

I S R A E L

SECTION A

Capital

Jerusalem 633,000 (2000 est.)

Area

20,770 sq km (8,000 sq mi)

Form of government

Parliamentary democracy

GDP—per capita

Purchasing power parity— \$18,300 (1999 est.)

Population

5,842,454

Note: This count includes about 171,000 Israeli settlers in the West Bank, 20,000 in the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights, 6,500 in the Gaza Strip, and 172,000 in East Jerusalem (July 2000 est.)

Ethnic composition

Israel is a country of immigrants and its population is comprised of a mosaic people with varied ethnic backgrounds, lifestyles, religions, cultures and traditions. The Jewish people account for 80.5% of the total population of Israel.

European/American-born Jews	25.9%
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Israel-born Jews	61.6%
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African/Asian born Jews	12.5%
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Non-Jewish (mostly Arab)	19.5%
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Note: Percentages based on 1996 estimates.

Official language

Hebrew, Arabic for Arab minority

Other languages

English is the most commonly used foreign language and is taught in state schools. Yiddish, Egyptian Spoken Arabic, Levantine Bedawi Spoken Arabic, North Levantine Spoken Arabic, Dutch, some Western Farsi, French, Malayalam, Marathi, Spanish, Turkish, and numerous other languages and dialects spoken by smaller segments of population reflect the diversity of cultural origins

Legislation dealing with the use of languages

There are no constitutional provisions relating to linguistic rights.

Background notes

Independence was achieved on May 14, 1948 through a League of Nations mandate under British administration.

There is no formal Constitution in Israel. Many of the functions of a constitution are filled by such legislation as the Declaration of Establishment (1948), the Basic Laws of the parliament (Knesset), and the Israeli citizenship law.

The origins of the present-day struggle between Israel and Arab nations predate the creation of Israel. Throughout the early 20th century Palestine, as the birthplace of Judaism and site of the ancient Hebrew Kingdom of Israel, became a center of Jewish immigration, encouraged and organized by a movement known as Zionism. However, the Arab inhabitants of Palestine, which contained areas holy to their predominant religion of Islam, also felt entitled to the region. Jews and Arabs remained in conflict throughout the British administration of Palestine from 1918 to 1948. War between Israel and its neighbors broke out when Jews declared Israel's independence in 1948. In this and subsequent wars Israel acquired territory beyond its original boundaries.

As a result of the Six-Day War of 1967 Israel took and later annexed the Syrian territory of the Golan Heights, a claim not recognized by most nations. Israel also occupied the West Bank (formerly of Jordan) and the Gaza Strip (formerly of Egypt), areas now partially under Arab Palestinian administration. Even Jerusalem, the city Israel claims as its capital, remains an area of dispute. Predominantly Jewish West Jerusalem has been part of Israel since independence in 1948; Israel captured the mostly Arab city of East Jerusalem in 1967. Israel has since

claimed the entire city as its capital. However, the Palestinians and the United Nations do not recognize Jerusalem as Israel's capital.

These territorial conflicts, combined with continued Jewish immigration, have caused major changes in population structure since Israel's independence. Much of the Palestinian Arab population in the territory that became Israel fled during the 1948-1949 war and became refugees in surrounding Arab countries. Still more Palestinians fled from the areas captured by Israel in 1967 (known collectively as the Occupied Territories; often referred to in Israel as "administered territories"), and thousands of Jews have settled in these areas. Meanwhile, Jewish immigration continued. By the late 1990s Israel had absorbed 2.1 million immigrants.

Israel's JEWISH POPULATION is composed almost entirely of immigrants and the descendants of immigrants from all over the world. In 1997 some 38% of Israel's Jewish population was born outside of Israel.

The two main groupings of Jews are Ashkenazim and Sephardim. The Ashkenazim, whose tradition was centered in Germany in the Middle Ages, now include Jews of Central and Eastern European origin. They formed a majority at the time of Israeli independence and continue to dominate political life as well as the upper levels of employment and education. The Sephardim, whose tradition grew in Spain and Portugal in the Middle Ages, now include Jews with ancestry from the Middle East, North Africa, and the Mediterranean region. Sephardic Jews immigrated rapidly to Israel in the decades after independence. Historically the groups differ in religious rite, pronunciation of Hebrew, and social customs.

Israeli Jews share many unifying influences such as Judaic tradition, the Hebrew language, the Holocaust (the murder of millions of Jews in Europe by Nazi Germany), and the socialist ideals of the early Zionist pioneers in Palestine. Furthermore, most Israeli Jews share the formative experience of compulsory military service from age 18 and subsequent years of reserve service for one or two months per year. Many of Israel's rural Jews live in two types of cooperative communities, the kibbutz and the moshav. In a kibbutz, residents own all property collectively and contribute work in exchange for basic necessities. In a moshav, families own separate farms but cooperate in some aspects of agricultural marketing.

