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Fertility and Population Policies in Israel

Population policy contexts and concerns

Roberto Bachi in his long standing teaching, research and public management activity was seriously involved with issues of applied social science and population policy in Israel and internationally. I think it would be a fair statement to say that among his main concerns the question of population growth and settlement in Israel had a significant relation to a number of other primary concerns tied to the State's existence and role in the region and in the world:

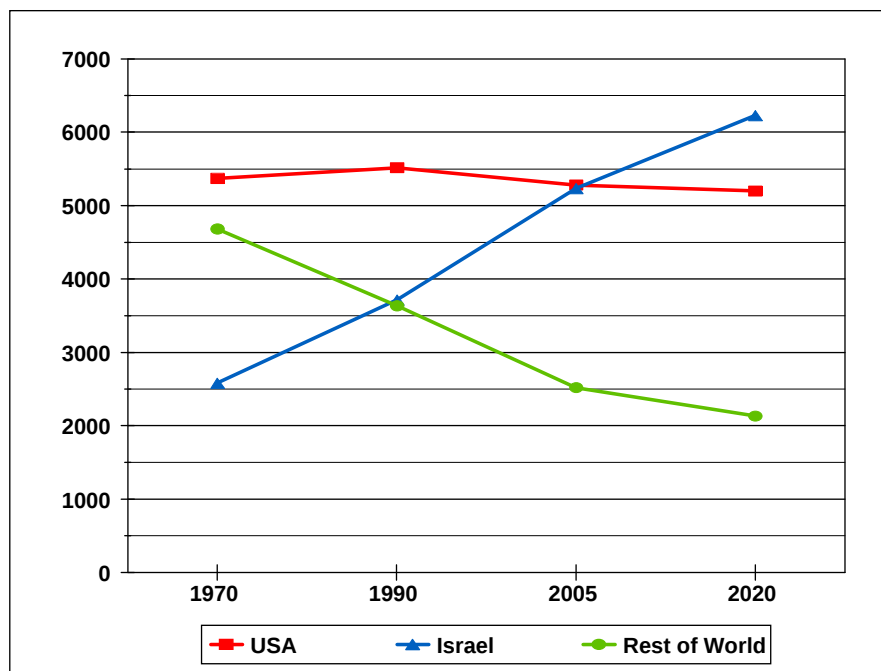
- Promoting population growth and settlement as a prerequisite for security and economic development;
- Keeping a balance between Jewish and Arab populations within the State of Israel, and after the Six Day War in the broader regional-territorial context of Israel and Palestine;
- Keeping a balanced age composition in Israel – much reflecting the nature of ongoing demographic processes;
- Tracking and tackling internal gaps in Israeli society; and
- Looking at the role of Israeli population in the context of world Jewry facing a demographic decline of the Jewish Diaspora.

These main concerns were central to Bachi's thought, and are still relevant today in a State of Israel still involved with military and political conflict and other crucial existential problems. The variable unfolding of population trends in each of the main areas of concern makes it quite understandable that over the years the interest in – and controversy on – demography has grown in both academic and public discourse.

The declining number of Jews in countries outside Israel and especially in the smaller communities out of the United States has a significant bearing on Israel's role among world Jewry. Figure 1 shows how Jewish population out of Israel and the U.S. has diminished since the

1970s and how it is projected to continue shrinking. The moderate ups and downs in the past and projected numbers of Jews in the United States point to a stable or moderately eroded Jewish population there. On the other hand, reflecting continuing growth mainly due to natural increase, Israel tends to become the host of the single largest Jewish population in the world, and in longer term prospect the majority of total world Jewry. The implications of these transformations are quite far-reaching and create a new set of responsibilities for Israel vis-à-vis taking care of Jewish culture, social solidarity, quality of life and also security worldwide.

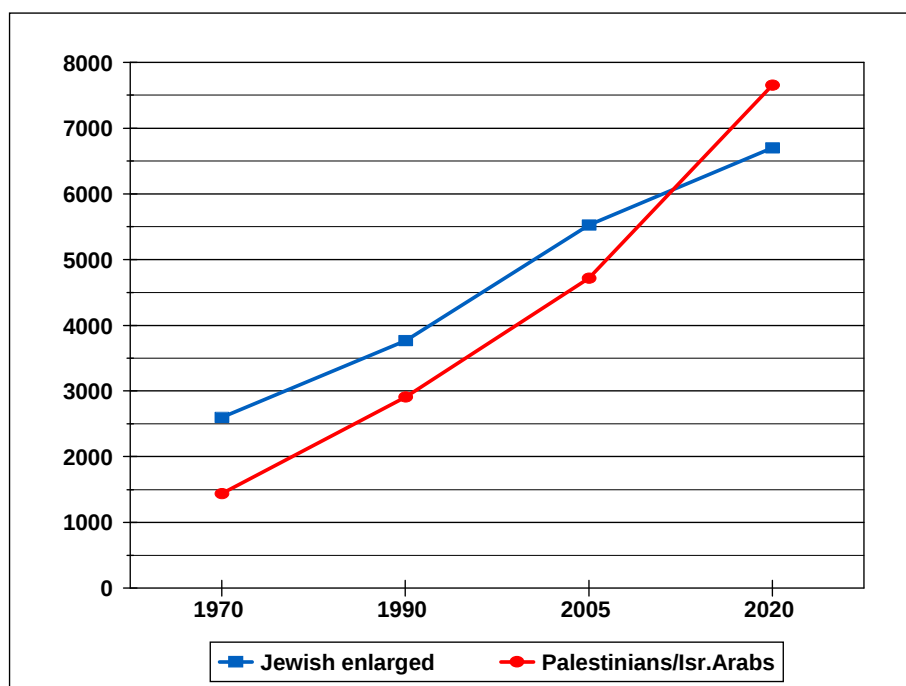
FIGURE 1. CORE JEWISH POPULATIONS (THOUSANDS) 1970-2020



A second paramount aspect is the demographic balance between Jews and Palestinians within the whole territory of the former British Mandate, Israel striving to be a Democratic State for Jews, Arabs and others with a Jewish majority. Data and projections about the overall balance between Jews – including the non-Jewish immigrants from the Soviet Union following the concept of enlarged Jewish population – and the Palestinians – including those who are Israeli citizens and the

inhabitants of the West Bank and Gaza – show the past evolution and expected shift between majority and minority (see Figure 2). There might be a non-Jewish majority over the whole territory between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River before 2010, which raises compelling questions about the nature and future directions of Israeli society.

