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Item 8 – Constructing assumptions for migration: data, methods and analysis

Prospective immigration to Israel through 2030: methodological issues and challenges

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ABSTRACT

In this paper we present an estimate of expected immigration to Israel within the next number of decades, including of amounts, countries of origin, and possible demographic implications. Future immigration to Israel is difficult to predict by using existing demographic methods, since it is largely affected by political and economic developments in Israel and the sending countries as well. Despite that, we would like to suggest three possible scenarios – high, medium and low - for future immigration through the year of 2030. The assumptions for future immigration are based on recent immigration trends and information on current Jewish population outside Israel, who constitute the main source of immigration to Israel. In each scenario total immigration will diminish over time, though the extent of reduction is changing.

1. INTRODUCTION

The immigration of the Jewish population to Israel (including their non-Jewish family relatives) has been a significant component in the growth and development of the Israeli state. Thus, Israel can be defined as a state of immigrants. Since its founding in 1948, Israel has absorbed around 3 million immigrants, mainly through waves of mass immigration from different geographic areas around the world, creating a diverse population in terms of cultural and socioeconomic status, as well as demographic differences (Sicron, 2004).

The importance of immigration to the size and structure of the population in Israel is reflected in the high share of net migration of total population growth. Thus, nearly 40 percent of the total increase of the Israeli population, from the State's founding until 2008, is due to migration balance (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2009b:89). Consequently, Israel has a relatively high percent of foreign born citizens: Almost 30 percents of the Jewish population in Israel today were born abroad, while in earlier periods their share was even higher: around 40 percent in the 1980s, over 50 percent in early 1970s and nearly two thirds in 1948 (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2009b:158; Sicron, 2004:57).

Therefore, estimates of future immigration to Israel and its demographic characteristics are invaluable for calculating projections for the total population of Israel.

2. THEORIES OF MIGRATION

Migration is the most volatile component of population growth, since it is highly susceptible to economic, social and political factors that can change abruptly. Therefore, it is more difficult to project future trends in migration than in fertility or mortality. In addition, there is no single, compelling theory of migration; hence, projections are generally based on past trends and current policies (O'Neill et al. 2001; Smith et al. 2001).

There are a number of theories that attempt to explain migration from different disciplinary perspectives. For example, economic approaches to international migration focus on differentials in wages and employment conditions between countries. These theories see individuals as rational actors who decide to migrate after considering the estimated benefits against the costs of moving in order to maximize their income (O'Neill et al. 2001; Massey et al. 1993).

However, economic incentives are only partial explanation for international migration, and political factors should also be taken into consideration, such as migration policies. Other factors include the need to escape from life-threatening situations, the existence of kin or other social networks in destination countries, and changes in cultural perceptions of migration in sending countries that are induced by migration itself (O'Neill et al. 2001).

The Jewish immigration to Israel was mainly dominated by "push" factors, such as responsiveness to crisis. Many Jews have immigrated to Israel as a result of national and religious persecutions and Antisemitism, for example, the migration of Jewish communities from predominantly Muslim countries in Asia and Africa and Holocaust survivors, mainly from Eastern Europe. In other cases an economic crisis in the country of origin played an important role, for example, the cases of immigration from the Former Soviet Union (FSU) and from Argentina (DellaPergola et al., 2000; Sicron, 2004).

On the other hand, many Jewish immigrants came to Israel on ideological/ Zionistic and/or religious grounds. This especially characterized the migration from Western Europe and North America (Sicron, 2004). It should be noted that the decision to immigrate to Israel was sometimes affected by both push factors (economic crisis, discrimination on religious grounds) and pull factors (living in a Jewish state) combined (Rosenbaum-Tamari, 2004).

Therefore, the immigration to Israel is rather unique in terms of motivations to immigrate. While international migration is usually explained by economic opportunities and labor market conditions, the immigration to Israel was mainly driven by political and ideological factors. In addition, there are other regulations, specific to Israel, which encourage Jewish immigration. For example, the Jewish Agency promotes and facilitates Jewish immigration to Israel from many different countries. Moreover, the government provides financial assistance and support in housing and employment for immigrants in their first years of arrival.

