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## **IMMIGRATION IN THE 1990s FROM THE FORMER USSR AND THE HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM IN ISRAEL IN THE FIRST HALF OF THE 1990s**

### **Introduction**

Immigration, which has been a characteristic of most developed countries in recent years, has a considerable effect on many areas of life, including education. This effect is felt not only by the immigrants but also by the natives. As academic achievements, especially in higher education, are one of the main avenues to future mobility in modern society, the effect of immigration on education should have one of the most important influences on the society that accepts and absorbs immigrants. Moreover, as most immigrant students lack strong social and economic networks, their academic achievements become one of the only springboards for social advancement in the destination country. Thus, the manner in which immigrants fit into the various levels of the education system is a significant indicator of how they will integrate into society as a whole in the future. Furthermore, the integration of immigrants in the education system may have differential effects on other social groups, and as such, immigrant integration can serve as a tool for educational stratification for members of the native population as well.

This study deals with the mass immigration to Israel from the former Soviet Union which began in September 1989 and has continued to this day, albeit in smaller numbers. Some 830 thousand people had immigrated to Israel by the end of the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, of

them 40% children and youngsters up to age 29. In absolute numbers this was the largest immigration since the State of Israel was established in May 1948. In addition to its impressive size, this wave of immigration from the former Soviet Union was marked by two additional characteristics: a very low percentage of immigrants with financial means, and a very high percentage of immigrants with some post-high school education (including academic schooling). Consequently, this immigration constitutes a unique case for examining the effect of the combination of great “human capital” with very limited “economic capital”.

The aim of the study is to examine the influence of the 1990s immigration from the former Soviet Union on the chances of learning (do they attend school?) and the patterns of learning (where and what do they learn?) of the immigrants who came to Israel from the former Soviet Union in the 1990s and on Israel-born children in the country's higher education system in the first half of the 1990s.

### **The policy of expanding the higher education system in the first half of the 1990s**

At the end of the 1980s six universities<sup>2</sup> offering bachelor studies operated in Israel, as well as a few non-university institutions of higher education, including the Bezalel School of Art, the Academy for Dance and Music, and regional colleges. Although high school matriculation

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<sup>2</sup> This number excludes the Open University, which was established in 1976, and the Weizman Institute, which opened in 1934. These two institutions of higher education have special characteristics: the Weizman Institute of Science, which focuses on studies for advanced degrees only, and the Open University, which is a unique institution in terms of accepting students and methods of teaching.

certificate eligibility rose during the 1980s (from 20% of all adolescents in the relevant age group in 1980 to 30% in 1990),<sup>3</sup> the Israel Council of Higher Education (ICHE) and the Committee for Planning and Budgeting (CPB) adhered to their policy of not expanding the higher education system.<sup>4</sup> This is what the CPB wrote in its 1989 report, a short time before the wave of immigration began:

The system as it stands in 1988 is capable of absorbing foreseeable additional demand for bachelor degree studies. Therefore, in order to maintain an appropriate academic level and to avoid a degradation of the value of the bachelor degree, the Council did not see any necessity to establish additional institutions (CPB decision 39/7, January 11, 1989, see CPB Annual Report, p. 70).

The wave of mass immigration from the former Soviet Union that began at the end of 1989 substantially changed the CPB's conceptions about expanding the system of higher education in Israel. As early as July 1990 the CPB appointed a sub-committee to examine ways to expand the supply and variety of institutions of learning for bachelor studies (CPB report, 1991, p. 70). Moreover, at the beginning of the 1990s immigrant absorption in the higher education system became the main focus of discussion, both in the ICHE and the CPB. As the annual CPB report from that period states:

Absorbing these immigrants in the higher education system is an issue engaging the CPB in 1990-91, both in terms of immediate absorption of the immigrants in the system and in terms of preparing for the next few years, when a large wave is expected to arrive (CPB Report, 1991, p. 67).

