

## Aliyah From Russia Spikes Amid Dramatic Drop in Western Immigration to Israel

Real estate prices are particularly an issue, as is the uncertainty surrounding the Netanyahu government's planned judicial overhaul and the accompanying protests

**New immigrants landing in Israel. Aliyah from the United States has been slowing after a stellar 2021.**

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The first quarter of the year saw a downturn in aliyah from almost every country in the world except Russia. But with Russian immigration tripling in the period because of the war on Ukraine, the overall figure for the quarter was up.

Sharp drops were registered in [immigration from France](#) and the United States, two countries that have been key sources of aliyah in recent years. Analysts are attributing the downturn to Israel's rising cost of living – [especially real estate prices](#) – and growing political instability marked by the protests against [the hard-right government's plan to weaken the judiciary](#).

According to Jewish Agency figures obtained by Haaretz, 18,610 immigrants arrived in Israel between January and March this year, an increase of 24 percent from the same period last year. [Immigration from Russia](#) accounted for more than three-quarters of the total.

Many Russians have been fleeing their country to avoid being drafted into the army for the war on Ukraine, and amid the growing crackdown on human rights by the Putin regime.

[Immigration from Ukraine](#), by contrast, was down sharply in the quarter, after spiking last year following the Russian invasion. Many Ukrainians eligible for aliyah under [the Law of Return](#) have either fled abroad or returned to Ukraine. In the first three months of the year, only 861 Ukrainians immigrated to Israel, a plunge of 87 percent from the same period last year.

Asked for comment on the overall downtrend, the Jewish Agency said in a statement: “The Aliyah process is typically not immediate, and therefore a reflection of current trends on Aliyah numbers takes time. The Jewish Agency is working together with the Ministry of Aliyah and Integration on a variety of new initiatives to promote and support Aliyah.”

Immigration from the United States hit a nearly 50-year high in 2021, with more than 4,000 Americans moving to Israel. That followed a significant slowdown in 2020 that was attributed to the global pandemic.

Israeli immigration officials had expressed confidence that 2021's high numbers could be sustained, but the drop in aliyah from the United States in 2022 and the first quarter suggests that this view was overly optimistic.

In the first three months of this year, 391 American Jews moved to Israel, down by one-third from the same period last year. A spokeswoman for Nefesh B’Nefesh, the private organization that facilitates aliyah from North America, said the downturn reflected a readjustment back to pre-COVID levels.

“Aliyah continues throughout the year from both overseas and from within Israel, so it is best to compare the annual aliyah numbers on a whole when ascertaining trends and changes,” she said.

But according to Prof. Chaim Waxman, a professor of sociology in the behavioral sciences at Hadassah College and a professor

emeritus at Rutgers University, both the high cost of living and recent political developments also account for the drop.

“The cost of apartments in Israel is extremely high, and this is a major deterrent,” he said. “Aside from that, there are many concerns about some of the people holding leadership positions in the country, and that was evident even before the current wave of mass protests.”

He noted that [Israel's high-tech industry](#) was once considered a major draw for American immigrants, “but because of everything happening here in recent months, Israel is now less of a startup nation than it used to be.”

French immigration was down even more sharply in the quarter. According to the Jewish Agency figures, only 178 Jews immigrated to Israel from France in the first three months of the year, a tumble of nearly two-thirds.

Dov Maimon, a fellow at the Jewish People Policy Institute who specializes in French aliyah, attributed this downturn to what he called Israel's prohibitively high cost of living as well as the uncertainty surrounding the planned judicial overhaul and the accompanying protests. The key factors that once drove French aliyah were a weak local economy and antisemitism, he noted.

“Those problems persist and have even gotten worse,” Maimon said. “But the reason they’re not generating more aliyah is that Israel has less pull these days.”

Aliyah from South Africa, which spiked during COVID, was also down in the quarter, when 97 South African Jews moved to Israel, a fall of 27 percent. Dorron Kline, the CEO of Telfed, an organization that assists immigrants from South Africa, said the downturn was simply a return to pre-COVID levels of aliyah.

“Until COVID, many South African Jews believed that if things got really bad in the country, they could always jump on a plane to Israel,” he said. “COVID proved that this wasn’t always the case, and that’s what pushed up the numbers so much during COVID.”

Asked whether he believed the mass protests and questions about the future of Israeli democracy played a role in the drop this year, he responded: “Very little.”

Aliyah from Britain fell more than 50 percent in the quarter, with only 83 British citizens moving to Israel.