

MIGRANT INTEGRATION AND ISRAEL

Migrant integration- policy

Migrant integration policy in Israel is characterized by local and national cooperation. This policy is addressing mainly immigrant Olim entering Israel under the Law of Return. The parties involved in developing and implementing the policy are governmental ministries, local governments (i.e. cities and municipalities), semi-governmental organizations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). NGOs play a key role in this process, especially related to labor migrants and asylum seekers entering Israel under the Law of Entrance.

Immigration laws

Immigration to Israel is governed by two main laws: the Law of Return (1950) and the Law of Entrance (1952):

The Law of Return (1950) grants prospective migrants with Jewish ancestry (having one or more Jewish grandparent) and their spouses the right to settle in Israel and acquire Israeli citizenship upon arrival. Migrants entering under this law are called **olim**, and their immigration is called Aliyah. The ministry in charge of the integration of olim in Israel is the **Ministry of Aliyah and Integration**, which provides them with financial support and special services in various fields. Migrants arriving to Israel under the Law of Return are referred to as olim regardless of their country of origin and immigration circumstances.

The Law of Entrance (1952) regulates the entry and stay in Israel of migrants who are not eligible under the Law of Return (mainly tourists, labor migrants, and asylum seekers). The ministry in charge of the entry of these migrants is the **Ministry of Interior**, operating via the **Population & Immigration Authority**. The Law of Entrance grants power to the Minister of the Interior to admit or prohibit the entry and stay of migrants.

As will be presented below these two types of immigrants follow a different integration path.



Integration of immigrants-Olim

The integration of Olim is handled by the **Ministry of Aliyah and Integration**. Newly arrived Olim are entitled to special rights (such as education, language acquisition, labor market integration, accommodation, legal assistance etc.).¹ As Olim are granted with an Israeli citizenship upon arrival, they are also entitled to all citizen's rights.

Until the beginning of the 90s the main integration track for Olim was via absorption centers. Immigrants (Olim) were admitted in their first year to absorption centers located in cities. These centers provided basic integration services (accommodation, language acquisition, professional training etc.). Following the massive migration flows of immigrants from the Former Soviet Union (FSU), the Israeli integration policy changed to "direct absorption". In the direct absorption track, new immigrants receive financial assistance, rent an apartment for themselves, register at an ulpan (Hebrew courses), and integrate independently into Israeli society. Within the framework of direct absorption there are two tracks for receiving financial assistance: receiving an Absorption Basket based on individual eligibility or receiving assistance without the Absorption Basket (receiving income during the period of ulpan studies). Both tracks are available today pending on immigrant's socio-demographic characteristics. For example, all immigrants arriving from Ethiopia are directed to absorption centers to facilitate their integration.

In addition, special integration programs and tracks are provided by the Ministry of Aliyah and Integration to specific immigrant's groups. Some of the programs are operated with the assistance of municipalities and the Jewish Agency (a semi-governmental Jewish global organization).² Moreover, many NGOs are operating to facilitate the integration of Olim. Some of the NGOs are targeting a specific immigrant group (for example, NBN organization is assisting immigrants from North America³) and some are providing assistance in a specific field (for example, Gvachim organization is promoting labor market integration for skilled Olim⁴).

¹ <https://www.gov.il/en/pages/new-olim-rights-guide>

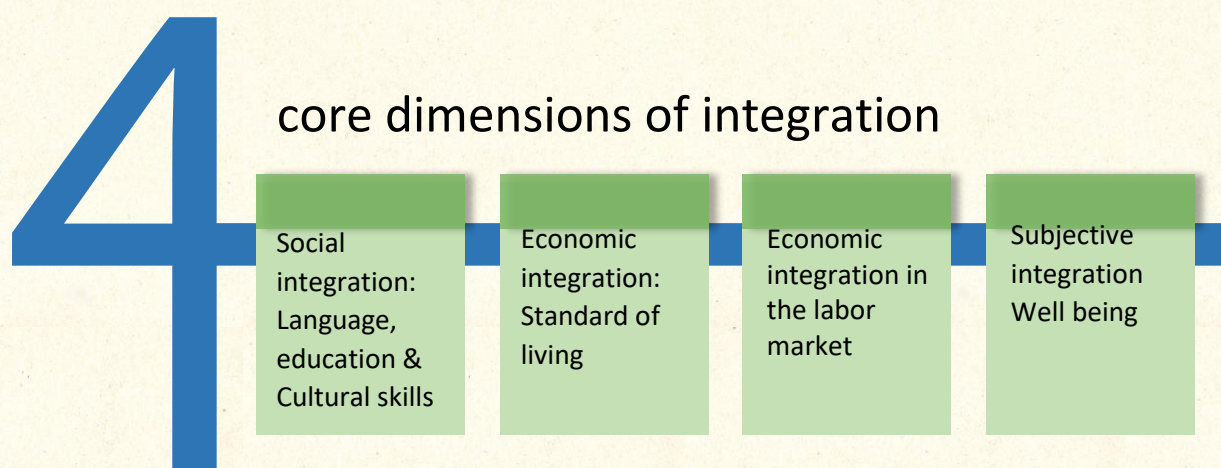
² https://www.gov.il/en/pages/klita_course

