

Some Reflections on Migration in Israel: Comparative Aspects

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Abstract

Israeli society has received and absorbed large-scale migration, both in absolute numbers and as a proportion of its total population. Migration has constituted a central factor in the daily experience of its inhabitants, its economy, culture and politics, as well as a central subject of local social research. This article discusses several aspects out of the broader framework of migration research in Israel. It especially looks at international migration linking Israel and Jewish populations worldwide; views Israel as part of the world system of countries; from a quantitative social scientific perspective; and stressing the macro level. Other important aspects are admittedly not covered here. Special attention is devoted to Israel's role in the framework of the general global migration system, and of global Jewish migrations also including movements to other countries; as a target of selective migration and differential absorption processes of Jews, as well as of other types of immigration not covered by the Law of Return; as a country of emigration; and as a possible source of migration policies.

The remarkable changes that occurred in Israeli society over the past decades – among other things because of immigration and its absorption – bear great significance not only for descriptive purposes but also for developing analytic and theoretical tools aiming at a better understanding of those changes. We need to approach migration research in Israel through a combination of multiple analytic frameworks: old ones that still hold true facing Israel's particularism, and new ones that belong with broader migration theories applicable to most countries in the world. Thorough migration research is likely to create knowledge and contribute useful insights to the academic system and to generate its application by other systems, namely those oriented toward policy planning locally and internationally.