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**Research Report**



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ENGELBERG CENTER FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH  
RESEARCH PROGRAM ON IMMIGRANT ABSORPTION

**The Integration of Immigrants  
from the Caucasus:  
Needs, Policies and Future Challenges**

Judith King • Sarit Ellenbogen-Frankovits  
Yoah Sorek • Talal Dolev

Prepared at the initiative of the UJA-Federation of New York  
in cooperation with JDC-Israel.  
Dedicated to the memory of Gary Rubin.

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## *In Tribute*

April 17, 2005

Dear Friends

The Myers-JDC-Brookdale Institute prepared this report at the initiative of the UJA-Federation of New York and in cooperation with JDC-Israel.

This report is dedicated to the memory of our good friend Gary Rubin, the former Director of the Commission on the Jewish People of the UJA-Federation of New York, whose untimely passing deeply shocked and saddened us.

Gary played a major role in the initiation of this report. The importance that he ascribed to it reflects his broad concern for the integration of immigrants and for helping them find their place in Israeli society. Gary took particular interest in helping the Jews from the Caucasus. The New York Federation, under Gary's leadership, was one of the first to recognize the needs of this population and to support major initiatives on its behalf.

This report is just one of the many important projects in which we had the privilege of working with Gary in close partnership. Gary was passionate about gaining an in-depth understanding of issues and thoroughly exploring what could best be done to address them so as to base decisions upon the best available data.

We were inspired by his commitment and challenged by his professionalism.

Prof. Jack Habib  
Director  
Myers-JDC-Brookdale Institute

April 2005

Nisan 5765

The immigration of a community from one location to another is an immense challenge for those involved, how much more so when it entails a profound cultural migration as well. The difficulties are faced by both the migrating population as well as the host community that must adapt and adjust to receive and accept the new population. This process presents many issues for both communities which must be examined and discussed for the process of resettlement to move forward successfully.

Gary Rubin devoted much of his professional life to the nexus of interaction between the migrating community and the host population. Whether in writing about Israel, the former Soviet Union or the United States he constantly sought to explore how new populations can be helped in overcoming the challenges of resettlement, and, equally important, how the established community can most effectively respond to the new arrivals. He understood and taught that both the migrating community is helped through migration to find a new home, while at the same time the host community is strengthened and energized by the new arrivals.

It is very fitting that this study of the needs, policies and future challenges to the integration of the Immigrants from the Caucasus is dedicated to Gary Rubin's memory. The study presents research and strategies to assist the Kafkazi community as well as suggesting directions that Israeli society must take to achieve Kafkazi integration. It recognizes that to succeed this must be a dynamic partnership requiring both sides.

We thank the Myers-JDC-Brookdale Institute for reissuing this significant study and for honoring Gary Rubin in dedicating it to his memory.

Liz Jaffe,  
Chair,

Commission on the Jewish People — UJA-Federation of New York

David M. Mallach  
Managing Director,

## Acknowledgments

We would like to thank the UJA-Federation of New York for initiating this project, especially the late Gary Rubin, Director of the Commission on Jewish People, Stephen Donschik, Director, and Ilan Halperin, Senior Overseas Executive, who worked with us closely.

We would like to thank JDC-Israel for its professional and financial support.

We would also like to express our gratitude to all the government and voluntary organizations and individuals who shared their knowledge and experience, as well as their dilemmas, with us (see Appendix 2).

Special thanks are due to the Kavkazi activists, whose commitment to their community inspired us with optimism.



## Related Myers-JDC-Brookdale Institute Publications

King, J.; Ellenbogen-Frankovits, S.; Sorek, Y.; Dolev, T. 2005. *The Integration of Immigrants from the Caucasus: Needs, Policies and Future Challenges. Executive Summary*. ES-20-05 (English); ES-24-05 (Hebrew)

Ellenbogen-Frankovits, S.; Konstantinov, V.; Levi, D. 2004. *Absorption of Youth from the Caucasus: Findings from a Follow-up Study*. RR-438-04 (Hebrew)\*

Bram, C. 1999. *From the Caucasus to Israel: The Immigration of the Mountain Jews*. RR-346-99 (Hebrew)

Ellenbogen-Frankovits, S.; Noam, G. 1998. *The Absorption of Immigrant Children and Youth from the Caucasus: Survey Findings*. RR-328-98 (Hebrew)

King, J. 1998. *The Absorption of Immigrants from the Caucasus in the 1990s*. RR-326-98 (Hebrew)

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\* The English-language executive summary of "The Absorption of Youth from the Caucasus: Findings from a Follow-up Study" appears as an appendix at the end of this document.

