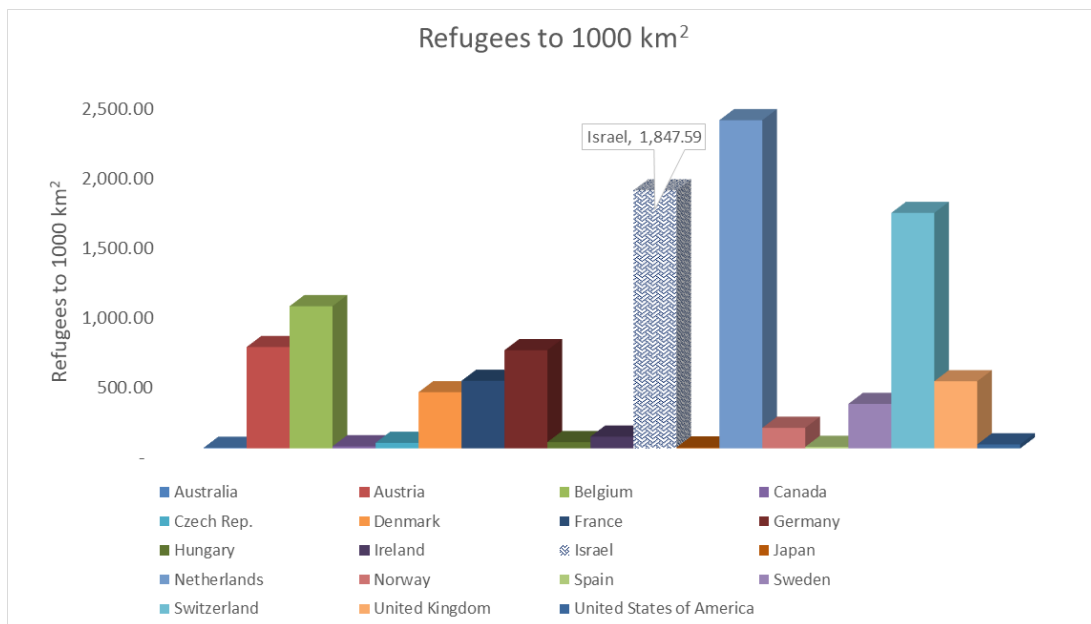
Appendix 3– Israel’s Dilemmas in Absorbing Migrants and Refugees

Critics, including human rights and Diaspora Jewish organizations are outraged by the thought of deporting African migrants, labelling all of them asylum seekers, drawing on Jewish values and comparing their plight to that of Jews in the Holocaust. Conversely, the Israeli government and two-thirds of Israelis support deportation, claiming they are illegal economic migrants and will negatively affect Israel's Jewish character. They also note the exceedingly high rates of crime in the neighborhoods in which they concentrate (South Tel Aviv).

While committed to sheltering and assisting refugees, Israel has no legal or moral responsibility for absorbing migrant workers, nor for allowing illegal immigrants to stay. Israel has the right to determine migration policy according to its national interests and limitations. These include its small geographic space and population and the specific ethno-religious character it seeks to maintain.

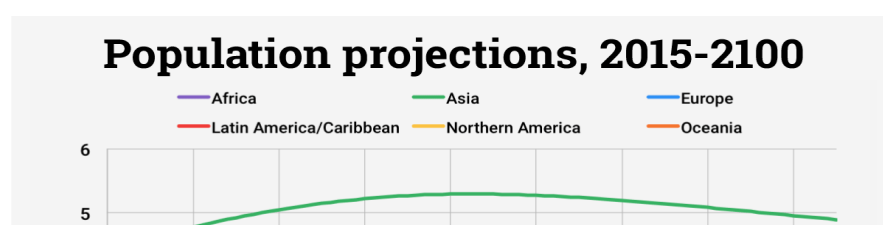
The presence of 40,000 individuals in relation to population (8.5 million) and area already places a strain on Israel, especially in certain parts of Tel Aviv.

The charts below based on UNHCR Data as of 2015. We note that the statistic examines refugees and those with a refugee-like situation. It includes the African asylum seekers and migrants in Israel within this statistic. They show that when comparing geographic area to number of asylum-seekers and migrants, Israel is second from the top while when comparing its population size, Israel ranks in the middle of the pack.