During this period, the principle guiding the CPB was that the wave of immigration from the former Soviet Union would bring students who had ceased their studies at various stages, as well as youth that had completed their high school studies and were interested in beginning their higher education studies (CPB Report, 1991, p. 67). Therefore, the Committee expected "an additional 30 thousand immigrant and veteran students in the higher education system beginning in 1991. Of them, 2/3 would be from the new immigrants and about one third would be from local natural increase" (Ibid., p. 68). As to absorbing the immigrant students, the CPB instructed the academic institutions to "absorb all those with suitable skills for studies. In other words, without changing the

acceptance standards in the faculties and without affecting the absorption of local Israelis" (authors' emphasis, Ibid., p. 67). As the then-presiding head of the CPB, Prof. Yaacov Ziv explained:

Despite the maximal importance of absorbing appropriate immigrant students, we should not infringe on the opportunities for Israeli-born youngsters to study. The acceptance thresholds will be equal for all and will be similar to those now in force, and those who meet them will be accepted. Of course, this will require an additional expansion of the higher education system. (Yedion, 1, p. 1).

As for the expansion of the academic institutions, the CPB instructed the institutions to absorb "this addition...mainly in the institutions on the periphery, [authors' emphasis] in keeping with the policy of dispersing the population and strengthening the northern and southern regions, as well as from academic considerations, to strengthen the institutions that have not yet reached optimal size" (Ben-Gurion University, Haifa University and Bar-Ilan University) (p. 68). The planned increase at the time was as follows:

The Hebrew University in Jerusalem	—	2000 students
Tel Aviv University	—	2000 students
The Technion	—	2000 students
Bar-Ilan University	—	5000 students
Haifa University	—	5000 students
Ben-Gurion University	—	6000 students
Other institutions of higher education	—	4000 students
Regional colleges	—	2000 students

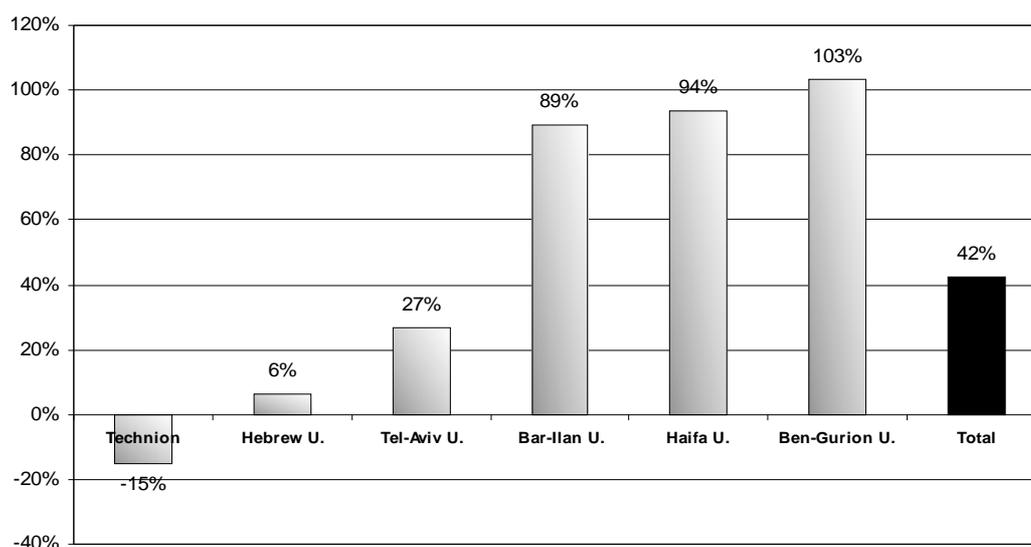
At the beginning of the 1990/91 academic year the CPB allocated NIS 16.5 million to the universities as immediate assistance for absorbing immigrant students. Of this amount NIS 7.5 million were transferred to the CPB by the Administrator General, at the initiative of then Justice Minister Dan Meridor, and NIS 9 million were transferred by the Ministry of Finance (Yedion, 1, p. 1). Thus, in the 1990/91 academic year, governmental participation in the regular budget of the universities (together with income from tuition) covered more than 80% of this budget, in contrast, for example, to 52% for the 1983/84 academic year (Yedion, 1, p. 4). Greater budgeting of the universities by the state continued during the first half of 1990. As a result, the higher education system, mainly the universities, began to expand intensively.

#### **Implementation of the expansion policy of the higher education system in the first half of the 1990s**

Figure 1 about here

<sup>3</sup> From a publication of the Adva Center: **Eligibility for Matriculation Diplomas by Settlement, 2003-2004, 2005.**

<sup>4</sup> In the 1980s the ICHE and the CPB rejected all proposals to expand the higher education system.