FIGURE 2. POPULATIONS IN ISRAEL AND PALESTINE (THOUSANDS) – 1970-2020



Considering these very broad background aspects, one may try to figure out the longer term implications of current trends and reflect about a set of policy directives that might help promoting Israel strategic goals. Several aspects, while certainly not confined to the purely demographic field, bear a very significant relation to demography:

- Aiming at political boundaries to Israel apt to ensure a stable Jewish majority in a democratic state in the long run;
- Developing Israeli society to high levels of life quality and competitiveness in the global context;

- Ensuring and facilitating inter-generational replacement among Israel's population;
- Encouraging aliyah and the absorption of new immigrants through innovative concepts and procedures;
- Creating conditions to deter emigration and strengthening the link between Israelis abroad and the parent country;
- Facilitating social and cultural integration and joining of the Jewish mainstream among non-Jews immigrating through the Law of Return;
- Improving and enforcing laws regarding immigrants not in the framework of the Law of Return;
- Providing continuing support to public health and longevity.

It should be noted that some of these items – such as the criteria for the eligibility of international immigrants currently are the subject for policy elaboration. Some of the avenues to be considered probably constitute developments over policy already existing while others require significant innovation. Some of the issues closely remind of the population policy questions debated today in the broader international scene, while others appear to be specific to the Israeli scene. But these are all items that ultimately will or may significantly affect the size, composition and quality of Israeli population and society.

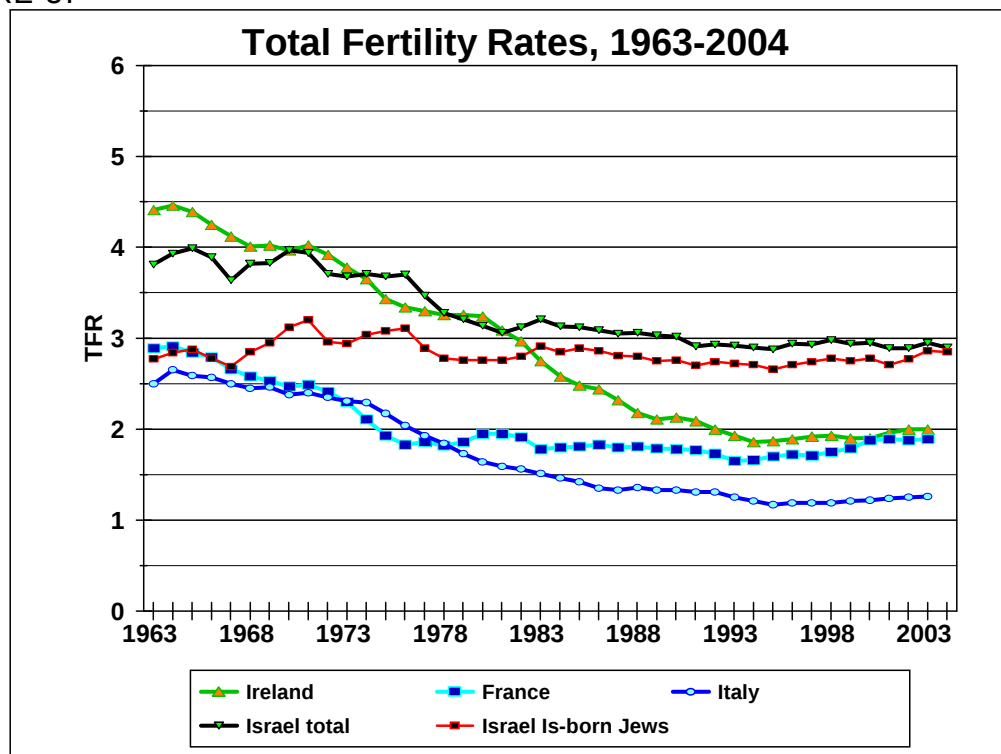
Fertility trends and differentials

I turn now to the main focus of this paper which aims to elucidate one central aspect of the overall population policy concern – fertility trends among the Jewish population in Israel.

First of all, it is interesting to point to the somewhat unique experience of the Israeli case when compared to other countries. Figure 3 outlined the evolution of the Total Fertility Rate (TFR) in a number of European countries and in Israel over the last 40 years. Patterns of convergence and divergence teach a very interesting lesson on the interplay of cultural and socioeconomic factors, population policies and fertility standards. Italy and France appear to have had common

beginnings followed by quite significant differences which possibly also reflect the very different social investments in supporting the family in the two countries. A lower Italian level of involvement contrasts with a somewhat more active French policy interventions. One would also raise the question of how much of the higher TFR in France is due to recent Muslim immigration how much depends on the old-timers – an issue that it is not politically correct to discuss in France. One also notes the interesting evolution of a country which was in the past highly Catholic – Ireland – and where TFR went down from a relatively high level to a level which is now very similar to that of France – notoriously a secular society.

FIGURE 3.



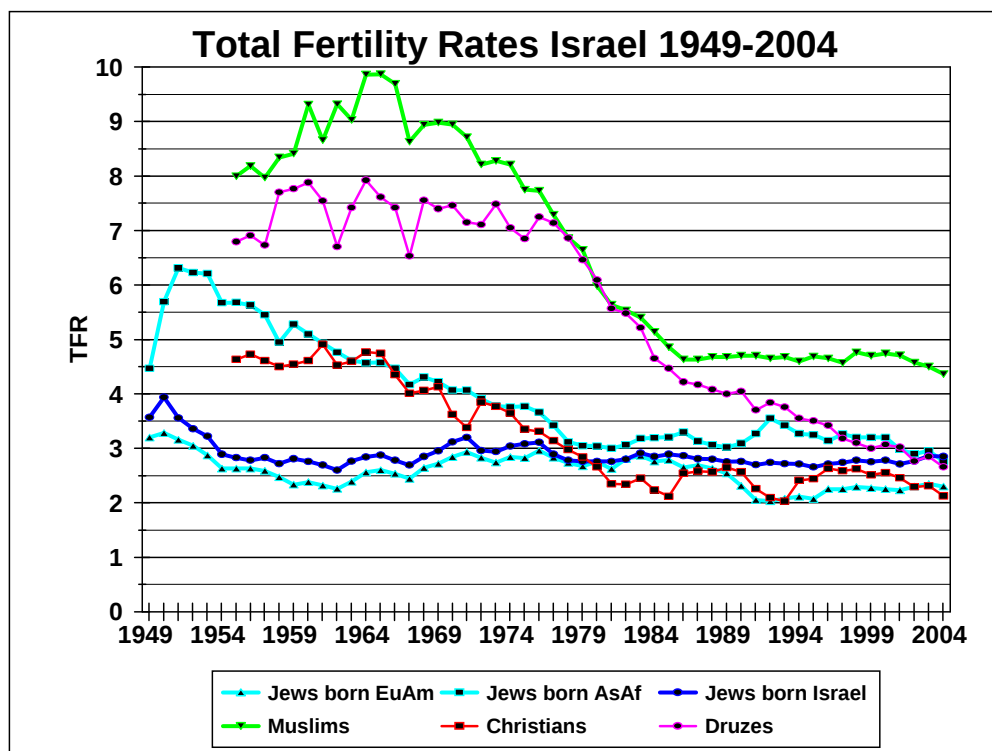
Source: Prioux (2005); Israel Central Bureau of Statistics.

