

# Policy Brief

November 2024

## A surge in emigration from Israel during judicial coup attempt preceding the war

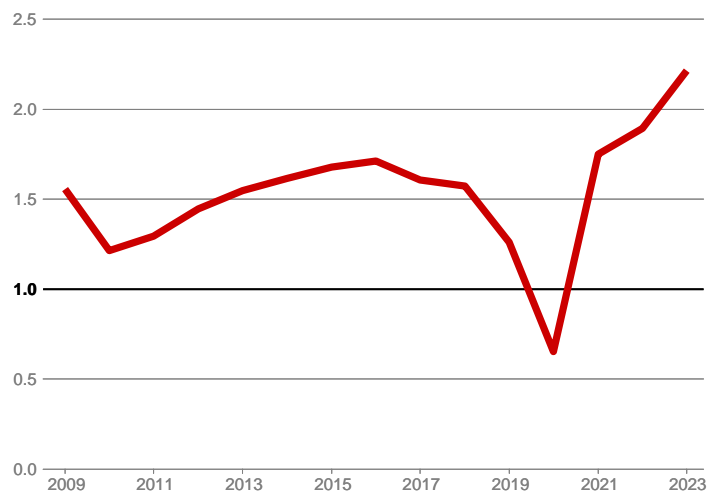
Dan Ben-David\*

During the nine months of the government's judicial coup attempt that preceded the outbreak of the October 7 war, the ratio between native-born Israelis who left the country and those who returned reached a peak unseen over the preceding decade and a half (Figure 1). To ensure comparability of annual findings, the data reported here reflects the first nine months of each year.

Israel's Central Bureau of Statistics lists emigrants in a given year as those who left and remained abroad at least 275 days out of the 365 days following their departure date (with first 90 days continuously abroad). Similarly, returnees

Figure 1

Ratio of native-born Israeli emigrants to returnees\*  
for January-September in each year, 2009-2023



\* The number each year is the ratio of those who left that year and were still abroad in the following year, relative to those who returned that year and were still in Israel in the following year. These are native-born Israelis who remained abroad, or in Israel, a minimum of 275 out of the 365 since their departure (with first 90 days continuously).

Source: Dan Ben-David, Shores Institution and Tel Aviv University  
Data: Eilat Cohen-Kastro, Marina Sheps, Alaa Atrash and Ahmad Hleihel from the Central Bureau of Statistics

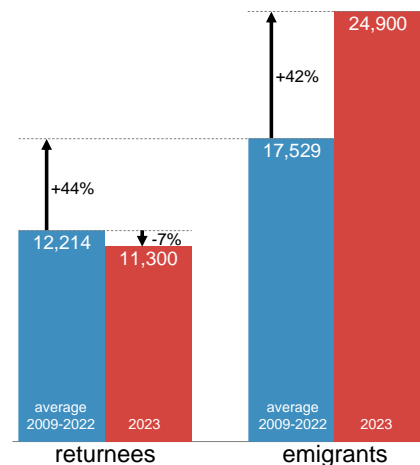
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include all those who lived abroad and returned to Israel for 275 days minimum of the 365 days following their return (with first 90 days continuously in Israel).

The CBS's upgraded measurement method goes back only to 2009 (previous measurements determined emigration/return on the basis of all 365 days abroad, or in Israel, respectively). Throughout the entire period since then, with the exception of 2020 (the year Covid broke out, there were fewer emigrants than returnees), the annual number of native-born emigrants has exceeded the annual number of native-born returnees. The last two years are exceptional in this regard. In each of them, the ratio of emigrants to returnees is higher than in the previous year – and higher than in each of the years since 2009.

An annual average of 17,529 native-born Israelis emigrated (during the first nine months per annum) in the period 2009-2022.<sup>1</sup> This was 44% higher than the average annual (first nine months per annum) number of native-born Israelis who returned (12,214) during the same period (Figure 2). The number of emigrants spiked dramatically, by 42%, to 24,900 native-born emigrants during the first nine months of 2023. They far exceed the 11,300 native-born Israelis who returned that same year, a number that itself was 7% below the multi-year average in 2009-2022. The resultant gap of 13,600 net native Israeli emigrants in 2023 was 2.6 times the average gap during the preceding period from 2009 to 2022.

Figure 2  
 Number of native-born Israeli emigrants and returnees\*  
 during January-September in each year, 2009-2023



\* Each year represents the number of those who left that year and were still abroad in the following year, and those who returned that year and were still in Israel in the following year. These are native-born Israelis who remained abroad, or in Israel, a minimum of 275 out of the 365 days since their departure (with first 90 days continuously).

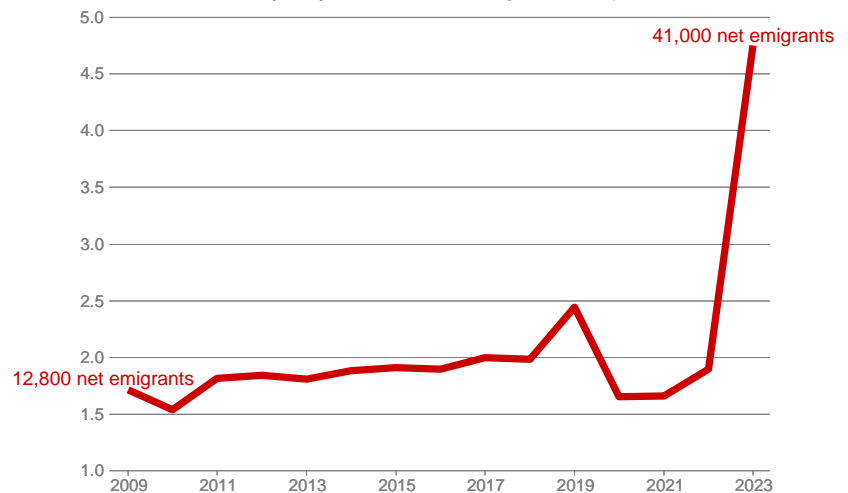
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<sup>1</sup> When excluding the Covid year, the average number of native-born Israelis who emigrated during the first nine months per annum during the years 2009-2022 was 17,962 while the average number of returnees was 11,738.

There are those who believe that olim (new immigrants to Israel) can more than compensate for those Israeli's who leave the country. The actual migration numbers suggest that just the opposite is true (Figure 3), with net emigration among foreign-born Israelis considerably higher than among the native-born. The emigration to returnee ratio among foreign-born Israelis has grown over most of the period, with a particularly sharp spike upwards in 2023. However, much of this latter data is significantly influenced by Russians and Ukrainians who immigrated during the war between their two countries, became Israeli citizens, and left Israel shortly thereafter.

It will be necessary to wait another year to know what happened during the first year of the October 7 war – and much more time thereafter to understand whether the worst crisis since Israel's independence will constitute a turning point in emigration from the country. What is important to emphasize is that this future has not yet been written. It depends greatly on changes, if any, in the social, economic, and political direction of the State of Israel.

Figure 3  
 Ratio of foreign-born Israeli emigrants to returnees\*  
 for January-September in each year, 2009-2023



\* The number each year is the ratio of those who left that year and were still abroad in the following year, relative to those who returned that year and were still in Israel in the following year. These are native-born Israelis who remained abroad, or in Israel, a minimum of 275 out of the 365 since their departure (with first 90 days continuously).

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