**Fig. 1. Rate of growth of the number of first year students from the 1990/91 — 1994/95 academic years, by institution**

Source of data: Central Bureau of Statistics, various years.

Over a period of five academic years (from 1990 to 1995), the number of first year students attending bachelor studies at the universities increased by more than 40%. Using the distinction between universities developed by Yogev (2000), the six universities were divided into two strata: the elite universities (the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, the Technion and Tel Aviv University), which aspired to general excellence, and the designated universities (Bar-Ilan University, Haifa University and Ben-Gurion University), which were intended to serve specific or geographically peripheral populations. According to this division it can be seen (Fig. 1) that the main part of the growth (about 90%) resulted from expansion in the designated universities, whose population of first year students doubled (a 103% increase at Ben-Gurion University and a 94% growth at Haifa University). In contrast, the elite universities — the Hebrew University, Tel Aviv and the Technion — registered a gain of about 20% while the Technion actually registered a 15% decrease in the number of first year students.

In addition, the areas of study also expanded differentially during this period with the major growth registered mainly in the humanities and social sciences. Thus, the number of new students in the humanities increased by 2,924, of them 938 in the elite universities and 1,986 in the designated universities. At the same time, certain fields of study shrank in student numbers in these years at the elite universities, such as agriculture, engineering, the social sciences and architecture.

It should be emphasized that in the first half of the 1990s expansion occurred not only in the university sector of the higher education system but also in the non-university sector — the colleges. Even before the College Law was enacted in 1995, the non-university sector was already undergoing processes of expansion and academization, such as in the teacher education and technological colleges. Thus, for example, the number of first year students in these colleges grew from 2,968 in 1990 to 5,520 in 1994. However, growth in the non-university sector in this period represented less than 30% of the entire increase in the number of first year bachelor students in the higher education system.

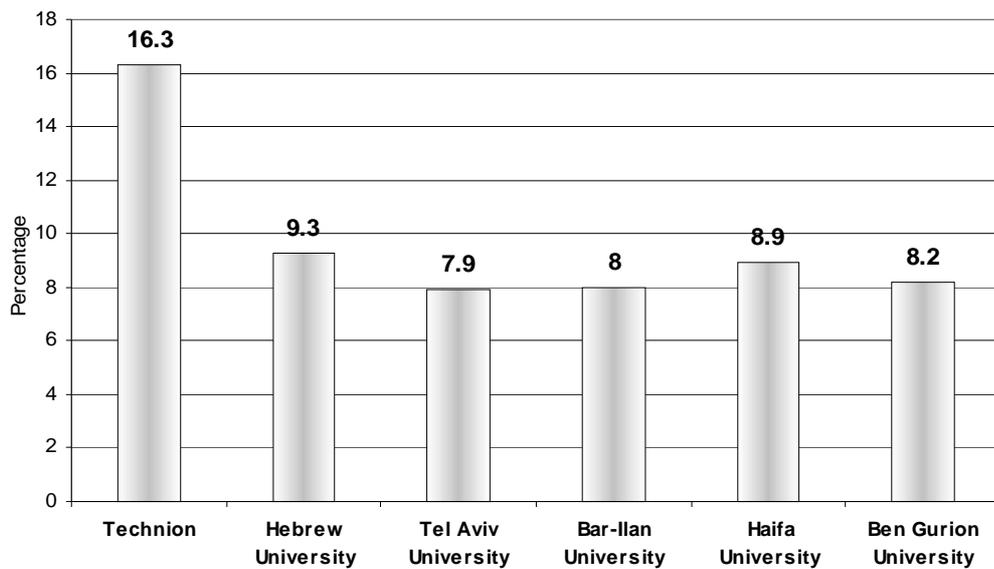
To this point, we have described expansion of the higher education system in the first half of the 1990s. The question that arises is: Did the immigrants for whom the higher education system tailored its expansion policy, mainly as a constructive step for absorbing them, actually take advantage of it? To answer this question we will first discuss how the immigrants fit into the higher education system.

