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Rise in numbers of Jews leaving for Israel from some European countries

Some European countries have seen an increase in the number of Jews leaving to live in Israel but the numbers fall short of an "exodus", according to a new study.

By Harriet Sherwood

World-Wide Religious News (12.01.2017) - <http://bit.ly/2jJlWyy> - The Institute of Jewish Policy Research compared recent trends of Jewish migration with cases of mass migration in response to persecution or major political upheavals in the past.

Jonathan Boyd, the IJPR's executive director, said: "There is no evidence of an exodus of Jews from Europe, even though the numbers of Jews emigrating to Israel from some countries in recent years – most notably France – are unprecedented."

He added: "It is clear that Jews in parts of Europe are genuinely concerned about their future, most likely because of antisemitism, but the levels of anxiety and apprehension are nowhere near those experienced during previous periods of intense stress, like the 1930s and 1940s. Drawing those types of parallels has no basis in empirical reality."

The IJPR looked at six countries – France, Belgium, Germany, Italy, Sweden and the UK, which account for about 70% of European Jews. It concluded there had been an increase in migration, especially from France, Belgium and Italy; but in the UK, Germany and Sweden levels of migration were not unusual.

Suggesting a definition of an exodus as 30% of the Jewish population, it said 4% of Jews in Belgium and France had left for Israel between 2010 and 2015. The proportion leaving from the UK, Germany and Sweden was between 0.6% and 1.7%.

The context, said the report, was a significant demographic transformation of Europe, with an inflow of migrants from the Middle East, north Africa and south Asia, which had implications for European culture, traditions and politics.

"It is against this background of demographic change and political reckoning that European Jews and Jewish communities try to orientate themselves. Irrespective of the degree of their religiosity and communal involvement, the process is neither easy nor light-hearted for most Jews," said the report.

"It takes place both in the shadow of the Holocaust, an event that showed to Jews and others the scale of possible tragedy when a small and vulnerable minority is drawn into ideologically-inspired military conflict, and in the context of painful and difficult discourse about the State of Israel that affects many Jews at a gut level."

It said the differences between the two groups of countries pointed to "the existence of two distinct post-2000s trajectories of migration to Israel", it said. "On the one hand,

there is the British pattern, constituted by the UK, Germany and Sweden, where 'business as usual' seemingly prevails, and on the other, there is the French pattern, constituted by France, Belgium and Italy, where new winds seem to be blowing."

According to a report by Human Rights First, antisemitic incidents in France doubled from 423 in 2014 to 851 in 2015 and were becoming increasingly violent. Figures collated by the UK's Community Security Trust suggested an 11% increase in antisemitic incidents in Britain in the first six months of 2016.

Daniel Staetsky, the author of the IJPR report, said: "European demographic and political landscapes are changing ... Large segments of Jewish populations in European countries perceive antisemitism to be on the increase. There is no perfect tool to measure the prevalence and strength of antisemitic attitudes in the general public, but some phenomena can be measured by their effects.

"Migration plays a very central role in Jewish demography, as Jews are known to move in response to a particularly acute deterioration in the political or economic situation. If Jews feel unwelcome in Europe, their movement out of Europe will serve as the first sure sign of that."

Two years ago, the Israeli prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, urged European Jews to migrate en masse to Israel following terrorist attacks in Paris and Copenhagen. "Israel is your home and that of every Jew. Israel is waiting for you with open arms," he said.

However, European politicians and Jewish community leaders called on Jews to stay in Europe, saying terror was not a reason to emigrate.

Report reveals poor living conditions in Saharonim detention facility

Israel Bar Association finds asylum seekers in southern detention facility are held in prison-like regime in cramped living spaces, no basic vaccines for infants, some cells without toilets

Y Net News (04.02.2014) - An official inspection report issued by the Israel Bar Association reveals evidence of harsh living conditions in Saharonim prison in south Israel. Bureau officials present a grim picture regarding the operation of the facility, protection of the detainees' rights, child care, medical system and social care.

The Saharonim facility, used to detain infiltrators, is the largest of its kind in Israel. While the inspection was conducted, men, women and children – all African, mostly Eritrean or Sudanese, were held there. Among the migrants detained in the facility are infiltrators, victims of human trafficking and victims of torture and sexual offences.

The authors of the report are attorneys Rachela Arel, Shelly Vaknin Adam and Oded Feller, who heads the immigration and status division at the Association for Human Rights in Israel, who were all appointed by Public Security Minister Yitzhak Aharonovitz.

According to the report, the living space for each detainee is smaller than that specified in the official standard, and the facility does not include almost any of the public functions that were decided upon in the standard. Despite the amendment to the law that requires the prolonged detention of the infiltrators, the authors of the report noted that no adjustments were made to the facility itself.

With no instruction book regarding prolonged detention, a prison routine is conducted in the center, with standard Israeli Prison Service (IPS) discipline to go along with it: The wings are locked, attendance counts are conducted three times a day, and the detainees are not permitted to go to other areas in the facility unless accompanied.

The report further shows that in some cases, the asylum seekers are tried and sent to isolation for up to a week at a time. In the 14th wing, designated for punishment, they are locked up in cells at all times of the day, apart from an hour and a half in the morning and an hour and a half in the afternoon.

Facility not equipped to treat kids

At the time of the inspection, children up to the age of 12, including infants, were held at the facility. A complaint that came up several times in the report was that there are not enough milk substitutes to feed the infants. Although a pediatrician did visit the facility twice a week, the infants did not receive vaccines or vitamins, and no development-tracking or instruction for parents was conducted, according to the report.

The head of the facility said that the issue of childcare will be regulated in the future. "The facility was not equipped for childcare, and children should not be held there," the report says.

Despite the fierce cold felt at the area during nights, the only wing in which heating is provided is that in which the mothers and children reside. No wing is equipped for a prolonged stay, or for the hot weather during the day. The showers and toilets are located in caravans.

The report also notes that the construction of the facility was not accompanied by an outline plan and no building permits were given. In one of the wings, detainees live in tents, with 16 crammed beds in each tent. In a different area titled Saharonim B, the cells do not include toilets.

In conversations with the authors of the report, the asylum seekers said that their complaints are not given sufficient weight. Most of them are dealing with severe mental distress due to their prolonged detention, and those who suffered from experiences of captivity, torture and sexual offenses show post-traumatic symptoms. The detainees shared with the inspectors their feelings of deep despair and lack of hope.

IPS: Report is biased, incorrect

The report cited that the IPS disapproved of the official inspection, and even moved to constrict their actions. It is to be mentioned that in the past two and a half years, the IPS did not allow journalists or media workers to visit the facility.

IPS officials told Ynet that "some of the claims put forth are incorrect and inaccurate," and said that childcare include transportation services to family health care centers, the testing of their development-tracking and a pediatrician on call.

An official report from the IPS said: "The Bar Association report was concluded in May 2013. Ever since, partly due to a change in legislation on the matter, the infiltrators conditions of detention have changed beyond recognition."

They further added that they only received the report seven months after it was conducted and they do not intend to take into account the deficiencies cited there as they are no longer relevant.