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## Preface

This study was completed in 2002 and thus most of the information is valid for that date.

At the time, the report was widely circulated to all policymakers and to the major organizations involved in immigrant absorption and was the subject of intensive discussion and deliberation. It served as a basis for a national seminar attended by national and local level policy makers as well as representatives of the main organizations working on behalf of this population and representatives of the Kavkazi community. The report includes the knowledge, interpretation and insights gained through the discussions in this seminar as well as in other forums.

We are reprinting the report at this time and making it available to the wider public, so that it can provide an important baseline for reviewing and evaluating some of the more recent developments.

Since the preparation of this report, only one major study of the Kavkazi population has been published: A national follow up on the situation of Kavkazi youth since the implementation of the national efforts to address their needs by the inter-ministerial forum\*. Findings from the study on youth have been summarized briefly and included in the current version of this report. This study points to the significant success of the efforts described in this report to improve the integration of this youth, especially integration into the education system, reduction of dropout rates and increase of the percentage of youth studying in tracks leading to matriculation. The study also points to the major challenges that still exist in fully integrating this group into Israeli society.

The Executive Summary of this report is being published in English and in Hebrew.

\*Ellenbogen-Frankovits, S.; Konstantinov, V.; Levi, D. The Absorption of Youth from the Caucasus: Findings from a Follow-up Study

# 1. Introduction

Jews from the Caucasus ("Kavkazi" Jews or "Kavkazim" in Hebrew) comprise one of the world's oldest Jewish communities. According to their tradition, they are descended from the Kingdom of Judea or the Kingdom of Israel and, after exile in Assyria, Babylonia and Persia, their forbearers found their way to what is today Dagestan. There is evidence that Jews were already living in this region prior to the destruction of the Second Temple. According to Professor Mordechai Altschuler<sup>1</sup>, the culture and language of the Kavkazi Jews began to crystallize in the fifth century.

While physically isolated from the Jewish world and from the West until the end of the 19th century, the Kavkazi community maintained close ties with the Land of Israel for hundreds of years, and with the Zionist Movement from its inception. Their representatives participated in the First Zionist Congress in Basel in 1897. They were also among the immigrants of the first three waves of *aliya* and among the founders of the pre-state *Hashomer* organization as well as the settlements of Be'er Ya'aqov, Mahanayim and Yesod Hama'ala, facts that are unknown to most Israelis.

Prior to their *aliya*, many Kavkazi Jews lived in a Jewish environment. At the heart of community life were the Jewish holidays and the various rites of passage, including circumcision, bar mitzvah, marriage and burial, all performed according to strict Jewish law. To a great extent, the local Jewish community was composed of extended families related through marriage. For the individual, the family was the single most important social unit. Young couples usually lived with the husband's family, along with other married brothers, and relatives. In this traditional family structure, the mother-in-law managed the household while the father-in-law was the sole decisionmaker, primarily in matters outside the home. The family kept the children under close supervision, and family honor, as well as male honor, were (and still are) central values.

The vast majority of both the men and the women (80%-90%) were employed in the Caucasus, as salaried workers. The men worked primarily as skilled laborers in industry or construction, and the women as office, sales or service personnel or in professional jobs. In addition to their salaried jobs some also had a private business on the side, either on a seasonal basis or when the opportunity arose. *Perestroika* led to an increase in the number of Kavkazim whose primary income was derived from private business ventures.

Kavkazi Jews immigrated to Israel in two large waves: Some 12,000 arrived in the 1970s and early 1980s, and an additional 60,000 immigrated during the 1990s. Until the mid-1990s, government policy did not recognize the Kavkazi Jews as a unique target population. The Ministry of Housing was the first government ministry to allocate special resources for programs for the Kavkazi immigrants, due to the fact that many of them had settled in Project Renewal neighborhoods. In the

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<sup>1</sup> Altschuler, M. 1990. *The Jews of the Eastern Caucasus*. The Ben-Zvi Institute and The Hebrew University. Jerusalem. (In Hebrew)

beginning of the 1990s, JDC-Israel, with the support of the UJA Federation of New York, initiated several pilot programs that tried to address the special needs of Kavkazi immigrants in the areas of employment and education.