#### **How the immigrants fit into the higher education system in the first half of the 1990s**

Regarding the integration of the new immigrants in the higher education system, three main points should be emphasized:

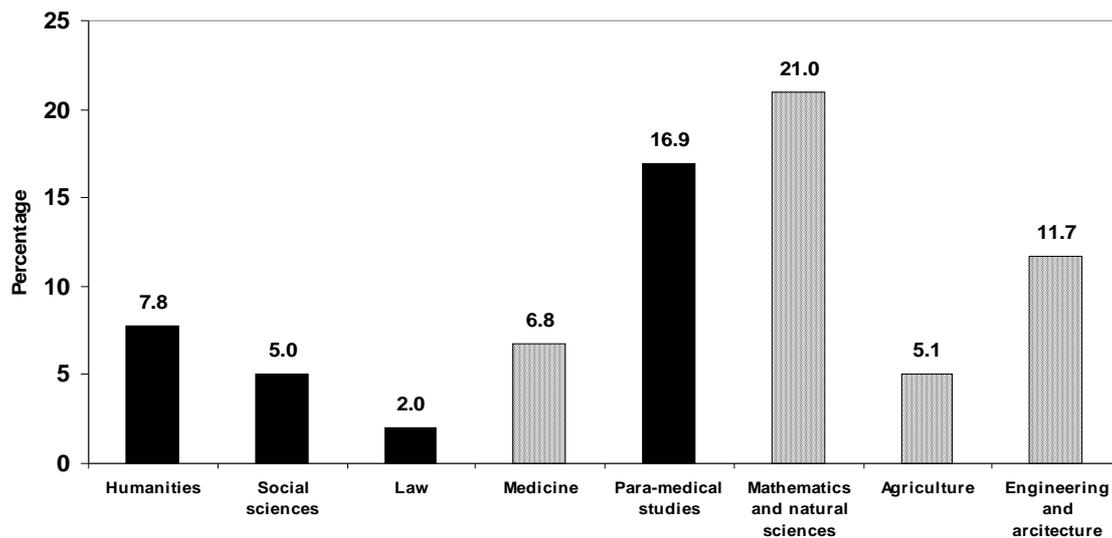
*First*, the percentage of immigrants, male and female, among the students in the first half of the 1990s was similar to their percentage in the population of the same age group, about 7% (CPB Report, 1995/96).

*Second*, as can be seen in Fig. 2 the percentages



**Fig. 2. Percentage of immigrants in the incoming class of 1995/96, by academic institution**

Source of data: Central Bureau of Statistics, publication 1068.



**Fig. 3. Percentage of immigrants in the incoming class 1995/96, by areas of study**

Black = expanded areas of study Gray = areas of study not expanded

Source of data: Central Bureau of Statistics, publication 1068

of immigrants in the elite universities exceeded those in the designated universities, except for Tel Aviv University. For example, the percentage of immigrants in the Technion was estimated at 16%, while at Bar-Ilan University they constituted only 8% of the students.

Third, the percentage of immigrants among students in the exact sciences was greater than those in the humanities. Thus, for example, the percentage of immigrants in the computer and technology sciences was

estimated at about 20% but in the humanities the figure stood at only about 8%, in the social sciences 5% and in law only about 2% (Fig. 3). Similarly, about 40% of the immigrant students were registered in the natural sciences and mathematics faculties while among the native Israeli population this figure stood at only 15%.

Analysis of the data about the integration of immigrants in the higher education system, together with information about implementation of the policy to expand the higher education system in the first half of the 1990s

shows that the *expanded university framework, ostensibly to absorb new immigrants, was utilized mainly by native born Israelis*: from 1990-1995, the number of first year students in universities grew by more than 40%. But the percentage of immigrants did not exceed 16% among first year university students. In other words, immigrants in the higher education system explained only about 22% of the 40% expansion. This being the case, the question that arises is: Which native Israeli groups took advantage of the massive expansion of the university sector in the first half of the 1990s?

#### **Who “gained” and who “lost” as a result of immigration in the early 1990s?**

In order to answer the question of which groups won and which lost out as a result of the expansion of higher education following the mass immigration in the 1990s, a descriptive analysis was conducted of *the probability of learning in an academic institution*<sup>5</sup> over time. Performing a longitudinal analysis makes it possible to distinguish between general trends and specific local influences.