In this context of quickly diminishing European fertility, the Israeli case is quite unique. In terms of the country's total population, Jews and Arabs together, the TFR has been fairly stable and stands today at about three children on average. Overall fertility has been perfectly stable since the mid 1970s. Even more interesting is the long-term nearly complete stability of the second generation of Jewish women born in Israel. Besides

minor fluctuations, the TFR of this second and third Israel-born generation has remained absolutely flat since 1960 for more than forty years. This is quite a unique case of lack of change, in spite of tremendous cultural and socioeconomic transformations in Israeli society under the impact of repeated wars and security problems, millions of immigrants, and speedy technological advances. Such pattern is absolutely unique for a developed country and points to a confluence of different modes of family planning within a stable model which is intermediate between the higher past family norms that prevailed among Jews in Asia and Africa and the lower patterns of many contemporary developed countries.

Further interesting aspects of diversity, but also significant convergence of fertility levels among different sub-groups within the unified Israeli context, emerge from Figure 4.

FIGURE 4.

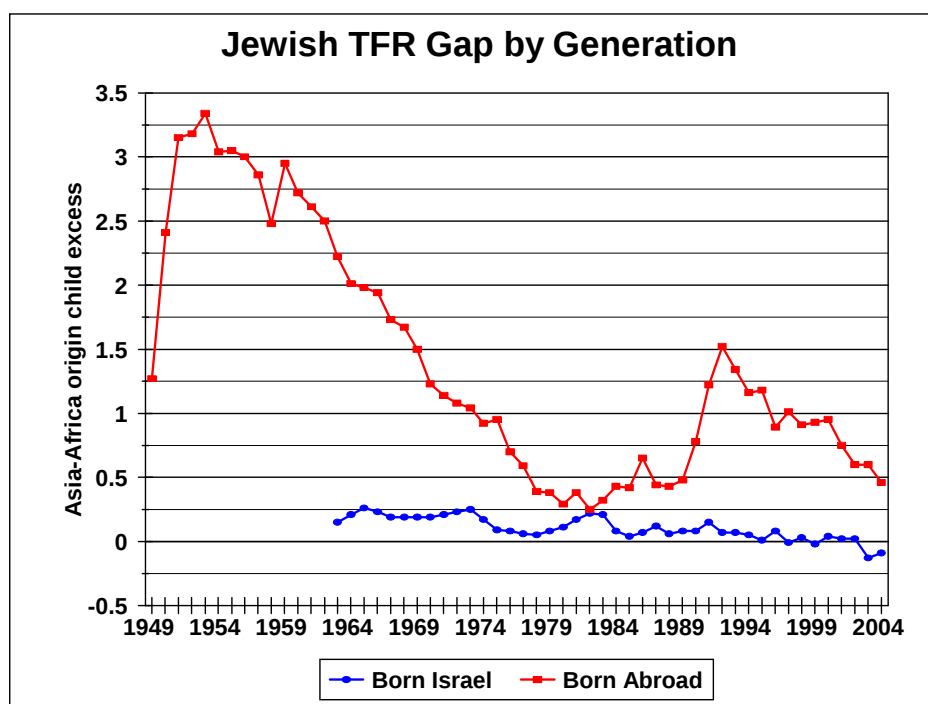


As already noted the fertility of Jewish women born in Israel has been uniquely stable. There was a noticeable convergence of fertility patterns of Jewish immigrant women from Asia and Africa and from

Europe and America at a level which tends to be quite intermediate between the original levels displayed at the time of immigration. By the 1980s the gap was nearly closed, it reopened under the immigration from the former USSR and Ethiopia during the 1990s, but has again tended to diminish in recent years. While the modernization of immigrants from less developed countries is related to shrinking family size, immigrants from low-fertility countries actually increased their fertility levels in the course of absorption in Israel.

There also was a remarkable convergence within the general model of the Christian Arabs and of the Druze, especially during the last few years. The most significant exception to convergence is the Israeli Moslem population whose TFR went down from an average of about 10 children currently born on average in the 1960s – one of the highest returns on record – to about four and a half and quite stable for the last twenty years. The last three or four years suggest a moderate Muslim TFR decline – perhaps the beginning of a new phase of convergence. If true, however, this may take some time.

FIGURE 5.



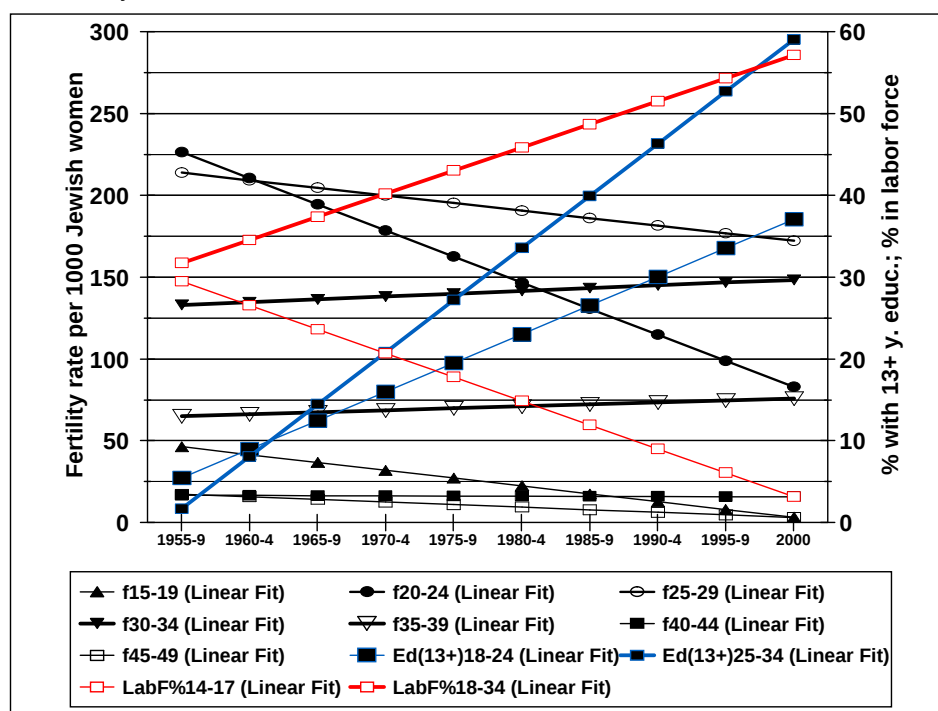
An important point well demonstrated by these data but worth stressing further is the progressive disappearance of the so-called 'sub-ethnic' factor [*hagorem ha'adati* in Hebrew], i.e. the dependence of fertility and other sociodemographic features on the geographic background of population.