³ <https://www.nbn.org.il>

⁴ <https://gvachim.org.il>

Following the Russia-Ukraine war in 2022 there was an increase in the number of Olim arriving from Ukraine and Russia. Since the outbreak of the Russia-Ukraine war in February 2022 and up till April 2024, more about 17,000 Olim arrived from Ukraine and about 82,000 Olim arrived from Russia. It is important to note that the war in Israel, which broke out on October 2023, led to a decrease in the number of immigrants entering Israel but not to a stop of immigration flows. The Ministry of Aliyah and Integration provided extra assistance and services to Ukrainian Olim-refugees upon their arrival. Municipalities played a significant role in providing information and services to Ukrainian migrants, and many of them were absorbed in hotels and absorption centers operating with the assistance of municipalities and the Jewish Agency. Additional initiatives, operated mainly by NGOs, were active and provided assistance and services to immigrants Olim arriving both from Ukraine and Russia.

In the following figure, 4 core dimension of (olim) immigrant integration are presented. These dimensions are specified in the Ruppin index, a prominent Israeli index for immigrant integration at the national level⁵.



Integration of immigrants- Labor migrants and asylum seekers

The ministry in charge of immigrants who are not classified as Olim, is the Ministry of Interior, operating via the **Population & Immigration Authority**⁶. Documented labor migrants and asylum seekers are entitled to basic social rights (children's education, emergency health care, work rights). **The ministry is not formally engaged in the integration of these immigrants in Israel as they are perceived as temporary residents.** Thus, the state is not involved in promoting the integration of these

⁵ <https://www.ruppin.ac.il/research-authority/research-centers-and-institutes/the-institute-for-immigration/the-index-for-immigrant-integration-in-israeli-society>
⁶ https://www.gov.il/en/departments/population_and_immigration_authority/govil-landing-page

immigrants into Israeli society. Many NGOs are involved in supporting labor migrants and asylum seekers. As most of these immigrants reside in Tel-Aviv, the Tel-Aviv municipality in collaboration with NGOs offer them services and assistance.

The Population & Immigration Authority is working closely with the Center for International Migration & Integration (CIMI)⁷. CIMI is an NGO aimed to assist the government of Israel to address issues related to labor migrants and asylum seekers, and is engaged in the development of systemic and individual responses while protecting the rights of these immigrants and maintaining international obligations. CIMI is assisting the government of Israel to implement the bilateral agreements in agriculture (Thailand) and construction (Moldova, Romania and Bulgaria), as well as pilot agreements for migrant workers in care giving from Nepal and Sri Lanka. The Population & Immigration Authority with CIMI operate a call center for foreign workers providing services and information in 10 different languages. CIMI with professional from the Population & Immigration Authority operate orientation programs for migrant workers.

As for asylum seekers, Israel chose to grant temporary group protection to several immigrant groups (mainly from Africa). CIMI acts in several ways to assist Israel in meeting these obligations and to enhance protection mechanisms for the asylum seeker communities. CIMI operates activity centers and after school programs. The municipality of Tel-Aviv with collaboration with local and international NGOs (such as HIAS, UNJCR) are providing support and services in multiple fields.