3.   IMMIGRATION TO ISRAEL, 1948-2008

Jewish immigration to Israel was legally established in 1950, when the Knesset adopted the Law of Return, which determines the right of every Jew to immigrate to Israel and become an Israeli citizen. Moreover, a child or a grandchild of a Jew, a Jew's spouse and a spouse of the child or grandchild of a Jew who are not Jewish themselves are also entitled to this right, according to the amendment to the Law of return in 1970 (Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2001).

Two thirds of the total of 3 million immigrants, who arrived in Israel since 1948 came from Europe and America, over half of them from the FSU. Another third originated in Asia and Africa. The immigration to Israel has always been characterized by waves of immigration of a few years, followed by low periods which lasted about the same time (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2009a).

During the three years following the founding of the State (1948-1951), the Jewish population doubled with the arrival of 690,000 immigrants. Nearly half of them came from Moslem countries in the Middle East and North Africa, while the rest were primarily European, including many refugees from World War II (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2009a; Friedlander, 2002).

Between 1952 and 1968 there were more moderate waves of immigration, with a total of 600,000 immigrants who arrived in Israel throughout this period. Three quarters of them came from Arab countries in North Africa, and the rest were from East Europe (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2009a).

After the Six-Day War (1967), the number of immigrants from western countries, including Western Europe, North and South America, and Australia increased, and they constituted a third of the total of 280,000 immigrants which arrived in 1969-1974. The majority of immigrants from this period came from the FSU (ibid).

This wave was followed by the longest decline of immigration in Israel's history, which lasted for 15 years (from 1975 to 1989), with an average of less than 20,000 immigrants per year (ibid).

The period of low immigration to Israel ended in 1989, with the fall of the Iron Curtain. By the end of this year thousands of Soviet Jews were given a permission to leave the Soviet Union, as a result of a liberalized emigration policy (Moore, 1992).

This change of policy led to a massive wave of immigration from the former Soviet Union which lasted throughout the 1990s and the beginning of the 2000s. The highest number of immigrants from the FSU arrived in 1990-1991 (nearly

350,000), and since then (with the exception of 1999) there was a moderate but steady decline in the number of immigrants arriving each year (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2009a).

Overall, during the years 1990 and 2001 more than one million immigrants arrived in Israel, most of them (86%) came from the former Soviet Union. In addition to that, around 40,000 immigrants arrived from Ethiopia in a special governmental operation (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2009a).

The last wave of mass immigration increased the Israeli population by 20 percent and had a significant influence on the population's structure as well, as the immigrants from FSU were characterized with a significantly lower fertility rate than that of the Israeli Jewish population and an older age structure. The Ethiopian immigrants who arrived at the same time were quite the opposite in demographic terms, with relatively high fertility levels and a younger age structure. However, the weight of the latter within the total immigration in this period was much lower (Sicron, 2004).

In addition to the immigrants who come to Israel under the Law of Return, the immigration to Israel includes also "immigrating citizens", who were born to an Israeli citizen during his stay abroad and enter Israel with an intention to settle. Most immigrating citizens are children aged 0-4, nearly half of them are from the United States and around 40% are from Europe. There are approximately 3,500 immigrating citizens entering Israel each year (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2009a).

Another source of immigration to Israel is "family reunification", which refers to people who receive a permanent resident status in Israel under the Law of Entry. These usually include non-Jews who were unable to receive permanent resident status under the Law of Return. In most cases these immigrants are non-Jews spouses or first kin of citizens or permanent residents of Israel (Hleihel, 2009). The scale of family reunification is approximately 4,500 persons a year.

However, the main interest of the current work is to follow the Jewish immigration, which constitutes the largest segment of the total immigration to the state of Israel.