Figure 5 demonstrates how the gap between having children in the first generation by continent of birth has evolved over time from a big differential of over 3 children more among Jewish women from Asia and Africa over women from Europe and America, to a very minor residual. In the second generation of Israel born women, classified by continent of birth of the respective fathers, the differential has been virtually zero since the 1960s. It conveys a very fundamental sense of convergence in both family norms and behaviors.

Another interesting point in terms of the mothers' background characteristics is the relationship of fertility to socioeconomic status – level of education attained and labor force participation. Selected data series by age, linearly fitted, are presented in Figure 6.

FIGURE 6. AGE-SPECIFIC FERTILITY RATES, PERCENT WITH POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION AND LABOR FORCE PARTICIPATION - ISRAEL, JEWISH WOMEN, 1955-2000

Source: Adjusted from Israel Central Bureau of Statistics.



Quite intriguingly the relation appears to be weak if existent at all. Between the 1950s and 2000 we notice a sharp surge in the percent of women holding post-secondary education (13 or more years of schooling) especially among those aged 25-34. Women's labor force participation diminished in the 14-17 age group consistently with an extension of the schooling period, and significantly increased in the 18-34 age group. As against these changes, age-specific fertility rates markedly diminished among women below 20 and at 20-24, and also though less sharply at 25-29 and above 45. On the other hand, fertility rates increased significantly at 30-34 and to some extent at 35-39, and remained flat at 40-44. From the earlier fertility peak at 20-24 followed by 25-29, Jewish women shifted to a peak at age 25-29 closely followed by 30-34. These shifts point to a significant mutual accommodation between reproduction and socioeconomic patterns, without however the total outcome in terms of TFR being affected.

As against the disappearing relevance of geographical origin and the diminishing impact of educational attainment and labor force participation as determinants of fertility levels and differentials, the role of religiosity continues to be a predominant correlate of fertility in Israel. Table 1, based on data that will be shortly introduced below, reports on numbers of intended children by Jewish married women and men by levels of self-assessed religiosity.

The range of variation in 2005 was between 9.8 children for the most religious and 3 for the most secular among Jewish women, and between 8 and 2.9, respectively among men. Although, as we shall see, intended and actual children need not necessarily to coincide, the indication is of a powerful differentiation of family norms related to religion. No less interesting of the very high family size ideals of the more religious – who constitute less than 10% of the Jewish population – are the preferences of the large segment that defines itself secular. A

preference for 3 children still appears extraordinarily high when compared to the prevailing norms in other developed countries.

TABLE 1. INTENDED NUMBER OF CHILDREN BY SELF-ASSESSED RELIGIOSITY, JEWISH MEN AND WOMEN MARRIED OR IN STABLE RELATIONS - ISRAEL, 2005

Religiosity self-assessment	Women	Men
Most religious (Haredi)	9.8	8.0
National religious	5.6	5.4
Traditional	3.5	3.7
Secular	3.0	2.9

Source: The Jewish Agency for Israel, Demographic Initiative. *Survey of Attitudes and Behaviors Concerning Family Size among Israel's Jewish Population, 2005*.

Appropriate and intended fertility among Israeli Jews

With this background, we now turn to illustrate a new set of data which was just recently collected and may provide the basis for further analysis and policy recommendations. The figures ahead are the product of a still preliminary exploration of a new survey of attitudes and behaviors concerning family size and on Israel's Jewish population that was undertaken at the end of 2004 and in January 2005. The survey was made possible thanks to the support of the Jewish Agency for Israel – a large sectorial organization concerned with the Jewish segment within the total Israeli population and with Jewish communities in the Diaspora.¹ The survey included a representative national sample of about 1000 women aged 25 to 40 and 500 men aged 25 to 50, all married or in stable unions. Women and men were separately interviewed providing an extremely high rate of response estimated at about 95%. Although independently drawn, the male and female samples provided highly consistent answers inasmuch as characteristics of respondents and reported characteristics of

¹The survey was part of the Jewish Agency's Demographic Initiative – a research program aimed at a comparative study of Jewish populations and communities globally. The committee that planned the questionnaire and data collection included Mina Zemach (Dahaf Institute), Rimona Wiesel and Moran Neuman (The Jewish Agency for Israel), Ilana Ziegler (Israel Family Planning Association (IPPF)), and the author.

the spouses could be compared – for example on measures of religiosity or labor force characteristics.

Besides current data on fertility drawn from vital statistics and the returns from the 1995 Population census, the previous large scale survey specifically aiming at Israeli fertility had been conducted in 1988. Roberto Bachi was instrumental in organizing and leading the project with the support of the United Nations Population Fund and a team of senior researchers.² The 1988 survey covered Israeli Jewish as well as Arab women (but no men) at reproductive age.

A first question is: How have family size preferences changed in 2005 in comparison with 1988?

TABLE 2. FAMILY SIZE PREFERENCES OF MARRIED JEWISH WOMEN - ISRAEL, 1988-2005

Number of children	1988	2005	
	Total	Total	Without Haredim
Currently born	2.5	2.5	2.3
Personally intended	3.5	4.1	3.5
Most appropriate for an Israeli family of social status same as respondent's	3.4	4.0	3.8
Ideal for an Israeli family	3.7	4.1	3.6

Source: The Jewish Agency for Israel, Demographic Initiative. *Survey of Attitudes and Behaviors Concerning Family Size among Israel's Jewish Population, 2005*. Principal investigators: Sergio DellaPergola (The Hebrew University of Jerusalem and JPPPI), Mina Tzemach (Machon Dahaf), Rimona Wiesel (The Jewish Agency for Israel), Moran Neuman (The Jewish Agency for Israel), Ilana Ziegler (Israel Council of Family Planning). 1988 data are based on 1500 married women aged 20-39. 2005 data are based on 1004 Jewish women, 25-40, and 494 Jewish men, 25-50, currently married or in stable relations.