ARABS, those Palestinians who remained in the region after Israel's independence and their descendants, constitute almost all of Israel's non-Jewish population. Since Israel's occupation of the West Bank, Gaza Strip, East Jerusalem, and Golan Heights in 1967, Arabs in Israel have

had increased contact, and an increased sense of identity, with fellow Palestinians in those occupied areas. Despite legal equality and increased integration into Israel's economy, for the most part Arabs and Jews live in separate areas, attend separate schools, speak different languages, and follow different cultural traditions.

Arab citizens of Israel include a number of different, primarily Arabic-speaking groups each with distinct characteristics.

MUSLIM ARABS, numbering some 870,000, most of whom are Sunni, constitute 75% of the non-Jewish population. They reside mainly in small towns and villages, over half of them in the north of the country.

BEDOUIN ARABS, comprising nearly 10% of the Muslim population, belong to some 30 tribes, most of them scattered over a wide area in the south. Formerly nomadic shepherds, the Bedouin are currently in transition from a tribal social framework to a permanently settled society and are gradually entering Israel's labor force.

CHRISTIAN ARABS, who constitute Israel's second largest minority group, some 130,000, live mainly in urban areas including Nazareth, Shfar'am and Haifa. Although many denominations are nominally represented, the majority of them are affiliated with the Greek Catholic (42%), Greek Orthodox (32%) and Roman Catholic (16%) churches.

THE DRUZE, some 100,000 Arabic-speakers living in twenty-two villages in the northern part of Israel, constitute a separate cultural, social and religious community. While the Druze religion is not accessible to outsiders, one known aspect of its philosophy is the concept of taqiyya, which calls for complete loyalty by its adherents to the government of the country in which they reside.

THE CIRCASSIANS, comprising some 3,000 people concentrated in two northern villages, are Sunni Muslims, although they share neither the Arab origin nor the cultural background of the larger Islamic community. While maintaining a distinct ethnic identity, they participate in Israel's economic and national affairs without assimilating either into Jewish society or into the general Muslim community.

SECTION B

Where does one observe language to be a problem in the country?

Israel is a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, multi-religious and multi-lingual society. While groups are not separated by official policy, a number of different sectors within the society are somewhat segregated and maintain their strong cultural, religious, ideological and/or ethnic identity. The country is not a melting pot society, but rather more a mosaic made up of different population groups coexisting within the framework of a democratic state.

DISCRIMINATION AGAINST THE ARAB COMMUNITY

Israeli Arabs are not provided with the same quality of education, housing, employment, and social services as Jews. In addition, government is proportionally far lower in predominantly Arab areas than in Jewish areas.

Israeli Arabs are underrepresented in the student bodies and faculties of most universities and in the higher level professional and business ranks. Well-educated Arabs often are unable to find jobs commensurate with their level of education. Arab Ph.D.'s suffer the greatest problems in this regard. A small number of Israeli Arabs have risen to responsible positions in the civil service, generally in the Arab departments of government ministries. Arab citizens comprise only 6.2% of the civil service and less than 1% of the position in the four senior-most civil service grades. The Government has allocated only very limited resources to enforce the landmark 1995 legislation prohibiting discrimination in employment. Israeli Arabs are not allowed to work in companies with defense contracts or in security-related fields.

Arab children make up a quarter of the public school population, but government resources for them are less than proportionate to those for Jewish children. Many schools in Arab communities remain dilapidated and overcrowded, lack special education services and counselors, have poor libraries, and have no sports facilities. Arab groups also note that the public school curriculum stresses the country's Jewish culture and heritage. Israeli-Arab students are also not eligible to participate in a special education program to provide academic assistance to students from disadvantaged backgrounds. A petition was filed with the High Court of Justice in May 1997 charging that the Ministry of Education's refusal to provide this program to Israeli-Arab students was discriminatory. The Attorney general's office agreed that the policy

constituted impermissible discrimination but asked for 5 years to expand the program to Israeli-Arab students.

The use of language in everyday life e.g. education, broadcasting and other

Hebrew and Arabic are the official languages.

The official language of the Knesset and Courts is Hebrew, but Arab members may address the legislature in Arabic, with simultaneous translation provided.

The Jewish majority speaks a modernized derivative of the Hebrew language. Immigrants are given intensive instruction in Hebrew, but many continue to speak their native language at home.

Israeli Arabs speak the Arabic language. Both Hebrew and Arabic are taught in schools and used in legal affairs and in the legislature. Many Israelis speak English, Russian, or any of a number of other European languages. Some older Ashkenazi immigrants speak Yiddish, a Germanic language.