In April, 1995, an inter-ministerial committee on Kavkazi immigrants was established. This reflected an attempt to develop special policies and programs for this population from a national perspective and through cooperation between government ministries and various organizations.

The studies conducted by the JDC-Brookdale Institute in 1997 provided, for the first time, systematic information about this group of immigrants and their adjustment to Israeli society in a range of areas. The studies indicated that many of the widely held beliefs concerning Kavkazi immigrants were greatly exaggerated. For example, in contrast to the perception that the Kavkazi community is closed, findings indicated that many Kavkazim would like more extensive relationships with non-immigrant Israelis and Israeli society. The findings served to emphasize the extensive heterogeneity among the Kavkazi community and pointed to the potential for building on the strengths of the community in developing policies and interventions. At the same time, the studies pointed to serious problems and challenges in the adjustment of Kavkazim in many areas, including Hebrew language proficiency, employment and education. These findings served as a basis for the development of policies and programs in many areas.

Following a decision to define them as “a special population”, special entitlements were given, including an extension of eligibility for Ministry of Absorption services to 10 years and special assistance to students. A number of national programs were implemented. Noteworthy among them are a leadership development program; *PELE*, a program to provide scholastic assistance, primarily for matriculation exams; and a program for encouraging participation in higher education that has succeeded in significantly increasing the number of post-high school Kavkazi students. In addition, initiatives in various areas were implemented at the local level.

Moreover, some local authorities began to adopt a more comprehensive approach to the integration of Kavkazi immigrants and to implement programs aimed at several areas such as employment, education and social integration. These programs are currently in their initial stages. Current policies towards Kavkazi immigrants are characterized by a strong trend to include and involve community leadership and community members in the formulation of policies and in planning and implementing programs.

This report reviews the integration of Kavkazi immigrants in the following major areas: employment and vocational training, community development, the family, formal and informal educational (pre-school through higher education) social integration of youth, youth risk behaviors and army service. It identifies areas that require further assistance and the strengths of the community that can be used in developing appropriate responses.

The review is based on a variety of sources.

1. Most of the statistical data and a large part of the data on the situation of the Kavkazi immigrants in Israel, as well as their background in their country of origin, are based on three studies conducted by the JDC-Brookdale Institute:

- ♦ *The Absorption of Immigrants from the Caucasus in the 1990s* (King, 1998);
- ♦ *The Absorption of Immigrant Children and Youth from the Caucasus: Survey Findings* (Ellenbogen-Frankovits and Noam, 1998);
- ♦ *From the Caucasus to Israel: The Immigration of the Mountain Jews - an Anthropological Mapping* (Bram, 1999).

In interpreting this data, it should be remembered that the information was collected four years ago, and should be examined in light of changes that have taken place in Israeli society and among the Kavkazi immigrants.

2. Mordechai Altschuler's comprehensive book (1990): *The Jews of the Eastern Caucasus*, published by the Ben-Zvi Institute and the Hebrew University.
3. Interviews with more than 40 policymakers and professionals who develop programs for the Kavkazi community, from the various government ministries (Education, Immigrant Absorption, Labor and Social Affairs, Housing and Construction), JDC-Israel, the Jewish Agency, the Association of Community Centers, the Israel Defense Forces and philanthropic foundations (see the list of interviewees in Appendix 2). During the interviews, information was gathered on the problems and needs of the Kavkazi immigrants (as perceived by the various professionals, each from the perspective of his or her field of expertise), on the policy of promoting the integration of Kavkazi immigrants into various areas of life, on the programs designed to facilitate implementation of these policies, and on their assessments of the courses of action that should be developed.
4. Interviews with national and local Kavkazi leaders and active community volunteers and focus groups with youth provided the perspective of the community itself regarding its problems and needs, and the best courses of intervention.
5. Field visits to towns with large concentrations of Kavkazi immigrants and meetings with local service providers.
6. Statements on the subjects of employment, education, community leadership and youth made during group discussions conducted in the framework of a widely attended study day devoted to this review's findings held at the JDC-Brookdale Institute on July 9, 2002.