One interesting point emerging from Table 2 is the quite remarkable stability in some of the measures. It should be recalled that Israeli society between 1988 and 2005 underwent significant transformations. It absorbed a very large number of new immigrants, most of them coming from countries with relatively low fertility levels especially in the Former Soviet Union (FSU), which generated a total population increase of about

²The team included Eric Peritz, Ilana Ziegler, Roni Starkshal, Ariela Keysar, Eytan Sabatello, Stanley Kupinsky and Mario Baras.

one fifth over the 1990s. Second, the country underwent a rapid transformation regarding its standard of living involving among other things the main characteristics of its economic system. Hi-tech branches and exports moved at the core of the production system. Between 1980 and 2000 Israel's Index of Human Development (HDI) improved by over 10% – the highest rate of growth among developed countries.³ Culturally, too, Israel underwent significant changes reflecting the growing impact of contacts with the Western countries but also the visible impact of the FSU new immigrants which could be expected to introduce a large secular element within the total societal pool. It also should be stressed that Israeli society underwent repeated periods of security stress related to the continuing conflict the Palestinians. The initial three years of the decade of the 2000s were particularly painful accompanied as they were by an unusually high number of civilian and military casualties. These security issues, their negative impact on incoming tourism and the additional general downturn in the global high-tech market caused a severe economic recession which was ending at the time of our fertility survey.

In spite of these significant ups and downs, when we compare the 1988 and 2005 measures of actual, expected and ideal fertility we find quite similar totals. Referring first to the whole sample including all sectors by religiosity, the average children currently born to married couples at reproductive ages remained unchanged at 2.5. In addition to the data on actual and still incomplete performance, three attitudinal measures report on the total numbers of children (a) personally intended, (b) most appropriate for an Israeli family of social status same as respondent's, and (c) ideal for an Israeli family. On each of these accounts comparisons between 1988 and 2005 indicate an increase of 0.4 to 0.6 of a child from about 3.5 to 4, or by 17%, 18%, and 11%, respectively. Personally intended children (4.1) stand minimally higher than appropriate for an Israeli family of social status same as respondent's (4.0).

³The HDI, developed by the UN Human Development Programme, is a composite countrywide measure of health standards, educational attainment and real income. See DellaPergola, Rebhun, Tolts (2005).

Once we focus on the majority excluding the more intensely religious sector – the so-called 'Haredim'⁴ – still the measures of intended or preferred fertility remain quite high and consistently at 3.5 or above. In terms of a tendency to keep steady and somewhat conservative fertility patterns, at least on the face of the attitudes expressed, Israeli adults do not manifest any deviation from the uniquely stable patterns of the last tens of years. Personally intended children (3.5) stand somewhat below most appropriate children (3.8) or even the ideal Israeli standard (3.6).

As already noted, average measures mask significant internal variation. We should not be surprised by finding high ideal (and actual) numbers of children among the most traditional families. More interesting are the fertility aspirations among the more secular sectors which constitute the vast majority of Israeli society and are conventionally thought to be the least family oriented. The ideal number expressed – about three children – is much higher than the upper performance one usually meets among the more traditionally oriented segments in countries like Italy or Spain which, at least until a recent past, were strongly influenced by Catholic values. The normative background of family behaviors in Israel, therefore, needs to be understood beyond the impact of mere religiosity and requires a more complex appraisal.

A further point of interest concerns the degree of correspondence at the individual level between intentions expressed by people regarding the number of children already born, that they do expect to bear over the next three years or over a longer span of years, or that they deem appropriate for an Israeli family in general, and for a family of their own socioeconomic status in particular. The surveyed couples include people at ages compatible with further family expansion. Overall there exists a fair amount of consistency between answers provided to different overlapping questions. At first sight, expectations about the respondents' future fertility did not change much over the 17 years that elapsed between 1988 and 2005, and the actual performances – at least as measured

⁴From the Hebrew *hared*, fearful (of God).

through the TFR – did not change much either. It might thus be inferred that no significant changes should be expected in the foreseeable future too. This however may depend to a large extent on the more detailed incidence of norms and expectations across the whole gamut of personal characteristics and perceptions of opportunities and constraints that exist throughout the public. On the other hand it is of capital importance to understand the interplay between childbearing and childrearing costs, and the existing infrastructure of services available to parents and children alike.

It is interesting to point out that women would like to have more children than men. The difference is not striking, but it is quite consistent. The more interesting inconsistency appears among a minority of both women and men the preferences expressed about their intended number of children, and the appropriate family size for a household of equal socioeconomic status (see Table 3).

TABLE 3. NUMBER OF INTENDED^A VS. APPROPRIATE^B CHILDREN, CURRENTLY MARRIED^C JEWS - ISRAEL, 2005 - PERCENTAGES

Gender and age	Number of Intended vs. Appropriate Children							N
	0-2 ^d	3 ^d	4 ^d	5+ ^d	I<A ^e	I>A ^f	Total	
Women, 25-40	12	25	11	16	8	28	100	975
Men, 25-50	14	26	11	11	15	22	100	481

- Sum of total number of children born so far plus total additional children expected.
- Number of children most appropriate for family with standard of living same as respondent's.
- Including non-married persons in stable couple relations.
- Same number of children Intended and Appropriate.
- Number of children Appropriate 3, 4, or 5, and fewer children Intended.
- Number of children Appropriate 2, 3, or 4, and more children Intended.

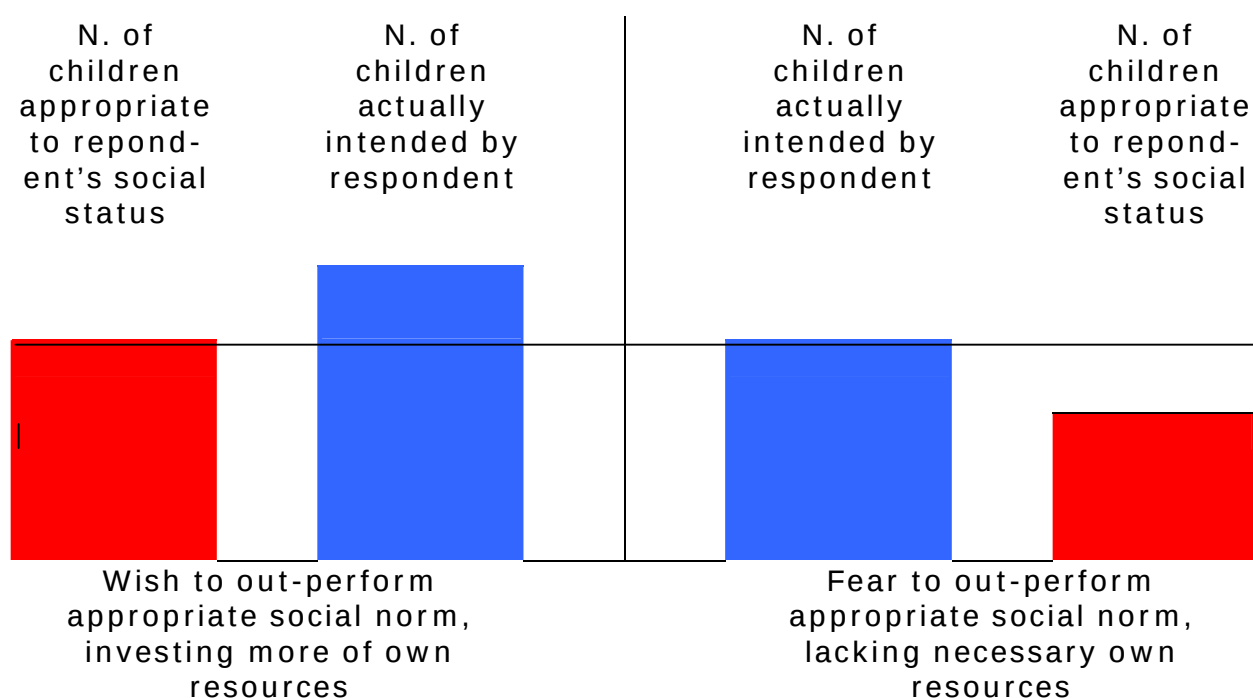
When matching the numbers of *intended* versus *appropriate* children – with reference to one's own family plans, the same 62-63% of women and of men indicate matching figures. Among persons of either sex the most frequent preference is for 3 children, followed by 5 or more for women versus 2 or less for men. The more intriguing part of these distributions includes those persons that provide inconsistent answers: 8% of women and 15% of men intend to have fewer children than they deem appropriate ($I < A$), while 28% of women and 22% of men intend to