Jewish children attend either state secular or religious schools, both with instruction in Hebrew. Arab and Druze children attend separate schools emphasizing their history, religion, and culture, with instruction in Arabic. Some secondary schools specialize in technological, agricultural, military, or religious studies. There are also private religious schools affiliated with ultra-Orthodox groups and Christian denominations. Literacy rates are very high among youth in both communities and for both sexes.

Radio broadcasts, newspapers, and periodicals use several languages in addition to Hebrew and Arabic. Most daily newspapers were published in Hebrew, while others appeared in Arabic, English, Yiddish, Russian, Polish, Hungarian, French, and German, with weeklies adding even more languages to the list.

Israel has developed a language instruction model known as “ulpan” which is designed to help newcomer's function in a Hebrew-speaking environment as quickly as possible. The Hebrew word ulpan translates as teaching, instruction and study. Ulpan is a Hebrew language school that rapidly teaches adults basic Hebrew skills speaking, writing and comprehension-along with the fundamentals of Israeli culture, history, geography and citizenship. The first ulpan, Ulpan Etzion, was opened in Jerusalem in 1949. Today there are 220 ulpanim nationwide- teaching

27,000 students at 350 sites in cities, kibbutzim, factories, hospitals, army bases, universities, community centers and government offices. Teaching the ulpan way is built around conversation. Students speak, practice and repeat, absorbing the rules of language as they go along. Vocabulary is acquired through demonstration, not translation and often in the form of idioms and expressions rather than single words. Grammar is assimilated through intensive daily practice of language structures, not by rote.

This strong cultural framework to language teaching has made the ulpan attractive to other nations attempting to revive the lost languages of their own cultures. Azerbaijan, Wales, Catalonia and New Zealand have all modeled their language instruction on the ulpan. The Welsh have even retained the name “ulpan” for their language schools.

What else can be found about languages and minorities?

HEBREW LANGUAGE

The Hebrew language is one of the world's oldest languages, spoken and written today in much the same way as it was more than two thousand years ago. After ceasing to exist as a spoken language about 250 B.C., it was reborn as a modern language in the 19th century, and today is the principal language of Israel.

The history of the Hebrew language is usually divided into four major periods:

- Biblical or Classical Hebrew up until about the 1st century B.C., in which most of the Old Testament is written
- Mishnaic or Rabbinic Hebrew, the language of the Mishna (a collection of Jewish traditions), written about AD 200
- Medieval Hebrew, from about the 6th to the 13th century A.D., when many words were borrowed from Greek, Arabic and other languages
- Modern Hebrew, the language of Israel in modern times

Modern Hebrew is based on the biblical language and contains many innovations designed to meet modern needs. It is the only colloquial speech based on a written language. The pronunciation is a modification of that used by the Sephardic Jews rather than that of the Ashkenazi Jews. The old guttural consonants are not clearly distinguished (except by Oriental Jews) or are lost. The syntax is based on that of the Mishna. Word roots consist usually of only three consonants, to which vowels and other consonants are added to derive words of different parts of speech

and meaning. The language is written from right to left in a Semitic script of 22 letters.

The renaissance of Hebrew as a spoken language in the 19th century may be ascribed almost entirely to the efforts of one man: Eliezer ben Yehudah. He devoted his life to the revival of the language, and at the same time adapted it for modern use through the introduction of thousands of modern terms. Hebrew gradually came into use among the Jewish settlers in Palestine and became the official language of the newly created State of Israel in 1948. Today about 3 million people speak Hebrew either as their maternal, adopted, or religious tongue.

YIDDISH LANGUAGE

Yiddish is the language of the Ashkenazi Jewry (Central and Eastern European Jews and their descendants). It is written in the Hebrew alphabet and became one of the world's most widespread languages, appearing in most countries with a Jewish population by the 19th century. Along with Hebrew and Aramaic, it is one of the three major literary languages in Jewish history.

The basic structure of the Yiddish language is a medieval form of German with many borrowed words from Hebrew and a few other languages e.g. Russian. There are numerous flavors and accents of Yiddish, depending on location. Written Yiddish looks identical to Hebrew because it uses Hebrew alphabet letters and it is written from right to left. However, it does not employ the Hebrew vowel system of dots and dashes below the letters. Instead, Yiddish uses certain letters to represent vowels.

Millions of Yiddish speakers were victims of the Nazi Holocaust. The number of speakers was further reduced by official suppression in the Soviet Union, by the semiofficial antagonism of Israeli authorities zealously guarding Modern Hebrew, and through massive voluntary shifts to other primary languages in Western countries. The language nevertheless continues to flourish among the ultra-Orthodox Hasidim in numerous countries. It also has a strong presence among secular students of Yiddish at leading universities, including Columbia University (New York), Hebrew University (Jerusalem), McGill University (Montreal), the University of Oxford, and the University of Paris.

APPENDIX A

MAP OF ISRAEL



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