

Policy Recommendations for Strengthening Jewish-Israeli Identity among Children of Israelis and their Attachment to the State of Israel and the Jewish Community

Recommendations to the Government of Israel:

General:

The children of Israeli emigrants (the second generation) abroad, thanks to their trans-national characteristics (Hebrew speakers with families in Israel and the Diaspora), could constitute a significant bridgehead and a strong link between the Jewish communities abroad and the state of Israel given the right incentives for deepening their Israeli identification and their attachment and incorporation into Jewish communities abroad.

The actions of the Government of Israel (GOI) and its officials vis-à-vis Israelis and their children abroad must be carried out with awareness of the potential ideological implications for the Zionist idea and the interpretations that might be given to the recognition of and investment in the Diaspora. The government should continue to highlight life in Israel as the most appropriate moral and Zionist choice for Israelis. However, acknowledging the current situation and with the rationale above in mind, the government should act to preserve the connection with Israeli communities abroad, with emphasis on the second generation, and to strengthen their Israeli-Jewish identity, including their affiliation with Jewish communities abroad.

In addition, policy makers in Israel should be aware that involvement of Israeli and Jewish communities abroad with Israel and Israel-related issues is not just the result of the influence Israel's policies have on these communities, this involvement also serves as an identity framework, a vehicle for building and preserving communal identity, and for motivating community members toward collective action.

Any policy must take into account the varying characteristics of Israeli communities in their host countries and absorbing societies. The challenges and opportunities with respect to children of Israelis in North America are different from those in Europe, Australia or South America.

In addition, as a basis for any future policy formulation, the knowledge gaps in current research regarding the characteristics of generation-and-a-half and second generation Israelis abroad, including their numbers and the trends of identification emerging among them, must be filled.

Recommendations:

a) **GOI must act to expand the opportunities and possibilities for expressing ethnic Israeli identity among second-generation emigrants abroad.** Research indicates that the integration of second-generation emigrants from Israel in their absorbing societies (especially in the United States) is rapid and successful. Economic integration processes that have taken other groups several generations to attain have taken less than one generation for Israeli emigrants. One result of this rapid integration, combined with the unique characteristics of Israeli identity and of Israeli emigrants, has been the creation of a 'lean' and subjective ethnic Israeli identity that occupies only a marginal place in the lives of individuals.

This trend has been enhanced by a public and institutional renunciation of the phenomenon of emigration (*Yerida*) in Israel, and the scarcity of opportunities for expressing ethnic Israeli identity in the daily life of second-generation emigrants beyond the individual scope due in part to intrinsically place-dependent nature of Israeli national identity. In order to mitigate and reverse this trend, actions should be taken for a structural expansion of the opportunities available to individuals and communities for expressing their affiliation and identification with Israel.

Examples for expanding these opportunities include:

- **Diversification and strengthening of Israeli youth movements operating abroad** (the current range of activity is significantly less than required). A significant part of the process of identity shaping and consolidation takes place during adolescence. Identity-forming experiences within the framework of Israeli youth movements have great potential for shaping the **future identities of Israeli youth abroad.**
- **Establish Israeli Houses of Culture¹** that would work to strengthen Israeli identity, sense of national belonging and Israel attachment by disseminating knowledge about Israel and Israeli culture, and teaching the Hebrew language. Models for this exist in other Western countries that foster ties with their diasporas, such as Alliance Française, Goethe Institute and the

¹ For a further discussion of this issue, see Maimon, D., Mirsky, Y., Kraus, M., and Karasenty, Y. (2009). *Responsibility, Mutual Assurance and Partnership: Policy Proposal Submitted to the Government of Israel Regarding the Strengthening of Jewish Identity and Israel Attachment among Jewish Youth around the World.* JPPPI: Jerusalem [in Hebrew].

British Council. The Hebrew language is critically important in the cultivation and preservation of ethnic identity, Israel attachment, and understanding the reality of life in Israel.

- **Establish Israeli schools and kindergartens abroad.** Successful and profitable models of Israeli educational institutions overseas, especially for young children (such as the JCC in Moscow) already exist. These institutions meet the need of many Israelis for a Jewish-national (as opposed to religious) educational system, and their establishment should be encouraged. Several countries, such as the US and France, operate an educational system overseas by sponsoring the operation of private schools to disseminate their values and educate according to them. The schools should combine a local curriculum with a Hebrew-language program that would be recognized by Israel's educational institutions for higher education credits or future employment, in order to encourage future connections with Israel and help students who wish to make Aliyah.

- **Complementing the above recommendation, in locations where there is no organized Israeli community, the Government of Israel should work together with local Jewish communities to accommodate children of Israelis within their educational frameworks and communal institutions.** The Jewish educational system appears to be the primary locus of first encounters between Israelis and Jewish communities abroad. It is recommended that the Government of Israel act to incentivize such encounters through dedicated budgets, supplying educational content, providing training for teaching staffs and more. An innovative approach in this regard would include GOI's encouragement of Jewish school principals to absorb children of Israeli descent by offering scholarships to every Israeli child attending the school, accompanied by a PR and marketing campaign to explain the initiative's importance.