The source of the data used for this analysis was 17 personnel surveys conducted from 1979-1995. As the analysis deals with probability figures for each year, all those who attended an academic institution before the survey year were excluded from the sample. The sample included all native-born Israelis, Jews and Arabs, women and men, ages 18-30. Only this age group was used in the sample because it encompasses more than 90% of those attending first year studies in institutions of higher education. The odd ratio was calculated as the number of students in an academic institution in survey year *t* in contrast to the number of those who were not attending such an institution.

By examining Fig. 4, “The odd ratio of attending an academic institution among Jews,” two conclusions arise about the *first half of the 1990s*:

*First*, in these years a gap began to develop in favor of women in terms of the odd ratio of attending an academic institution. In this period, the percentages of those attending institutions of higher education rose for both women and men, but the rate of increase was larger for women than for men. As can be seen in Figure 6, men maintained the same rate of increase that characterized the 1980s while for women it rose. Two possible reasons can explain this. The first is that, as

noted earlier in this article, the areas of study that expanded in the first half of the 1990s were in the humanities, the so-called “female” subjects; the second reason is that the academization process, begun in the 1980s and intensified in the early 1990s, affected teacher education institutions and the teaching profession. Most of those who took advantage of this process were women.

It can be assumed that the “female” areas of study did not expand because more women wanted to study, that is, it was not the increase in demand that was responsible for the full expansion, but rather the increased supply of learning places in these areas was the main cause of expansion. Offering more places in higher education institutions was part of the policy of expanding the higher education system, ostensibly to absorb young immigrants from the academic institutions of the former Soviet Union.

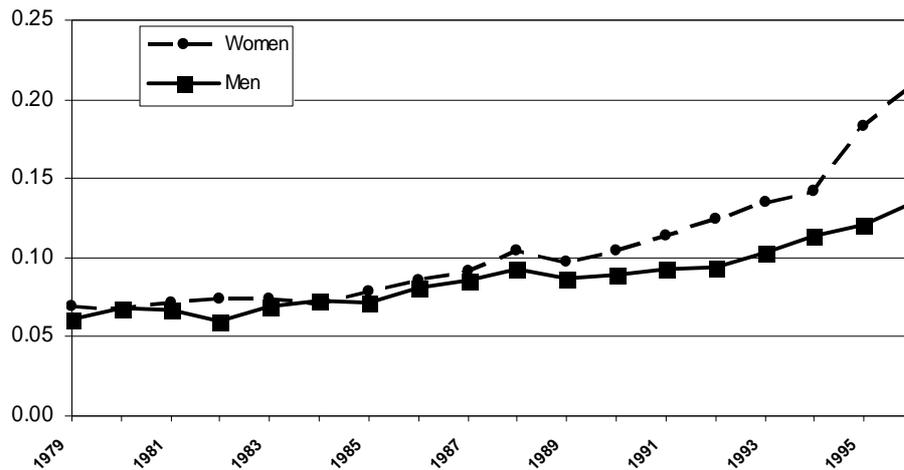
This raises the question of why these specific areas of study expanded so massively and not other areas of study such as the exact sciences which were preferred by the immigrants. In this context we can only assume that the reason that humanities studies were expanded in the universities can be attributed to economic considerations: the cost per student in the humanities was lower than the cost per student in the exact sciences. However, it should be noted that the CPB reports makes no reference to which areas of study should be expanded for absorbing new immigrants, even though the ICHE knew<sup>6</sup> that the immigrants tended more towards the exact sciences.

*Second*, despite the fact that in the first half of the 1990s the odd ratio of attending an institution of higher education rose for males, it is possible to assume that the immigration of the 1990s somewhat “impinged” on their learning pattern, in that the immigrants tended to study exact sciences, in other words the “male” professions, in the elite institutions which did not expand in this period. A salient example of this is the Technion. In the first half of the 1990s, the number of first year students in the Technion declined by 15%, despite the fact that the percentage of new immigrant first year students at the institution stood at more than 20%. In the 1989/90 academic year the percentage of candidates rejected by the Technion was about 30% but in the 1992/93 academic year this figure rose to 37% (Statistical Journal No. 11, 1994). As the

