

IMMIGRATION TO ISRAEL

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A. Immigration to Israel according to the Law of Return

1. Immigration from Non- Former Soviet Union / East European Countries

According to Israeli Law of Return any Jew is entitled by right to immigrate to Israel (the "Right of Return"). This also applies to the spouse, children and grandchildren of a Jew, and to the spouse of such children or grandchildren, even if they themselves are not Jewish. The Jewish person, by virtue of whom the Right of Return is being claimed, need not be alive at the time of immigration and need not immigrate himself.

For the purpose of the applying the Right of Return, a "Jew" is defined as anyone who was born to a Jewish mother or has been converted to Judaism, and is not a member of another faith.

The visa granted under the Law of Return is known as an "*Oleh Visa*". The *Oleh Visa* is to be applied for and obtained at the Israeli Consulate nearest the place of residence of the immigrant. An individual, who has entered Israel on a Tourist Visa and is entitled to immigrate under the Law of Return, may file an application for change of status with the office of the Ministry of Interior nearest his place of residence.

2. Immigration from non- former Soviet Union / East European countries

If the prospective immigrant is a citizen of the former Soviet Union or of any other East European country the application for the *Oleh Visa* must be filed with an office of the Jewish Agency abroad or an Israeli Consulate and is then processed by the "Prime Minister's Office - the Contact Bureau" ("*lishkat hakesher*" in Hebrew).

The Contact Bureau will require originals of documents issued prior to 1990, which may serve as proof of the applicant being a Jew or a family member of a Jew entitled to immigrate to Israel under the Law of Return.

3. Acquiring Israeli Citizenship

Israeli citizenship is awarded automatically to a person having immigrant status ("*Oleh* "), upon the expiry of 90 days after his entry into Israel, unless he opts not to become a citizen (i.e. files a declaration to that effect at the Ministry of Interior) during that period, or prior to his arrival in Israel.

The immigrant is not required to stay in Israel during the 90 days in order to acquire the citizenship. He may leave on his foreign passport, but he must obtain an "exit permit" from the Ministry of Interior, which is only a formality and is normally granted automatically.

If the immigrant opts to refuse Israeli citizenship, then his status remains that of an *Oleh* and a permanent resident.

B. Naturalization

A person, who is not an Israeli citizen, may obtain Israeli citizenship by naturalization, provided that such person:

- Is in Israel;
- has spent at least 3 out of the 5 years period to filing the application;
- Is entitled to permanent residency status;
- Has settled in Israel or intends to do so;
- Has certain knowledge of the Hebrew language;
- Has renounce previous citizenship, or has proven that he will cease to be a foreign citizen when he becomes an Israeli citizen.

C. Permanent Residency

A non-Jew may apply for permanent residence status if the applicant can show special reasons for wishing to live in Israel. The granting of such status is at the complete discretion of the Minister of the Interior and is rather rare. Christian clergy are the most common example for obtaining this status.

D. Other Entry Visas and Permits

1. Tourist Visa and Permit

A Tourist Visa and Permit (B/2) for citizens of most countries is issued upon entry into Israel, and is limited to an initial period of 3 months. Citizens of certain countries may be required to apply for the Tourist Visa at the Israeli Consulate nearest their place of residence.

The Tourist Visa and Permit may be extended by a maximum of 2 years.

2. Temporary Resident Visa and Permit

A Temporary Resident Visa and Permit may be issued initially for a maximum period of 3 years, and may be extended by periods of up to 2 years each.

A person entitled to immigrate to Israel under the Law of Return, and who wishes to spend up to 3 years in Israel in order to explore the possibility of settling in Israel as a new immigrant, may also apply for a Temporary Resident Visa and Permit.

3. Work Permit and Visa

In order for a non-resident foreign national to be employed in Israel, he must be in possession of a B/1 Visa and Permit, which entitles him to work in Israel. Persons entering Israel on a Tourist Visa and Permit (B/2) are not permitted to work in Israel. A B/1 Visa and Permit will not be granted to an individual whose passport expires less than six months from the date of issuance of the visa.

3.1. Standard Application

An application for the B/1 Visa and Permit may be filed either at the Israeli Consulate nearest to the place of residence of the applicant, or in Israel. In both cases, however, before the Ministry of Interior will issue the Visa, it requires that the Ministry of Trade and Commerce - upon application by the prospective Israeli employer - issue a work permit as a precondition for issuance of the B/1 Visa and Permit.

Once the Ministry of Trade and Commerce has issued the work permit, it is sent to the Israeli employer, to be submitted later on to the Ministry of Interior together with the formal application for the Visa.

Upon receipt of the B/1 Visa and Permit, long term Tourist Visas and Permits (6 to 12 months) are usually obtained for family members, and these may be extended if necessary.

3.2. Applicants Eligible for Immigration under the Right of Return

Applicants, who are eligible for immigration under the Law of Return, may obtain a six-months B/1 Visa and Permit without needing a work permit from the Ministry of Trade and Commerce, provided they are under the age of 35, have spent less than 2 years in Israel prior to filing the application, and are not from a former communist country. The application must first be processed through the Information Center of the Jewish Agency in Israel.

The six-months B/1 Visa and Permit may be renewed for an additional six months, by re-applying for the B/1 Visa and Permit according to the same process as described above. Any further extension must go through the regular channels, i.e. through the Ministry of Trade and Commerce.

E. Issuance of Israeli passport

Although every Israeli citizen has the right to obtain an Israeli passport, it is at the Minister of Interior's discretion to issue a *laissez-passer* to a citizen whose citizenship is "undefined or questionable". Accordingly, it is the practice of the Ministry of Interior to issue a *laissez-passer*, instead of a regular passport, to an Israeli citizen during his first year of citizenship.

Upon application, a regular Israeli passport will be issued after the first year, provided the applicant can show that he has resided in Israel for a whole year and that it is his intent to transfer the center of his life to, and settle in, Israel.

Except where Israeli citizenship was acquired by way of naturalization, an Israeli citizen is not required to renounce prior citizenships, and may acquire others. An Israeli citizen, however, must exit and enter the country using his Israeli *laissez-passer*, or Israeli passport, as the case may be.

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