



**THE MANY FACES OF ISRAEL**

**פְּנִיִּים רַבּוֹת לְיִשְׂרָאֵל**

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## ETHIOPIAN ISRAELIS

יִשְׂרָאֵלִים מֵאֶתְיוֹפְיָה



Most of the 125,000+ Israelis who trace their origins to Ethiopia either made aliyah since the mid-1980s or were born in Israel to immigrant parents. Ethiopians can be found across Israeli society—from Members of Knesset and army officers to doctors, teachers, and activists. The annual Sigd festival, marking the day they believe God revealed Himself to Moses at Mt. Sinai, takes place 50 days after Yom Kippur and has been added to Israel's official calendar. A memorial at Mt. Herzl commemorates those who died on the harrowing journey from Ethiopia to Israel; their memory is marked on Yom Yerushalayim in honor of the central place Jerusalem held in Ethiopian Jews' lives for centuries. Their traditional delicacies are featured in restaurants around the country, where airy injera bread is used to scoop meat, beans, and vegetables from communal plates.



## ISRAELIS FROM THE FORMER SOVIET UNION

יִשְׂרָאֵלִים מִבְּרִית הַמוֹעֲצוֹת לְשֶׁעֶבֶר



Some one million Israelis trace their origins to the mass immigration from the Former Soviet Union in the 1990s, joining those who made aliyah in the 1970s, making them the largest ethnic community among Israeli Jews. Many are not considered Jewish according to Israel's Interior Ministry; they were granted citizenship under the Law of Return due to their Jewish heritage. Broadly referred to as "Russians," they can be found in every part of society, including politics, law, media, academia, and more. Many continue to embrace their language and culture: the Geshar Theater highlights Russian culture, restaurants feature their cuisine, and prominent politicians champion a secular, super-patriotic form of Israeli-Jewish identity. Indeed, no other immigrant community in Israel's history has challenged the status quo on issues of religion and state as much as they have.



## MOROCCAN ISRAELIS

יִשְׂרָאֵלִים יוֹצְאֵי מְרוֹקוֹ



As hundreds of thousands of Jews immigrated to Israel in the early years after independence, the largest number came from Morocco. Jews had lived in this North African country for centuries, and many had close relations with their Muslim neighbors. However, in the aftermath of 1948, fearing for their safety and drawn by the promise of a better future as part of the Zionist enterprise, Moroccans settled in Israel. Moroccan Jews are integrated throughout Israeli life; some of the earliest Israeli films focused on Moroccan immigrants, and Omri Casspi, the first Israeli to play in the NBA, is Moroccan. Today, one million Israelis trace their origins to Morocco, making them the second-largest ethnic community among Israeli Jews. The traditional Moroccan Jewish holiday of Mimouna, celebrated with festive open houses the day after Passover, features rich honey-drenched pancakes called mufletta.



**DRUSE**

דְּרוּזִים



About 10% of the world's one million Druze live in Israel, while most of the rest reside in Syria and Lebanon. The Druze are a breakaway from Islam, but they are not considered Muslim. In Israel, they are recognized as an Arabic-speaking separate ethnic group. The Druze faith is closed to the outside world; they do not accept converts, and even most adherents never learn the details of their belief system. Reincarnation is central to the Druze faith: the body and the soul are eternal, and one cannot survive without the other, so reincarnation is said to occur immediately after death. The Druze believe in loyalty to the sovereign nation of wherever they live, a reason they broke with the Arabs of the region upon Israel's establishment. Druze men serve in the IDF, and the community willingly accepts the existence of the state.



# BEDOUIN

בְּדוּיָאִים



The Bedouin are a traditionally nomadic Muslim group in the Arab world. Approximately 250,000 Bedouin are citizens of Israel, where they live in all parts of the country, with the largest concentration in the Negev. Since 1967, when the government established Tel Sheva, the first permanent town for Israeli Bedouin, the community has been transitioning from their traditional way of life and embracing Western lifestyle. While today most live in permanent cities and towns, the government continues to navigate the tensions over unofficial communities and disputes over where Bedouin-owned livestock can graze. Many serve in the IDF, where their nomadic roots make them excellent trackers. Some receive support from organizations to help them adapt to 21<sup>st</sup> century life while preserving their traditions, including the rich culture of tent life, embroidery, and more.



## ARAB CITIZENS OF ISRAEL

עֲרָבִים אֲזְרָחֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל



Arabs comprise more than one-fifth of the citizens of Israel. While the Declaration of Independence guarantees all citizens equal rights regardless of ethnicity or religion, many Arab citizens struggle to see these values actualized in their lives. While the official term used most often to refer to this population group is Arab Israelis, many prefer to call themselves 1948 Arabs or Palestinian Israelis. They have full voting rights, and in the 2015 elections, the Joint Arab List became the third-largest party in the Knesset. Arabs attend all of the country's colleges and universities and work in every profession and sector of society. Many have relatives in the West Bank or Gaza—home to approximately four million Palestinians who are not citizens of Israel.



# JUDAISM, CHRISTIANITY, AND ISLAM

יְהוּדִים, נִצְרִיִּים, וְאַסְלָאִם



Israel is home to many of the holy sites of the three major monotheistic faiths. The country is committed to ensuring that all citizens are free to practice their religion. In accordance with the precedent set during the 400-year rule of the Ottoman Empire that ended in 1917, matters of personal status such as weddings and burials are handled only by the religious authorities of each recognized religion. Today, approximately 75% of the population is Jewish and about 20% is Muslim. Christians comprise a small minority of the total population. Nowhere do these three religious groups intersect more than in the Old City of Jerusalem, one of many sites in Israel with Biblical significance and filled with meaning for followers of all three faiths.





# LANGUAGES

שפות



When Eliezer Ben-Yehuda set out to revive the Hebrew language, he had a dream of turning what had long been thought of as a “dead language” into a modern, spoken tongue. Today, of course, Hebrew is the No. 1 official language of Israel, and it’s estimated that nine million people around the world speak the language. Hebrew and Arabic are Israel’s official languages, though English and Russian also get used a lot; most street signs throughout the country use Hebrew, Arabic, and English. In all, 35 languages are spoken on a regular basis in Israel—including Yiddish, Amharic, Romanian, German, French, Ladino, Spanish, and Israeli Sign Language.



# ACCESSIBILITY

# נגישות



With nearly one in five Israelis having a disability, the country prioritizes its efforts to become a global leader in ensuring accessibility and opportunities for all. Hotels and tourist attractions lead the way in making Israel open to people with disabilities; even Masada is wheelchair-accessible! Everything from wheelchair lifts on public buses to a wide range of technological innovations, special training programs, and legislation make it possible for people with disabilities to enjoy productive lives. Israel's strong showing at the Paralympics and laws mandating web access for people with disabilities are just a couple of examples of how the country leads the way. Nevertheless, there is still more room for growth in ensuring access, as the hilly terrain in much of the country poses challenges, as do the ancient streets and infrastructures in many cities.