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Israel: A Country of Immigrants and Beacon of Freedom

Like the United States, Israel is a country founded by immigrants. Since its founding, the tiny state has absorbed millions of immigrants from more than 100 countries, including Jews from the former Soviet Union, Ethiopia and those forced to flee from Arab countries. A haven for Jewish refugees from around the world, Israel has also reached out assist Jews wherever they suffer from persecution and has made the successful absorption of new immigrants in society a top priority.

- Like the United States, Israel was founded by immigrants that escaped persecution or that felt inspired by ideology of freedom. Since the founding of Israel, more than 3 million people have immigrated to Jewish state.
- From the beginning, Israel accepted and encouraged immigration from Jews fleeing from Europe after the Holocaust and from Arab lands.
- In 1950, the Israeli government issued the Law of Return, which gave all Jews the right to become Israeli citizens.
- Following the War of Independence, Israel struggled economically—food and other basics were rationed and new immigrants lived in temporary structures. Despite these shortages, Israel took proactive measures to ensure the safety of Jews at risk abroad. Later, to handle the influx of immigrants to Israel, the government created absorption centers to provide housing and Hebrew classes.
- Jews from Arab countries were among the first immigrants to be flown into Israel out of harm's way. One year after independence, the Israeli government arranged to airlift approximately 45,000 Yemenite Jews to Israel in Operation Magic Carpet.
- In 1951, Israel coordinated with the Iraqi government to allow 130,000 Jews to be transported to Israel.
- Israel's dedication to helping Jewish communities at risk was clearly shown when Israel carried out secret missions to rescue Jews in Ethiopia. In 1991, Israel flew more than 14,000 Ethiopian Jews to Tel Aviv.
- With the fall of the Soviet Union in the 1990s, Israel absorbed a massive wave of new immigrants. More than 1 million Jews from the former Soviet Union immigrated to Israel, changing the face of Israeli society.

Additional Resources:

Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs: Aliya and Absorption

<http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/History/Modern+History/Centenary+of+Zionism/Aliya+and+Absorption.htm>

Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs; Population of Israel – General Trends and Indicators

<http://www.israel-mfa.gov.il/MFA/Archive/Communiques/1998/POPULATION+OF+ISRAEL-+GENERAL+TRENDS+AND+INDICATOR.htm?DisplayMode=print>

The Jewish Virtual Library: Immigration

<http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Immigration/immigtoc.html>

State of Israel Ministry of Immigrant Absorption

http://www.moia.gov.il/Moia_en/ReturningHomeProject/HomePage60.htm