FIGURE 1: IMMIGRANTS BY YEAR OF IMMIGRATION AND LAST CONTINENT OF RESIDENCE*
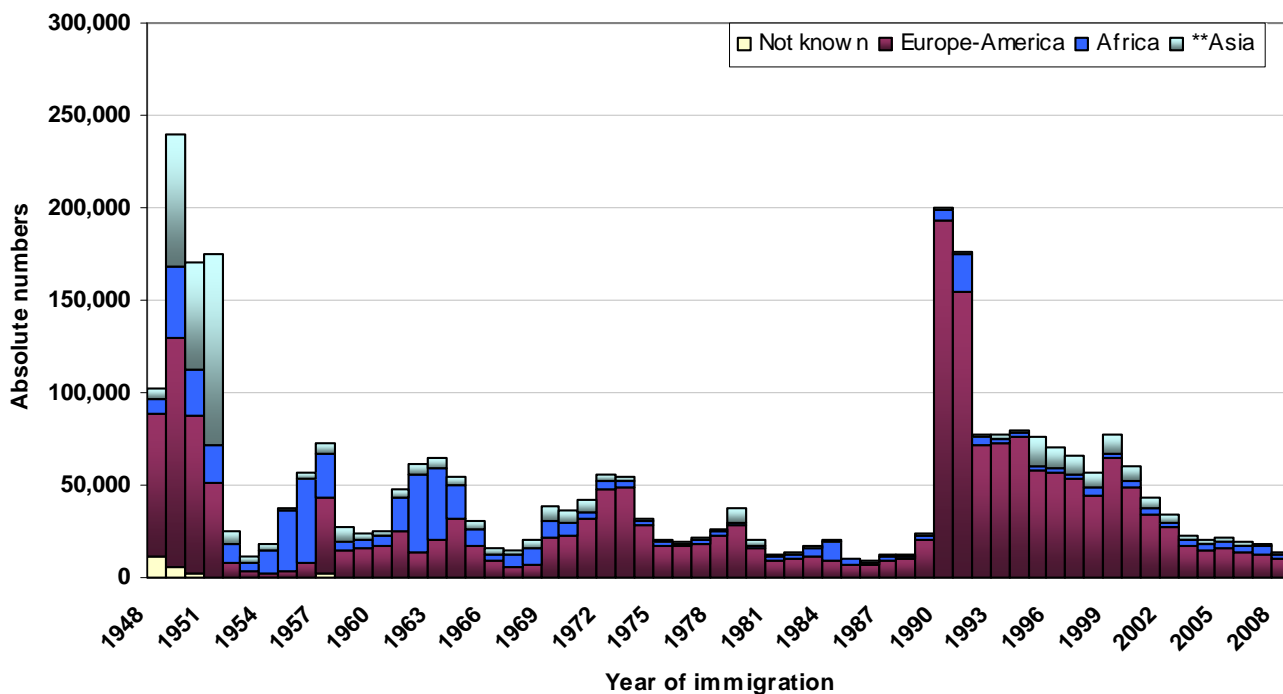
*Excluding immigrating citizens and family reunification.

** As of 1995, "Asia" also includes immigrants born in the Asian republics of the FSU.

4.   PROJECTING FUTURE IMMIGRATION

The main source of immigration to Israel is the Jewish population outside of it. Hence, its size and demographic trends are important for estimating the prospective immigration to Israel (Sicron, 2004). It should also be noted that Israel has no defined immigration quota, so there is no upper limit to the number of prospective Jewish immigrants.

At present, the largest Jewish community outside Israel is found in the United States, with a core Jewish population that is estimated at 5.3 million . Another large community is located in France, with nearly half a million Jews. The Jewish population in Canada is estimated at 375,000 and in the United Kingdom, there are almost 300 thousands Jews (DellaPergola, 2009). The Jewish population in the former Soviet Union diminished from 1.5 million in 1989 (DellaPergola et al., 2000:138) to nearly 340,000 in 2008, the majority of them (60%) reside in the Russian Federation (DellaPergola, 2009).

The migration potential to Israel from the Middle East, North Africa, Ethiopia, Eastern Europe and the Balkans is limited, since most of the Jewish population there has already moved out, either to Israel or to North America and Western Europe. It should also be noted that unlike the Jewish population in Israel, the Jews outside of Israel have a negative population growth rate, mainly as a result of low fertility levels (between 0.9 to 1.7 children) and an older age structure in most Diaspora communities. In addition to that, there is an increasing phenomenon of intermarriage and assimilation among Diaspora Jewry (DellaPergola et al., 2000).