Following the decision of the Minister of the Interior after the outbreak of the Russia-Ukraine war, a quota of five thousand migrants from Ukraine (refugees) was set, permitting entry on a humanitarian basis for family reunification. According to the Population & Immigration Authority report summarizing 2022: 72,944 Ukrainian nationals (olim+ refugees) entered Israel and more than half of them- 40,490 (most of them refugees) left Israel⁸. The **Ministry of Welfare and Social Affairs** (in collaboration with NGOs) took responsibility for these migrants. According to this ministry's report about 15,000 refugees from Ukraine entered under the Law of Entrance from the beginning of the war, most of them women. The main information and service provider for Ukrainian refugees is a program (Tzav Hasha'a⁹) operated by the Ministry of Welfare and Social Affairs in collaboration with NGOs.

[/https://www.cimi-eng.org](https://www.cimi-eng.org) ⁷

https://www.gov.il/BlobFolder/news/sikom_2022/he/2022.pdf ⁸

<https://govextra.gov.il/molasa/tzav-hashaa/home> ⁹

ACTORS AND THEIR ROLES

Table 1 and Figure 1 show how the integration of migrants is organized for **Olim**.

Table 1. Actors in Olim's integration.

NATIONAL LEVEL	
Ministry of Aliyah and Integration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordinates integration policies between ministries • Provides support and services for olim (both online and off-line): employment, education, housing, health etc. • Cooperates with municipalities in integration programs and reception points and centers • Cooperates with the Jewish Agency (semi-governmental organization) in operating absorption centers • Cooperates with NGOs in special programs for Olim integration • Conducts research and evaluation of the programs and services • Ukrainian Olim-refugees: • Providing additional services to these immigrants via a designated website • Coordinates between ministries, municipalities, the Jewish Agency and NGOs
The Ministry of Industry, Trade and Labor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enforces labor laws and working conditions through employment policy • Develops employment programs aimed at improving the employment status of various populations including Olim • Provides vocational and technological training, with the financial support of the Ministry of Aliyah and Integration • Provides data and research with the assistance of the National Insurance
Ministry of Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Operates, with the financial support of the Ministry of Aliyah and Integration, Hebrew courses (Ulpan) for all immigrants • Administers development and subsidy programs to support Olim children and pupils • Methodically directs integration of Olim children and pupils • legislate and plan education services for Olim • Work in collaboration with municipalities

Ministry of Construction and Housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create appropriate housing solutions at an affordable price for Olim • Promotes residential construction in rural and urban areas, supplying public housing and subsidizing rent and mortgages for Olim
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Jewish Agency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assist prospective Olim in the initial immigration planning in their origin countries thru representatives and thru the Global Aliyah Cal Center. The services include employment planning and language learning. • Work in collaboration with the ministry of Aliyah and Integration and municipalities in the facilitation of absorption centers
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Other ministries are also involved in the integration of Olim especially since they are Israeli citizens upon arrival

LOCAL LEVEL

Ministry of Construction and Housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create appropriate housing solutions at an affordable price for Olim • Promotes residential construction in rural and urban areas, supplying public housing and subsidizing rent and mortgages for Olim
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CIVIC SOCIETY

Olim focused NGOs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide services to specific Olim groups (legal, social, educational, employment etc.) • Raise awareness of the situation of Olim and defend their rights • Organize cultural, educational and community events • Facilitate communication of Olim in ministries and municipalities
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Figure 1. Actors in Olim's integration.