have more children than appropriate ($I > A$). While in any case the total percentage of those with inconsistent reporting (37-38%) is higher than that of each given consistently specified parity, such 28% also represent the highest share in the whole women's parity distribution. Among men, a preference for 3 children remains the relative plurality of answers.

In other words, nearly more than one in four of all women at reproductive ages report a personal inconsistency: they declare they intend to have, and probably will have more children than they believe they should have in relation to the social status to which they belong. Nearly another one in ten declares they are going to have fewer children than they believe would be socially appropriate. How do we understand these inconsistencies?

The latter inconsistency ($I < A$) is easier to explain in that the inability to reach a praised target may involve factors such as relatively older age or health impairments. The opposite and more frequent inconsistency ($I > A$) calls for a more complex and probably also more ambivalent explanation (see Figure 7).

FIGURE 7. ALTERNATIVE EXPLANATIONS OF INCONSISTENCIES BETWEEN PERCEPTIONS OF INTENDED AND APPROPRIATE TOTAL NUMBER OF CHILDREN – ISRAEL, 2005



The explanation of this inconsistency can indeed be read in two different ways, partly depending on the ordering of the underlying logic to the question. The first explanation would postulate that a respondent in the first place determines what would be appropriate in his or her social environment, and following that determines to out-perform the social norm which is appropriate to his/her status. This wish to achieve or contribute a larger than usual family size implies investing a greater amount of personal resources which therefore must be available. There may be an alternative explanation postulating that first a respondent evaluates his/her expected performance, and following that determines that the expected performance exceeds the actual capabilities. This implies a fear to out-perform what in fact would be appropriate because of a perceived lack of the necessary resources. The problem is that we may attribute two totally different meanings to answers that are apparently the same.

Only a detailed analysis of the characteristics of such respondents may allow determining the predominant pattern behind the apparent inconsistencies. At first sight, one would propend toward the first explanation, possibly grounded on ideological determinants. However, a preliminary reading of the data indicates a greater likelihood of the second explanation, or a fear to out-perform appropriate norms grounded on a feeling of insecurity about the availability of necessary tools and means. Many of those who are in such situation of ambiguity tend to belong to lower social strata, to have fewer resources, a lesser feeling of security, or other personal data that make it less appropriate to expand their family as they would have liked and as in any case they claim they will do.

While the substantive findings seem to portray a sense of personal – mostly economic – inadequacy on the side of a substantial share of the Israeli households, the same findings also have far reaching analytical implications. They seem to portray a very wide horizon of indetermination in family growth processes even among a public that seems highly

determined to achieve clearly specified objectives and with a good record of having achieved them in the past. This widespread amount of indetermination appears to be significantly more widespread among women than among men.

Determinants in decision-making about family size

We now turn to a short review of the main findings concerning the factors that more importantly may have affected past and may affect future decisions on family planning and family growth. We focus here on the female respondents only, noting that males were overall similar but surely not identical in their answers. In each of the following instances respondents had to provide one answer only out of rather detailed lists of possible factors provided to them. We regrouped the detailed answers into a smaller number of broader categories of factors. The following analysis refers to the whole sample including the more religious sector. Differences by religiosity can easily be detected in the context of the answers provided.

It should be reiterated that the general response rate to the survey was very high. However, it is worth noting the different response rates obtained to each question. When asking about the main factors affecting decisions about the number of children, overall 86% of the women interviewed were willing to discuss the matter. This varied between a high of 91% among women consistently choosing 4 children as both intended and most appropriate, and a low of 79% among women consistently preferring 5 or more children. This very variation is symptomatic of the association of mothers of larger families with a more traditional outlook, which may comprise an attitude to family size as something valuable but not really a matter for planning or judgment (see Table 4).

Overall, the main factors deemed to affect decisions on the number of children clearly fall in the economic domain, including housing (48% of respondents). This category of factors is quite predominant among women preferring all types of parities with the only exception of women who

prefer larger families of 5 children or more. Economic factors are viewed as a particularly important explanatory factor among women preferring small families up two children, and among those intending to have more children than they believe would be appropriate. Ideological reasons such as religious reasons, continuity of the Jewish people, or related to Israel's sociological or political context were the distant second factor mentioned (18% of respondents). Only among women preferring 5 or more children, expectedly, the most frequent determinants mentioned affecting decisions on number of children were ideological. Most Haredi women are included in this category.

TABLE 4. MAIN FACTORS AFFECTING DECISIONS ON NUMBER OF CHILDREN, MARRIED JEWISH WOMEN – ISRAEL, 2005

Factors	Number of Intended vs. Appropriate Children						
	0-2	3	4	5+	I<A	I>A	Total
Response rate, %	85	86	91	79	88	89	86
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Economic factors, housing	63	48	40	21	32	63	48
Woman work, aspirations	5	12	5	8	11	5	8
Family, adult or child related	13	18	26	14	17	9	16
Child early care, education	31	5	8	4	12	8	7
Ideological, social context	10	12	16	49	14	12	18
Health, age	0	4	4	5	14	3	4

The third most frequent category of explanatory factors (16%) is related to its assumedly positive influence of children on the family, interpersonal relations between the spouses or between parents and their children, or among the children themselves. Early childhood care and children's education – i.e. explanations focusing on the child's welfare – are less frequently mentioned (7%) but quite prominent among women aiming at small families of 2 children or less. Women's working conditions and individual aspirations are mentioned by a relatively scant minority (8%), which seems to confirm the comparative indifference of fertility to participation in the labor force. Health and age (4%) are mentioned especially by those who intend to have fewer children than would be appropriate in their view.