In recent years, the former Soviet Union is still the largest source of immigration to Israel, although the number of immigrants is in a constant decline. Thus, their share among all immigrants has dropped by more than half (from 65% in 1999-2003 to 29% in 2004-2008). On the other hand, there was a slight increase in the number of immigrants from the United States and France, which constituted together 16 percent of all immigrants in 2004-2008. Another major source of immigration to Israel in recent years is Ethiopia, which constituted 12 percent of all immigrants in this period, although it is assumed that most of the Jewish population in Ethiopia has already immigrated to Israel. Between the years 2004-2008 an average of 27,000 immigrants arrived in Israel each year, including immigrating citizens and family reunification (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2009b).

In the next section, we will describe the methods that are being used to estimate the number of immigrants that are expected to arrive in Israel in the coming years.

5.   DATA AND ASSUMPTIONS

The immigration data is based on files received from the Ministry of the Interior, based on data reported on the Immigrant Registration Questionnaire. These questionnaires are completed by all immigrants upon arrival to Israel, and include details on country of birth, last country of residence, citizenship, date of birth, sex, marital status, occupation abroad, number of accompanying the head of family, years of schooling, and first address in Israel (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2009a). The immigration data for Israel are considered to be of high quality (Hleihel, 2009).

In order to construct scenarios of future immigration to Israel, we divided the different sources of immigration into seven major groups and specified three alternatives (high, medium and low) for each one. The total prospective immigration to Israel is the sum of the high, medium and low scenarios of each group.

The projections are sub-divided into five years periods: 2006-2010, 2011-2015, 2016-2020, 2021-2025, and 2026-2030, while the first period is partially based on observed records from 2006-2008. Therefore, the projection for 2006-2010 is identical for all three alternatives. In most sources of immigration the assumption for the medium scenario is the average number of immigrants during the last decade: 1999-2008. However, in cases of a constant decline in the number of immigrants arriving each year, or when the potential for future immigration is weak, we assumed a continued decrease for the medium alternative. The specific assumptions for each source of immigration are described below.

6.   SCENARIOS OF FUTURE IMMIGRATION

The first grouping of immigrants is sourced in the former Soviet Union, which constitutes the largest source of immigration to Israel. Despite that, there is a constant decrease in the number of immigrants from the FSU since the year 2000. Thus, all three alternatives assume that the number of immigrants from the FSU will continue to drop, but in a different rate: the high alternative assumes a reduction from 33,000 in the first period to 21,000 immigrants in 2026-2030, while the medium and low alternatives assume a sharper decline until the last period of projection (10,000 and 5,000 respectively).

The second group includes two countries: the United States and France. These countries have been a steady source of immigration to Israel throughout the last 30 years, with an annual average of nearly 2,000 immigrants from each country. The high alternative assumes a gradual increase from 21,000 immigrants in the first period of the projection to 29,000 in 2026-2030. The rational for the increase is the slight increase in the number of immigrants from these countries during the last decade. In addition to that, there is a large Jewish population in these countries and therefore the potential for immigration to Israel is relatively high. The medium alternative is the fixed average immigration throughout the years 1999-2008, which was 18,000. The low alternative offers a gradual decrease from 21,000 to 13,000, similar to the figures that were recorded in late 1980s.

The third group is Ethiopia, from where Jewish migration to Israel was almost non-existent until the 1980s. During the period 1980-2008 most of the Jewish population in Ethiopia was brought to Israel (over 80,000 immigrants) (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2009a). The remaining of Ethiopians with a (limited) eligibility to immigrate to Israel, are estimated at less than 9,000 people.

Therefore, the high alternative is that in the upcoming years the immigration from Ethiopia will decline gradually to a level of 1,000 immigrants in 2026-2030, while the medium scenario is that the immigration will be ceased by 2020. The low alternative assumes that the immigration flow from Ethiopia will cease in the next few years and be close to zero throughout the entire projection period.

The fourth group is Argentina, from which around 1,000 immigrants arrived each year between 1980 and 2001. The exception year was 2002, when a particularly high volume of immigrants – nearly 6,000 - came to Israel as a result of the severe economic crisis in Argentina. However, in the following years there was a sharp decrease in the immigration flow from Argentina to Israel, and the number of immigrants was reduced to less than 500 a year. Therefore, the high alternative is based on the average immigration in 1999-2008, which includes the peak year of 2002. The medium projection is the average of the same period of time, excluding the year 2002. The low alternative is based on the last three years (2006-2008) in which the immigration from Argentina was in a low point.