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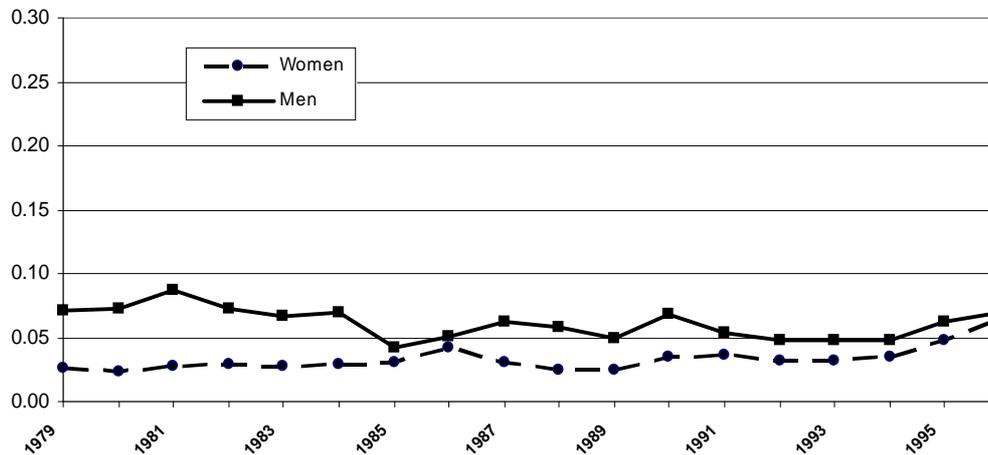
<sup>5</sup> **The odd ratio of learning in an academic institution** is calculated as the ratio between the probability of attending an academic institution and the probability of not attending such an institution.

<sup>6</sup> As early as 1991 the following appeared in the newsletter of the ICHE and the CPB: “The updated forecasts also take into account the tendency among some of the new immigrants to learn in non-academic post-high school settings, in order to acquire a profession quickly and to help support their families. A similar phenomenon was observed among immigrants who arrived from Romania in the 1970s” (Yedion, 1, p. 1).



**Figure 4. The odd ratio of attending vs. not attending an academic institution among native born Israel Jews ages 18-30**

Source of data: Central Bureau of Statistics, Human Resources, 1979-1995.



**Figure 5. The odd ratio of attending vs. not attending an academic institution among Israeli Arabs ages 18-30**

Source of data: Central Bureau of Statistics, Human Resources, 1979-1995.

probability of attending an academic institution rose among Jewish native-born Israeli men in this period (Fig. 4), it can be said that those “harmed by the immigration of the 1990s” did not abandon the higher education system but rather continued their studies in less prestigious academic institutions or in areas of study with lower acceptance requirements. One of the indicators of this is the growth of the departments of the exact sciences and engineering in the designated universities, such as Ben-Gurion University, in the first half of the 1990s.

Having discussed the probability of Jewish men and women studying at an academic institution (Fig. 4), Fig. 5 presents the probability of such studies among the Arab population. Unlike the situation for Israeli-born Jewish women and men, it is apparent that the probability of attending an academic institution among

Arab men and women did not change in the first half of the 1990s. One of the explanations for this lies in the choice of areas of study among the Arab population. Arab men and women tended to choose academic institutions in the “female” “applied” areas of study, such as nursing and education. These were some of the same areas of study selected by the immigrants. Therefore, the expansion of these areas of study in the first half of the 1990s did not affect the probability of Arabs to attend academic institutions in this period, as the expansion in learning places was taken advantage of mainly by the immigrants. Thus, the relative number of learning places remaining for the Arab population did not change.

#### **Summary and Discussion**

The wave of immigration from the former Soviet

Union substantially changed the conception held by the ICHE and CPB about expanding the higher education system: they made a sharp transition from a policy of “numerically freezing the system” in the 1980s to a policy of massive expansion whose aim was to absorb new students, most of them immigrants. As Professor Yaacov Ziv, then-head of the CPB, wrote in 1990:<sup>7</sup> “The higher education system is facing a planning and organizational revolution the likes of which we have not known since the state was established” (Yedion, 1991, 1, p. 4).

At the beginning of the 1990s, the absorption of immigrants in the higher education system became the focus of discussion, both in the ICHE and the CPB. The working assumption of the CPB in this period was that the wave of immigration from the former Soviet Union brought students who had left their studies in their home countries at different stages, as well as youngsters who had completed their high school studies and were interested in beginning their higher education studies (CPB Report, 1991, p. 67). Similarly, discussions in the ICHE and the CPB noted the forecast that the immigrants manifested a tendency to study in post-high school institutions that were not necessarily academic, in order to acquire a profession quickly so that they could help to support their families (Yedion, 1991, 1, p. 4).

