

Israel lacks comprehensive immigration policy

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Dan Izenberg , THE JERUSALEM POST

The country's population increased by 10 percent over the past decade through non-Jewish immigration, and more than 50% of all its foreigners are undocumented, The Metzliah Center for Zionist, Jewish, Liberal and Humanist Thought said in a paper presented to President Shimon Peres on Thursday.

The study, carried out by professors Shlomo Avineri and Amnon Rubinstein and researcher Liav Orgad, also found that Israel is the only Western democracy that has no modern immigration law.

"Its institutions are unprepared to cope with the challenge, strategic thinking on the matter is lacking, it has no vision, it has not defined its long-term goals and targets, and it does not have a reliable statistical foundation to serve as a basis for determining policy.

Today's reality stems from ad hoc decisions, some of which are made arbitrarily by appointed civil servants and without a guiding hand," the researchers wrote.

In formulating an immigration policy and passing appropriate legislation, Israel must take into account the criteria that guide all Western countries, they said. These include security and public order, economic interests, intake capacity in terms of the number and types of immigrants, national identity and social-cultural characteristics, and the welfare system.

Beyond that, Israel must take into account the fact that it is a Jewish state whose purpose is to offer all Jews the right to self-determination, that it has been involved in an ongoing military conflict since it was established, that it is a developed country in a developing region, that it is a democracy in an undemocratic and unstable region, that it is small and therefore sensitive to social change, and that it is bound by ethical considerations in creating its immigration laws, especially when it comes to refugees.

According to the authors, Israel has no national interest in non-Jewish immigration.

Therefore, the guiding principle of its policy toward non-Jewish immigrants should be "hard outside/soft inside."

That means it should establish a rigid and selective policy regarding those who wish to come and live here, and a humane policy once the immigrant has been allowed in and lived here long enough, including the possibility of obtaining citizenship.

A proper immigration policy should include establishing clear criteria for granting entry permits, such as age, education, economic status, links to Israel or close family ties to an Israeli citizen, the researchers wrote. Immigrants should be made to declare that they recognize Israel's legitimacy. The same restrictions that apply to would-be immigrants according to the Law of Return should apply to other immigrants.

Special rules should apply regarding the acceptance of would-be immigrants from enemy countries or entities. The above rules should be effectively enforced. Illegal immigrants should be expelled.

Regarding refugees and asylum-seekers, Israel should adopt a liberal policy, based on the principles of the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and international human rights law, they wrote. "It should balance between the need to generously grant asylum and protection to refugees in an exemplary manner and the need to reduce the enormous

scale of the phenomenon and the improper exploitation of the law by those who are not refugees," the authors said.

After the meeting with Peres, the president said that "the state of immigration in Israel today is very poor and shameful and we must make efforts to change the situation." He instructed officials in the President's Office to keep in touch with Rubinstein, Avineri and professor Ruth Gavison, the president of Metzilah, and to organize a discussion on the matter with all those involved under the president's sponsorship.

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