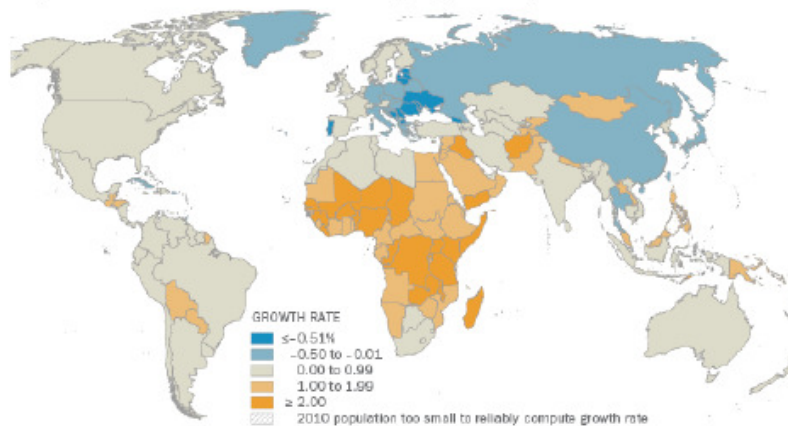


Beyond that, this 40,000 are expected to quickly grow to 200,000 or more as these will seek family reunification, were they to be absorbed.

From a broader perspective, Africa's high birthrates (expected to reach 4 billion by 2100), political instability, conflict, desertification and climate change, mean that millions of African migrants will make their way north in the coming decades. Europe is already reeling from the effects. As these general African migration trends are rise in the future, Israel would resume being a favorable destination. While the security barrier and Egyptian cooperation help dissuade migrants, a forgiving policy would convince them to journey to Israel – the only developed country to which one can arrive by land. Currently, Israel's strict policies in recognizing refugee claims and allowing for naturalization similarly make it an unattractive destination.



Projected Annual Growth Rate of Country Populations, 2010-2050



Source: The Future of World Religions: Population Growth Projections, 2010-2050
PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Lastly, Israel must be careful not to set precedents for Palestinian demands to repatriate refugees from 1948 in any peace negotiations. Any perception that Israel is willing to accept large numbers of non-Jewish immigrants will strengthen demands to accepting a higher number of refugees should negotiations resume.

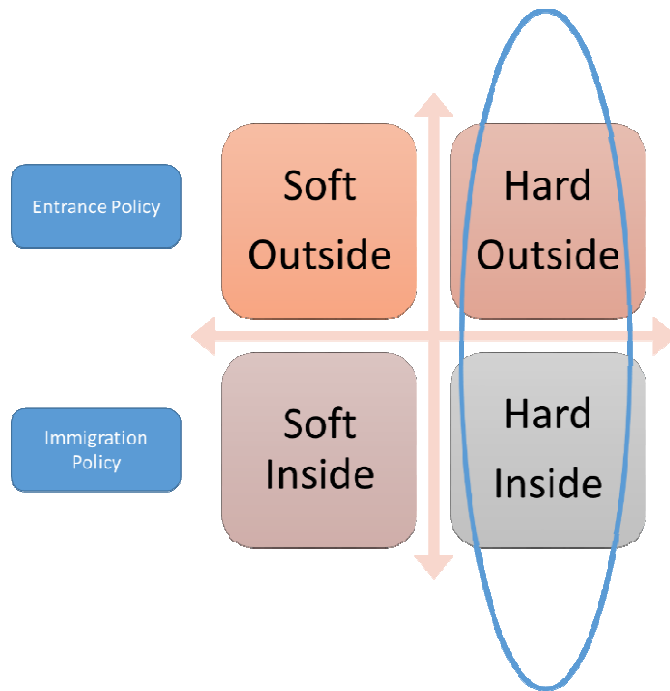
Appendix 4 - Towards a "Hard Outside / Soft Inside" Refugee Policy

Israel should strive for a refugee and immigration policy that strikes a balance between ideals and reality. On the one hand, between Jewish values and Jewish history, as well as Israel's obligations as a modern state and a part of the community of nations. On the other hand, its specific mission as the nation-state of the Jewish people intended to maintain a certain ethno-national character, remain a viable option for Jewish migration and refugees should the need arise, and from the reality of it being a relatively small country both in terms of area and population.

We would like to refer the reader to a position paper authored by Shlomo Avineri, Liav Orgad and Amnon Rubinstein, and edited by Ruth Gavison, "Managing Global Migration: A Strategy for Immigration Policy in Israel."¹⁴ Drawing on this comprehensive report, such a policy would similarly "be generous and exemplary in providing refugees with protection and shelter and the need to limit the vast range of the phenomenon and the abuse of law by non-refugees."

¹⁴<http://din-online.info/pdf/mz12.pdf>

Thus, Israel's current policy can be described as having stringent entrance policies for immigrants and refugees but also a harsh and stringent approach toward them once they are inside.



We propose, in the spirit of this report, that Israel, in line with its mission as a nation-state of the Jews and small size, adopt a policy that maintains a stringent entrance policy, but seeks to treat those already inside Israel more humanely and fairly.

