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: Emigration pushes population growth to a dramatic low in 2025

# Emigration pushes population growth to a dramatic low in 2025

Nati Tucker

Israel's population growth marked a new low in 2025, increasing by just 0.9 percent, Prof. Alex Weinreb, research director at the Taub Center for Social Policy Studies and an expert in demography, estimated in the chapter on population appearing in the center's annual State of the Nation Report 2025.

He ascribes the drop principally to a decline in the birthrate and rising mortality, but mainly to net negative migration. Taub calls 2025 a turning point year regarding demographic trends in Israel. Before the Gaza war broke out in 2023, the population typically grew between 1.9 and 2 percent annually, a pace unlikely to return in the future. Going forward, Israel will need to attract large numbers of immigrants to maintain lower growth rates.

Israel's high rate of population growth over the past decades had important macroeconomic effects. Demographic growth increased the youth's percentage of the overall population, which in turn contributed to high labor force growth which in turn encouraged economic growth.



Crowds in the Mahane Yehuda market in Jerusalem.

Olivier Fitoussi

Israeli economic growth over the previous decade had ranged between 3 and 4 percent annually, but when measured on a per capita basis (gross domestic product per person), the rate of growth was slower due to Israel's fast-growing population.

The slowdown in population growth is likely, on the one hand, to weigh on overall economic growth, especially if it impinges on the

most skilled and productive workers. On the other hand, at least mathematically, when population increases more slowly, per capita GDP is likely to grow faster.

The Taub Institute called the estimated 0.9 percent rise in population "an unprecedented decline." It noted that since the establishment of the state, population growth has only declined to less than 1.5 percent annually twice, to 1.45 percent

in 1982 and 1.35 percent the year after. However, the official Central Bureau of Statistics figure for 2024 was an even lower 1.1 percent.

Population growth is determined by mortality (deaths), fertility (births) and migration (people coming and going). Weinreb's analysis shows that each of these three components has undergone significant

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# GROWTH

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changes in recent years.

In regards to rates of death, life expectancy has risen, and Israel remains at the top of the OECD league tables. However, the Gaza war affected the rate, mainly among Jewish men, whose life expectancy fell to 81.5 years today from 82.4 years in 2023, the Taub research found.

Although overall life expectancy is increasing, Taub found that the absolute number of deaths is also climbing, a phenomenon that it attributed to a growing elderly population. In other words, as the Jewish and Arab populations age, so does the number of deaths. The trend is expected to continue in the years ahead.

Vis-à-vis the birthrate, Taub found that despite the increase in Israel's population, the nominal number of births has remained flat. In 2025, about 181,000 births were recorded, the same as in 2016. Behind that was a 30 percent decline in ferti-

lity rates over the past 20 years among Muslim and Druze women and a similar drop among Christian and other women over the past 12 years.

Jewish women's fertility rates have remained relatively stable. Despite a decline among secular Jewish women, the rate among religious and Haredi women has held steady.

The biggest changes have occurred regarding migration. Measuring it has become problematic because the CBS changed the way it measures the phenomenon in the past year. According to the revised data cited in the Taub report, the number of Israelis emigrating in 2024 and 2025 was double the number in 2018, while the number of returning Israelis remained unchanged.

The number of people who left Israel in 2024 and 2025 numbered approximately 120,000 more than those who returned to it (not including new immigrants). "This is a negative level of net migration never before observed in Israel," the report states.

When the number of new immigrants – whose numbers have dropped dra-

matically since the war – is factored in, net migration to Israel is negative. That is, when new immigrants and returning Israelis are subtracted from the total emigration figure, Israel went from net positive migration of almost 57,000 people in 2021 to about 16,000 in 2023, before turning negative to the tune of 26,000 in 2024.

For 2025, Taub estimates that, based on current emigration data, the figure will grow to a negative approximately 37,000. It predicts that net negative migration will continue for a third year in a row in 2026.

In the short or medium term, birth and death rates are difficult to change with policy measures.

The Taub report said that if Israel wants to continue to maintain a population growth rate similar to the coming years, the only option is to focus on immigration. However, sentiment toward Israel abroad, and especially the growing number of Israelis moving abroad due to the government's conduct, raises doubts about Israel's ability to reverse the negative migration.