Comparing the answers provided to questions on the future intention to have or not to have further children provides a further indication of the extent of people who are sure of their fertility choices and outcomes versus those who are still in a situation of indetermination (Table 5). About 60% of women and 46% of men (who in our sample are on average older than women) do plan to have further children or are undecided. The highest propensity to have more children is among those preferring 5 or more (85% of women, 74% of men). The highest propensity not to have more children appears among women intending to have fewer children than appropriate (68%) and among men preferring 2 children or less (75%). This relationship may seem quite circular but at least points to high inner coherence of response.

TABLE 5. RESPONSE RATES ON QUESTIONS CONCERNING NUMBER OF INTENDED VS. APPROPRIATE CHILDREN, CURRENTLY MARRIED JEWS ISRAEL, 2005 - PERCENTAGES

Gender and age	Number of Intended vs. Appropriate Children						
	0-2	3	4	5+	I<A	I>A	Total
Women, 25-40, N	118	244	108	156	74	275	975
Do not intend to have additional child or undecided	62	49	37	14	68	52	46
Plan to have additional child or undecided	39	55	65	85	34	66	60
Total	101	104	102	99	102	118	106
Men, 25-50, N	69	127	54	54	71	106	481
Do not intend to have additional child or undecided	75	56	44	20	65	51	54
Plan to have additional child or undecided	23	46	59	74	27	51	46
Total	98	102	103	94	92	102	100

When summing the response rates to the two questions: "I do not intend to have additional children or undecided" and: "I do intend to have additional children or undecided", the total response closely approximates 100%. This means that the mention of undecided notwithstanding, most people who answered to one question did not answer to the second one, and vice-versa. The 'undecided' therefore seem fairly strongly oriented in

one sense or another. The only substantial overlap of answers appears among women mentioning more intended than appropriate children. This seems to express a real uncertainty amounting to about 20% of the relevant respondents who answered both questions.

The reasons why one might have or might not have one further child tend to be quite different (see Table 6).

TABLE 6. MAIN FACTORS IN DECISION-MAKING ON NUMBER OF CHILDREN, MARRIED JEWISH WOMEN – ISRAEL, 2005

Factors	Number of Intended vs. Appropriate Children						
	0-2	3	4	5+	I<A	I>A	Total
<i>(If not intending to have other child)</i> Main factor preventing additional child							
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Economic, housing	47	29	32	14	28	62	42
Adult aspirations	20	24	20	18	28	12	19
Child and family related	29	37	30	27	22	18	27
Age, health	4	10	18	41	22	8	12
<i>(If intending to have other child)</i> Main factor supporting additional child							
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Child and family related	98	93	81	27	88	78	72
Ideological	0	2	7	56	4	8	17
Socially acceptable	0	1	0	1	0	1	1
Other	2	4	11	16	8	13	10

The factors preventing additional children are again primarily oriented in the economic sphere (42%). Again we go back to economy and housing, particularly stressed by women intending to have more children than appropriate or very small families up to 2. Reasons related to children and family are the second most frequent (27%), stressed in particular by those aiming at 3 children – namely the time available for childcare. Reasons related to adult aspirations, namely interference with women's work, studies, careers and self-care are somewhat less mentioned (19%), though more frequent among those intending to have fewer children than they feel appropriate. Age and health (12%) are the main reasons for stoppage among women who wish to have large families of 5 or more children. It will be recalled that these include the more religiously traditional segment of the sample. Health and age are a

significant factor also among women intending to have fewer children than appropriate.

Reasons for having another child, on the other hand, bring us to a totally different sphere because they are overwhelmingly and quite consistently concentrated in the sphere of child and family related norms and values (72%). This subsumes a detailed set of answers – such as good for the children, good for the parents, good for brothers and sisters, good to have children of both genders, don't want the house to be empty. All of these are reasons for which no easy rational quantification is possible. They all share a motive of household intimacy if not individualism. In contrast, ideological reasons – such as good for Judaism, good for the State of Israel, good for the Jewish people – again are confined to a minority of respondents (17%). These reasons are predominant only among those who wish to enlarge their family and intend to have 5 or more children who also are the more religious.

Two quite different sets of reasons, therefore, emerge for having or not having further children. While the negative factors concretely relate to the daily experience of economic constraints, childcare and work, the positive factors primarily indicate the continuing presence of widespread and resilient pro-family norms. It is evidently the interplay of economic and cultural reasons that creates the peculiarity of Israeli fertility patterns.

A further test of fertility norms and intentions consists at asking a further question: "All considered – what factor might motivate you to have another child above the number you have finally determined to have?" The very fact of being ready to discuss such a question is interesting, because after so many other queries about ideal family norms, appropriate behaviors and actual (and definitive) family plans – further insistence on questioning about a larger family size might look like a provocation or a nuisance. Yet, about 80% of the women interviewed – slightly higher than among men – are ready to discuss the issue and provide an answer. A certain amount of indetermination regarding the finalization of family size already emerged from the data presented above.

But it appears the extent of such indetermination is more widespread than we might suspect, and a large share of the households might consider, or at least are ready to discuss, a larger family under the appropriate circumstances.

The substantive answers are quite different from those reviewed so far. The further factor that might bring a parent (in this case a woman parent) to reconsider previous decisions is primarily (28% of respondents) concentrated on provisions for early childhood care. This implies support and infrastructure which, to some extent, exist in the State of Israel but in the minds of the respondents should be further developed. The costs of education beyond early childhood also constitute a child-related concern (10%) – more visible among those intending to have more children than appropriate. The next most significant are the concerns related to women employment (18%) such as more flexible working hours, having a longer interval between having a child and returning to work, and not being discriminated against in career development because of the time devoted to the family. Housing follows as a concern (14%), more so among 4 child families and among those intending to have more children than deemed appropriate. Interestingly, we find very little emphasis on money transfers (5%), namely child allowances, or tax exemptions (5%). Child allowances have constituted the paramount tool in the Israeli government's family policies and even more so a bone of contention in public debate. The only group that stresses the importance of money transfers is families envisaging 5 or more children. This is significant after an ideological background had previously emerged as the main determinant of their family size decisions. Fertility treatment is a further factor for having more children than intended (3%), evidently confined to those in need.

Finally, a significant minority (17%) goes back to pure and simple family norms: more children are good to children. Here again a clear predominance emerges among families aiming at 5 or more children. It is intriguing to find that one in six women, after having resolutely

established their family size targets, are ready to consider one more child on purely normative grounds.