- **Granting the right of absentee voting in Knesset elections to Israelis abroad for the first four years after leaving Israel, provided that voters register at an Israeli Consulate abroad or other authorized institution.** This recommendation is expected to mostly affect first generation emigrants, but since they are their children's primary agents of socialization, strengthening and preserving their attachment to Israel is expected to also affect their children. Involvement with Israel affairs is a vehicle for association and

motivation for Israelis abroad. In addition, for many, mostly secular Israelis, a political Israeli identity constitutes a means for expressing their ethnic identity. Preserving their involvement in the Israeli political system, whether by granting voting rights² or some manner of representation in a pan-Jewish body³ that could influence Israeli reality, would likely have a positive impact on the nature and intensity of their attachment to Israel.

- **The phenomenon of dividing time between Israel and a second country of residence among emigrants (instances of multi-localism) should be encouraged**, along with removing bureaucratic barriers to trans-nationality and promoting ongoing ties between emigrants and the State of Israel. This could take the form of exemptions and adjustments in matters of taxation, capital investment in Israel, removing barriers for living and studying in Israel for children of Israelis, especially through recognition of SAT scores, degrees and professional diplomas attained abroad, which would help children of Israelis to integrate into Israeli society.

- **Israel attachment and exposure have a significant impact on Israeli identity.** Actions such as promoting visits to Israel, favoring children of Israelis in high school programs and Birthright trips together with Jewish community members, seasonal airfare discounts for children of Israelis to encourage families to spend their vacations in Israel, or granting a free first semester in Israeli universities to children of Israelis, are some possibilities.

Research shows that parents have a major role in creating and cultivating an ethnic Israeli identity. It is therefore recommended that any new policy vis-à-vis second-generation emigrants should also apply to parents, including:

- a) Creating unique cyberspace-based study materials to aid parents and teachers, including virtual learning opportunities, uploaded textbooks, children's literature and plays.
- b) Raising awareness of Israeli parents to the need to develop their children's Israeli identity and to the sociological processes shaping the community of Israeli emigrants.

² Karasenty, Y., and Hakman, I. (2011). *Israelis absentee voting*. JPPI: Jerusalem [in Hebrew].

³ For proposals on this subject, see *World Forum for the Jewish People*. JPPPI: Jerusalem, 2005 [in Hebrew].

- c) **Improving Israel's image.** Children of the generation-and-a-half and second-generation emigrants are likely to choose to emphasize aspects of ethnic identity perceived as positive in their surroundings; conversely, they will likely hide those aspects perceived as negative. Actions should therefore be taken to reduce the 'price' of identification with Israel and to increase the incentives for such identification, emphasizing areas in which Israel has relative advantage.

Recommendations for Communities:

The relationship between the Jewish establishment (mainly in the USA, the main destination of emigrants) and Israeli emigrants has in the past been characterized by a mutual alienation fueled by two main sources: Zionist ideology and religious affiliation. Israelis have often regarded themselves as the representatives of a different and unique worldview and lifestyle (despite the fact that they elected to leave Israel). The communities, for their part, adopted the "Zionist view", regarding emigrants from Israel. This was manifested, among other ways, in the American Jewish establishment's treatment of Russian Jews as compared to Israeli emigrants in the US. In religious terms, even secular Israelis saw themselves as part of the Orthodox framework, and perceived the Jewish American experience as alien and often threatening. Such notions and sentiments still exist today, but their intensity has decreased. The second generation of Israelis, who grew up abroad and adopted local languages and customs, provides an opportunity for re-shaping the relationship between the two communities, so that they are based on deepening ties, partnership and reciprocity.

Given this reality, both parties must realize that the integration of Israelis and especially their children in the Jewish communities abroad could be a driver for demographic and identificational regeneration and thriving, which are vital to both sides, as well as for strengthening ties between Jewish communities abroad and the State of Israel.

Action Recommendations:

- **The involvement of Israelis in communities** abroad should be strengthened by integrating Israelis and children of Israelis in key roles in communal life, especially with regards to the formulation of educational policy and Israel-related cultural activities, **and in particular with regards to community outreach efforts toward Israelis.** Such integration is expected to contribute to Israelis' sense of communal belonging and increase their participation in activities and financial support.
- **The establishment of Jewish identity and identification frameworks with a national Israeli foundation** should be encouraged, to accommodate the ways in which Israelis perceive their Jewish identity and sense of belonging to the Jewish collective. Such frameworks would allow Israelis to participate and identify more easily. Joint celebration of national Israeli holidays could provide an opportunity for connecting the two communities.

As part of this effort, action should be taken jointly with the Government of Israel to establish Zionist-Jewish educational systems and to incorporate Israeli-related content in Jewish school curricula consistent with the Jewish-national identification of Israeli emigrants.

- **A joint task force of Jewish community representatives and Israeli emigrants** should be established, including Jewish educators and practitioners, with the aim of examining ways to adapt outreach efforts already made by Jewish communities toward less involved Jews, to targeting Israelis abroad, especially second-generation emigrants.
- **The range of possibilities for encounters between children of Israelis and members of the Jewish communities should be expanded** through joint cultural and recreational activities, youth movements, etc. Official Israeli institutions such as Israel House and Israeli Consulates should play a central role in implementing this recommendation.

Cooperative projects and initiatives targeting those currently not part of the discourse should be explored. The involvement model offered by the Chabad movement has become increasingly attractive for many Israelis abroad. The merit of adopting similar outreach models towards Israelis abroad, seeking more familiar patterns of Jewish affiliation, should be examined..