Immigration from other countries: Throughout the 1980s, an average of 6,000 immigrants arrived each year from this group. Since then, their number decreased by half and estimated today at around 3,000 immigrants per year. The high and the medium alternatives are a fixed number of 16,000 throughout the projection period, same as the average number in 1999-2008. According to the low assumption, there will be a moderate decrease from 16,000 to 8,000 immigrants at the end of the projection period, decline that is similar to the one that occurred between 1980s and 2000s.

The last two groups of immigration to Israel include immigrating citizens and family reunification: From 1986 to 1996 the number of immigrating citizens doubled from 2,000 a year to nearly 4,000. However, throughout the last decade their number stabilized at 3,600 people each year. Therefore, we suggest for the high alternative an increase from 18,000 in 2006-2010 to 22,000 at the end of the projection period. For the medium and low alternatives, we assume a fixed number of 18,000 immigrating citizens for all periods of projections.

The component of family reunification is the most difficult to project, since it is highly dependent on governmental policies. During the last five years (2004-2008), this figure was stable around 4,800 immigrants a year. In the high scenario, there will be an increase from 25,000 in 2006-2010 to 29,000 in the last projection period. The medium scenario is based on the fixed average of 2004-2008: 24,000 immigrants. The low scenario suggests a gradual decline to 20,000 immigrants in 2026-2030, similar to the level in 2001-2005.

The sum of immigration projections from each source provide us with three different alternatives for the total immigration to Israel:

1. High scenario – throughout the projection period (2006-2030) a total of 623,000 immigrants will arrive in Israel. Their number is expected to decline from 129,000 in 2006-2010 to 122,000 in 2016-2020 and increase to124,000 in the last projection period. On average nearly 25,000 immigrants would arrive each year.

2. Medium scenario – during the years 2006-2030 a total of 522,000 would immigrate to Israel - on average about 21,000 immigrants each year. Their number is expected to decrease every period from 129,000 to 89,500 at the end of the projection period.

3. Low scenario – a total of 444,000 immigrants would arrive to Israel throughout the projection period, with a decrease from 129,000 in 2006-2010 to 65,000 in 2026-2030. On average, about 18,000 immigrants would arrive every year during the years 2006-2030.

Table 1: Observations and projections of the immigration to Israel*

Source of Immigration	Observations		Projections			
	1996-2000	2001-2005	Alternative	First Period 2006-2010	Last Period 2026-2030	Total 2006-2030
Total Immigration	**372,000**	**180,500**	**High**	**129,000**	**124,000**	**623,000**
			Medium		**89,500**	**522,000**
			Low		**65,000**	**444,000**
Former Soviet Union	277,000	84,000	High	33,000	21,000	135,000
			Medium		10,000	104,000
			Low		5,000	84,000
United States and France	16,000	18,000	High	21,000	29,000	125,000
			Medium		18,000	93,000
			Low		13,000	79,000
Ethiopia	11,000	16,000	High	15,000	1,000	23,000
			Medium		-	19,000
			Low		-	15,000
Argentina	5,000	9,500	High	1,000	6,000	25,000
			Medium		3,500	15,000
			Low		1,000	5,000
Other Countries	21,000	15,000	High	16,000	16,000	80,000
			Medium		16,000	80,000
			Low		8,000	60,000
Immigrating Citizens	19,000	18,000	High	18,000	22,000	100,000
			Medium		18,000	90,000
			Low		18,000	90,000
Family Reunification	23,000	20,000	High	25,000	29,000	135,000
			Medium		24,000	121,000
			Low		20,000	111,000

* The full projection appears in Appendix 1.

Overall, it can be seen that the number of immigrants arriving to Israel is expected to decrease under every alternative of the future projections. The main explanation for the vast decline is the ending of the period of mass immigration from the former Soviet Union and the exhaustion of immigration from other regions, such as Ethiopia.

Moreover, considering the constant negative population growth of Diaspora Jewry throughout the last decades, a rise in the number of immigrants arriving in Israel seems unlikely.

7. DISCUSSION

Immigration to Israel has played an important role in the growth and development of the state, and has had a crucial influence on the demographic characteristics of the Israeli Jewish population. However, in recent years immigration to Israel has become less prominent, both in absolute terms and in relation to the total population. This trend is expected to continue in the future, as the sources of potential immigration to Israel are shrinking.