TABLE 7. MAIN FACTOR AFFECTING DECISION TO HAVE ONE ADDITIONAL CHILD ABOVE NUMBER INTENDED
MARRIED JEWISH WOMEN – ISRAEL, 2005

Factors	Number of Intended vs. Appropriate Children						
	0-2	3	4	5+	I<A	I>A	Total
Response rate, %	47	82	80	70	70	83	78
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Early childhood care	44	27	24	11	33	31	28
Child education	10	9	8	7	10	14	10
Woman employment	17	22	16	14	19	15	18
Housing	10	13	19	11	10	18	14
Money transfers	2	3	2	16	2	6	5
Tax exemptions	7	6	7	5	0	4	5
Fertility treatment	1	1	4	6	4	2	3
Good to children	8	19	20	30	23	10	17

Separate data on men, not shown here, show greater sensitivity to some monetary aspect. Men, regrettably, are less attentive to child education and early child care. And this is also something that needs to be dealt more in depth at the educational level.

The State's role in fertility trends

In the light of these behaviors and attitudes, the emerging question is: What should the State do? Is it legitimate for the State to intervene on matters of family size, hence implicitly affecting population size and composition? Or are these issues to be confined to the realm of the individual, population policies constituting unacceptable interference into privacy?

Over two thirds of woman respondents believe that the State should encourage larger families or at least keep the number of children stable (see Table 8). The amount of support to such public interventions clearly is unequally distributed across parity preferences. The larger the families, the more interventionist they report to be and, as expected, highest support appears among those aiming at 5 or more children. About one in

four of the respondents believe that the State should not act on these matters. Families aiming at smaller families of up to 2 or 3 children are more often represented here. Only a very minor share of the respondents believe the State should encourage fewer children – 3% of women and 5% of men.

Israeli society as portrayed through this instrument continues to be steadily in favor of an activist approach to family policies and robust population growth. A further question is whether specific parities might constitute a peculiar focus for population policies. This has been alleged by those who feel that the disproportionate share of births which occur in large families is not socially desirable as it is often accompanied by a lowering of the families' socioeconomic standards – to the extreme case of poverty – which in turn may have very negative consequences for child development. Should then, more specifically, the State encourage people to have three or four children? (see again Table 8).

TABLE 8. ATTITUDES TOWARD POSSIBLE POPULATION POLICIES
CURRENTLY MARRIED JEWISH WOMEN – ISRAEL, 2005

Characteristics	Number of Intended vs. Appropriate Children						
	0-2	3	4	5+	I<A	I>A	Total
How should State act?	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Encourage more children	48	47	69	85	59	56	59
Keep number of children stable	11	13	3	1	7	11	9
Do not act on this matter	30	31	26	13	28	26	26
Do not know	5	6	1	1	3	2	3
Encourage fewer children	7	4	1	0	3	4	3
State should encourage women to have 3 rd and 4 th child	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Surely should encourage	28	33	54	73	51	46	46
Think it should	31	25	19	17	14	23	23
Think it should not	22	21	11	5	18	18	16
Surely should not	18	21	16	5	17	14	15

Here, again, the answer is quite overwhelmingly favorable. About one half of the respondents believe the State surely should encourage a 3rd and 4th parity, and about another one in four thinks it should. Overall, a majority is favorable at each intended parity, and in direct relation to

planned parity, reaching a 90% peak among women aiming at 5 or more children.

Policy Discourse and Operations

This review of Jewish family performances and expectations reveals some new intriguing facets of an issue that has long been debated in Israel and is likely to be at the center of renewed interest among policy planners. The data presented here are very preliminary and do not constitute more than the beginning of a systematic analysis that should be pursued through multivariate measures and perhaps later translated into some more sophisticated thoughts in terms of policy implications. Significantly, the focus of this study being on the Jewish population, it did not deal with the non-Jewish sector which of course also represents an important part of the overall population policy focus.

At this stage it may be recalled that the elaboration of population policies in Israel has a veteran presence in public discourse. The imagery and the rhetoric have been prevalent upon the articulation of clear and determined interventions. In terms of economic policies and public discourse, the main focus has traditionally been on family allowances which however have not been demonstrated as being effective in influencing demographic trends. These money transfers, in any case, have undergone repeated upward and downward changes reflecting short term contingencies of economic policies.

In the light of the materials reviewed a number of main conclusions stand out:

- Concepts such as *the encouragement of births* [*yidud hayeludah* in Hebrew] are obsolete in the light of prevailing perceptions of intended and appropriate family sizes in Israel. People in Israel still do want children, and their explanations strongly point in the direction of the microsocial sphere of family norms.
- The real policy issue is how to lower economic and logistic barriers that hinder the widespread desire for children among Israeli

(Jewish) families, and how to facilitate families to have the children that they would like to have.

- A high share of all households is undetermined concerning their intended and appropriate family size. Policy interventions may significantly affect the final outcome if they can relate to the crucial needs clearly expressed by the public.
- Policy interventions are highly welcome by a majority of the public. Direct money transfers are not perceived as a significant tool in family growth strategies. The preferred emphasis should go to the infrastructure aimed at early childhood care, child education, housing, and woman empowering.
- Persistently intensive family values are not incompatible with personal aspirations, namely among working women – if appropriate provisions can be established.
- An emphasis on supporting 3rd and 4th children commands widespread public approval, and would have much greater impact than the support of very large families that has been at the center of recent social policies concerning the family.
- Finally, of course, the State's role is not one of imposing family planning targets – rather of facilitating what the people actually desire.

I think this is a good starting point for a coherent approach to population trends in Israel that conceivably will develop in the foreseeable future.

Acknowledgments

I shall open with my remembrance of Professor Roberto Bachi who not only encouraged me when I was a young man to pursue studies in Jewish population but in fact with a little scholarship that he awarded me encouraged me to come to Jerusalem and study – which affected my whole adult life. The fact that I am where I am today is a consequence of that early interest by Roberto Bachi. The research on which this paper is

Jerusalem, January, 2006

based owes much to Sallai Meridor who, in his position as Chair of the Jewish Agency for Israel (JAFI) and promoter of its Demographic Initiative suggested that priority should be given to the study of fertility of married couples in Israel. The organizational framework of JAFI's Demographic Initiative owes much to Rimona Wiesel who coordinated the program with the assistance of Moran Neuman. The data were collected by the Dahaf Institute directed by Mina Zemach. The initial draft of the questionnaire was prepared by Ilana Ziegler. Research for this paper was undertaken at the Jewish People Policy Planning Institute in Jerusalem thanks to the support of its founding President Yehezkel Dror and its General Director Avinoam Bar Yosef. Israel Pupko ably assisted with data processing. Background research was carried out at the Division of Jewish Demography and Statistics of The A. Harman Institute of Contemporary Jewry, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem. This paper was developed during my stay in the 2006 spring semester as Senior Fellow at the Steinhardt Social Research Institute, Brandeis University, Waltham, Massachusetts. I thank Leonard Saxe, Director of the Steinhardt Institute and of the Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies at Brandeis for his support.