In keeping with the new policy, the higher education system expanded by 40% in the first half of the 1990s by 40% (in terms of the number of incoming first year students being accepted). However, the immigrants accounted for only about half of this growth — immigrants who had migrated at higher academic education age did not seek further academic studies as predicted by policy makers of the higher education system. The immigrants, who were supposed to be the main beneficiaries of the more widely open doors of higher education in Israel, were not the only ones to benefit, and in fact were not even the main beneficiaries.

One of the reasons that masses of young immigrants did not storm the gates to enter the higher education system was that most of them came from families of limited economic means. In addition, they lacked sufficient mastery of the Hebrew language. Therefore, the young immigrants tended to choose practical studies that did not require good mastery of Hebrew but that would provide them with remunerative employment after completion of their studies. Areas of study such as engineering, computers, the sciences and nursing were perceived as suitable for them. As was shown in this article, these areas of study accounted for a very small part of the entire expansion process, as most of the

increased capacity was concentrated on areas of study in the social sciences and humanities.

These findings raise questions as to the extent that the expansion policy influenced the extent to which the immigrants were absorbed in the higher education system, and whether the lack of expansion of the areas of study that were of interest to the immigrants blocked their entry into the higher education system. As we are not working in laboratory conditions, the answers to these questions must remain in the realm of suppositions only; but it is clear that the expansion policy as it was implemented could not lead to the massive entry of immigrants into the higher education system. Rather it was like the flat plate on which the fox presented food to the stork in La Fontaine’s renowned fable.

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**Chachashvili-Bolotin Svetlana, Shavit Yossi, Ayalom Hanna. Immigration in the 1990s from the Former USSR and the Higher Education System in Israel in the First Half of the 1990s**

One of the main consequences of the immigration wave to Israel from the former Soviet Union during 90s

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<sup>7</sup> On January 1, 1991 Professor Pazi replaced Professor Ziv, who had served as chair of the CPB for five years.

was the development and implementation of new educational policies in Israeli higher education. These policies had two main goals: providing opportunities for newly arrived immigrants, so they would be able to attend institutions of higher education in Israel, and (b) building the infrastructure (potential) for absorbing and educating future immigrants.

As the result of these policies, the number of first year students enrolled in higher education during 1991-1995 increased by more than 40%. However, despite an apparent success of these policies: it is still unclear if these reforms were able to increase the number of immigrants enrolled in institutes of higher education. This paper aims to provide an answer to this question.

*Key words:* education, immigration and social stratification.

**Чачашвілі-Болотін Світлана, Шавіт Йосси, Аялон Хана. Імміграція 90-х років з СРСР/СНД як чинник реформи системи вищої освіти в Ізраїлі**

Одним з наслідків імміграції з СРСР/СНД на початку 90-х років було проведення державної політики розвитку системи вищої освіти в Ізраїлі — для прийому тих іммігрантів, які приїхали раніше, з урахуванням прогнозованої на найближчі роки масової російської імміграції. У результаті цієї політики протягом п'яти років (1991 — 1995) кількість студентів першого року навчання в університетах Ізраї-

лю збільшилося більш ніж на 40%. У цій статті розглянуто питання: чи досягла така державна політика своєї мети — збільшення кількості іммігрантів, що вступають до ВНЗ Ізраїлю?

*Ключові слова:* освіта, імміграція й соціальна стратифікація.

**Чачашвілі-Болотин Светлана, Шавит Йосси, Аялон Хана. Иммиграция 90-х годов из СССР/СНГ как фактор реформы системы высшего образования в Израиле**

Одним из последствий иммиграции из СССР/СНГ в начале 90-х годов было проведение государственной политики развития системы высшего образования в Израиле — для приема уже прибывших иммигрантов с учетом прогнозируемой на ближайшие годы массовой русской иммиграции. В результате этой политики в течение пяти лет (1991 — 1995) число студентов первого года обучения в университетах Израиля увеличилось более чем на 40%. В данной статье рассматривается вопрос: достигла ли такая государственная политика своей цели — увеличения числа иммигрантов, поступающих в вузы Израиля?

*Ключевые слова:* образование, иммиграция и социальная стратификация.

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