The main reason for the reduction in the number of immigrants is the fact that most of the Jewish populations in countries that constitute the main source of immigration to Israel (the former Soviet Union and Ethiopia) have already moved there.

Today, the vast majority of the Jewish Diaspora is located in western countries in North America and Western Europe (especially the United States, France, Canada, and the United Kingdom). The share of immigrants coming to Israel from these countries has been relatively small. Therefore, the potential immigration to Israel today is lower than in previous periods (DellaPergola et al., 2000; Sicron, 2004).

Another reason for the shrinking sources of immigration is the negative natural increase of the Jewish Diaspora, and a generally negative balance of accessions to and secession from Judaism.

These developments, in addition to immigration data from past years, formed the basis for the assumptions of future immigration to Israel presented in this paper. All three alternatives for prospective immigration in the next decades, assume that the number of immigrants would decrease.

It should also be noted that immigration from some regions might increase during the period of projection. For instance, in recent years there was a rise in the number of immigrants from United States, France and the United Kingdom. Immigration from these countries is usually motivated by ideological factors. Furthermore, in Argentina, an event of economic crisis could repeat itself and cause an increase in immigration to Israel as happened in the past. Another possible scenario that might affect immigration from all countries is a rise in the incidences of Anti-Semitism, which could raise the number of immigrants to Israel as well. However, another event of mass immigration to Israel is less likely to occur.

The main sources of future immigration to Israel for the next two decades will determine the demographic traits of the prospective immigrants. Thus, if most immigrants are expected to arrive from North America and Western Europe (as well as from the former Soviet Union), they will be characterized by much lower birthrates and an older age structure in comparison to the Israeli population (DellaPergola et al., 2000).

Estimating the vital statistics of immigrants, in addition to their size, is important when producing projections for the total population of Israel. However, these estimates demand further research and development which are beyond the scope of the current report.

The effect of immigration on the Israeli population is also dependent on emigration rates of the immigrants, which are considerably higher than those of the veteran population of Israel. Out of every immigration wave a certain percentage (7%-15%) leaves the country, especially during the first years following their arrival (Sicron, 2004).

Thus, exploring the different sources of immigration to Israel, as well as its demographic patterns and trends will help to create a more accurate portrait of the expected immigration in the future and therefore will enable better projections for the entire population of Israel.

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Appendix 1 - Projections of the immigration to Israel by periods

Source of Immigration	Alternatives	Projections					
		2006-2010 First Period	2011-2015	2016-2020	2021-2025	2026-2030 Last Period	2006-2030 Total
Total Immigration	**High**		**125,000**	**122,000**	**123,000**	**124,000**	**623,000**
	Medium	**129,000**	**108,500**	**100,500**	**94,500**	**89,500**	**522,000**
	Low		**93,000**	**83,000**	**74,000**	**65,000**	**444,000**
Former Soviet Union	High		30,000	27,000	24,000	21,000	135,000
	Medium	33,000	26,000	20,000	15,000	10,000	104,000
	Low		21,000	15,000	10,000	5,000	84,000
United States and France	High		23,000	25,000	27,000	29,000	125,000
	Medium	21,000	18,000	18,000	18,000	18,000	93,000
	Low		16,000	15,000	14,000	13,000	79,000
Ethiopia	High		5,000	1,000	1,000	1,000	23,000
	Medium	15,000	3,000	1,000	-	-	19,000
	Low		-	-	-	-	15,000
Argentina	High		6,000	6,000	6,000	6,000	25,000
	Medium	1,000	3,500	3,500	3,500	3,500	15,000
	Low		1,000	1,000	1,000	1,000	5,000
Other Countries	High		16,000	16,000	16,000	16,000	80,000
	Medium	16,000	16,000	16,000	16,000	16,000	80,000
	Low		14,000	12,000	10,000	8,000	60,000
Immigrating Citizens	High		19,000	20,000	21,000	22,000	100,000
	Medium	18,000	18,000	18,000	18,000	18,000	90,000
	Low		18,000	18,000	18,000	18,000	90,000
Family Reunification	High		26,000	27,000	28,000	29,000	135,000
	Medium	25,000	24,000	24,000	24,000	24,000	121,000
	Low		23,000	22,000	21,000	20,000	111,000