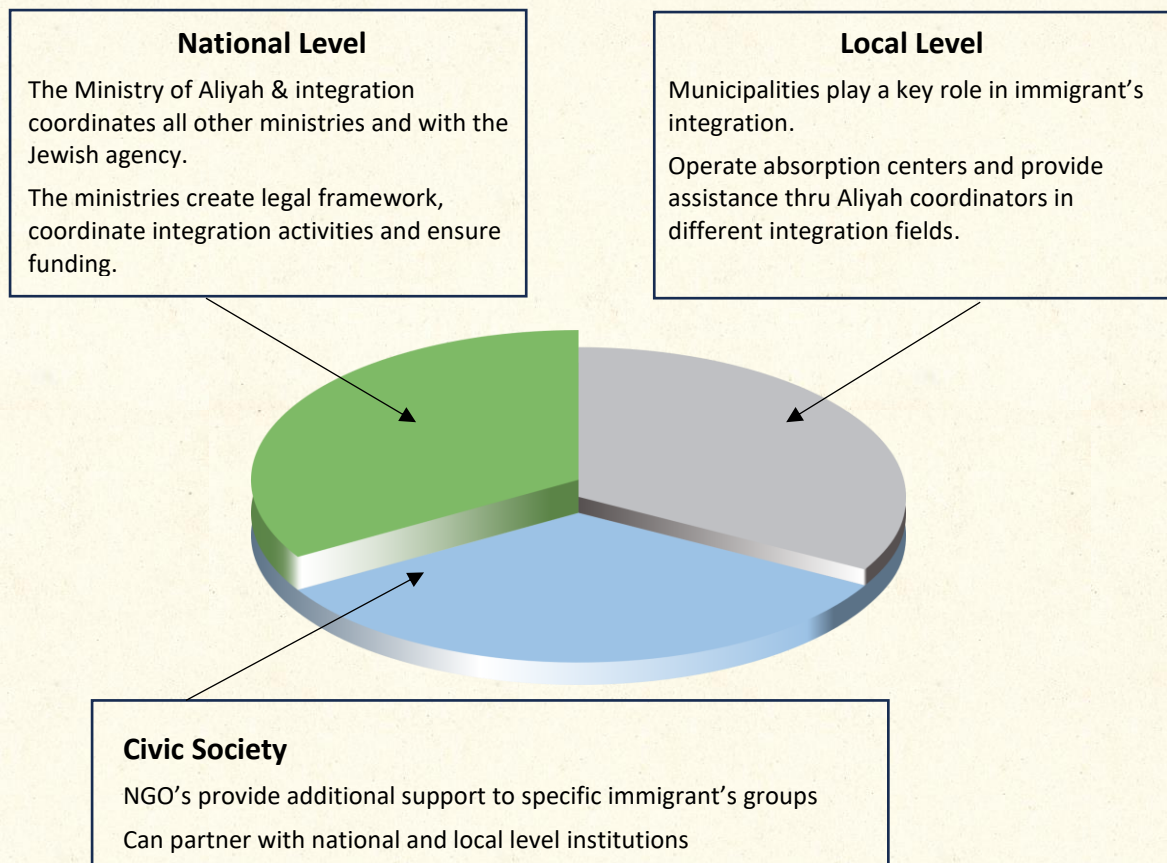


Table 2 specifies integration actors for labor migrants and asylum seekers.

Table 2. Actors in labor migrants and asylum seeker's integration.

NATIONAL LEVEL	
The Ministry of Interior	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Operates via the Population & Immigration Authority • Provides basic right for documented labor migrants and asylum seekers (employment, education for children, emergency health care) • Works closely with the Center for International Migration & Integration (CIMI) • Ukrainian refugees: • Collaborated with The Ministry of Welfare and Social Affairs to assist Ukrainian refugees
Ministry of Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides public education to all children of labor migrants and asylum seekers from the age of 3. • Work in collaboration with municipalities

The Ministry of Welfare and Social Affairs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides information and service for Ukrainian refugees is a program (Tzav Hasha'a) operated by the Ministry of Welfare and Social Affairs in collaboration with NGOs
LOCAL LEVEL	
Municipalities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Most of the local level activity is conducted in Tel Aviv Work in collaboration with the ministry of interior Work in collaboration with NGOs

CIVIC SOCIETY	
Labor migrants and asylum seekers focused NGOs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Play a major role in the integration of this migrant population Provide services to specific immigrant groups (legal, social, educational, employment, health etc.) Raise awareness of the situation of migrants and defend their rights Organize cultural, educational and community events Facilitate communication of migrants in ministries and municipalities

Contextual summary

Israel has many years of experience in integrating olim (immigrants). Over the years the integration policy has been updated and many integration programs have been implemented. The various programs are aimed at diverse groups of immigrants: programs in the field of education and higher education, in the field of occupational integration, in the field of housing, in the field of health etc. These programs are based on the policies of various government ministries led by the Ministry of Immigrant Aliyah and Integration and are evaluated by the research departments of these ministries. Academic research institutes perform periodic assessments of the integration of immigrants from different origin groups and provide feedback to the relevant ministries and organizations working in the field. One such example is the Ruppin index¹⁰.

The programs aimed at assisting non-olim migrants (labor migrants and asylum seekers) are operated mainly by NGOs at the national and municipal level. Some of these organizations, such as the Center for International Migration & Integration (CIMI), are performing assessments and evaluations within their research departments¹¹.

¹⁰ <https://www.ruppin.ac.il/research-authority/research-centers-and-institutes/the-institute-for-immigration/the-index-for-immigrant-integration-in-israeli-society>

¹¹ <https://www.cimi-eng.org/research-and-development-cimi-en>