## 2. Who are the Kavkazi Jews?

The Kavkazi Jews, or the "Mountain Jews" (*gorsky ebrei* in Russian) come from the following republics (Bram, 1998):

- ♦ Azerbaijan – an independent state in the southern Caucasus, primarily from the capital city of Baku, or from Kuba;
- ♦ Dagestan – an independent republic which is part of Russia, primarily from the capital city of Makhachkala, or from Derbent;

- ◆ Several autonomous republics in the northern Caucasus, which are part of Russia, including Kabardino-Balkaria (primarily from the city of Nalchik), Chechnya (primarily from Grozny), Ingushetia, and Ossetia;
- ◆ The Stavropol region of the northern Caucasus, which is part of Russia, primarily from the city of Pyatigorsk;
- ◆ Various areas of the FSU, such as Moscow and St. Petersburg, to which they migrated from the Caucasus.

Kavkazi Jews are descendents of one of the oldest Jewish communities. According to their traditions, they are descended from the Kingdom of Judah or the Kingdom of Israel and following the Assyrian, the Babylonian and the Persian exiles finally found their way to the area known today as Dagestan. There is evidence that Jews had settled in this region even before the destruction of the Second Temple. Altschuler (1990) claims that the formulation of their culture and language as a separate community apparently began in the fifth century CE. The Kavkazi Jews were isolated from the Jewish world and the West until the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Sarig, 1998).

Kavkazi Jews maintained close ties with the Land of Israel for hundreds of years, and with the Zionist movement from its inception. Their representatives participated in the first Zionist Congress in Basel in 1897 and they were among the immigrants of the first three waves of *aliya* and among the founders of the pre-state *Hashomer* organization as well as the settlements Be'er Ya'aqov, Mahanayim and Yesud Hama'ala. Most Israelis are unaware of the involvement of Kavkazi Jews in the historical milestones of the State of Israel. Kavkazi immigrants are offended by Israeli society's lack of awareness of their history, their ties to the Land of Israel, and their contributions to the Zionist endeavor. This increases the alienation between them and the general population.

Kavkazi Jews are a distinct ethnic group with a clear communal-cultural identity that distinguishes them from other immigrants from the FSU.<sup>2</sup> It is difficult, however, to identify them using the administrative data of the immigration authorities since these contain information on republics and cities of origin. In most of the cities from which the Kavkazi Jews emigrated, "Ashkenazi" or "Russian" Jews have also been living since the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. As noted above, the Mountain Jews migrated from Dagestan, Chechnya and Azerbaijan to other cities in Russia due to the lack of security in the Caucasus. As a result, any attempt to estimate the number of Jews who immigrated from the Caucasus on the basis of the administrative data on cities of origin is problematic.

Different organizations have different figures for the number of Kavkazim. In addition to the above-mentioned reason, this is due to the use of different criteria to define the Kavkazi population for whom they provide services. Thus, the Ministry of Immigration only deals with the Kavkazi immigrants who have come to Israel since 1989, while the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs and

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<sup>2</sup> Actually, immigrants from the FSU are far from being a homogeneous population; in addition to Kavkazim, there are other distinct ethnic groups such as the Bukharim, Georgians, etc.

the local authorities also include the Kavkazim who immigrated to Israel in the 1970's and even their children who were already born in Israel. These different bases create considerable gaps in the reported figures of Kavkazim. For example, Hadera reports 4,820 Kavkazim who immigrated between January 1, 1989 and December 31, 2001. When those who arrived in the 1970s are included, the number of Kavkazim in Hadera increases to 7,000 (see Appendix 1 for population estimates in different localities.)

It should be emphasized that although Kavkazi Jews constitute a distinct ethnic group with unique communal-cultural characteristics, there is also a great deal of variation within this population in levels of education and behavioral patterns, stemming from their area of origin (the country and its composition of residents – e.g., a Muslim majority in contrast to a Christian majority, a city as opposed to a town or village). The impressions formed on the basis of the reports of service providers might be misleading since these are based primarily on contacts with individuals who are most in need of their services. These Kavkazim have limited resources, are on the more “traditional” end of the traditional to modern continuum and are grappling with a particularly large number of problems as part of their integration into Israeli society. In setting policy and developing methods of intervention, we must take into account the differences among Kavkazi immigrants and utilize the resources and strengths within the community (for example, the significant number of educated and professional Kavkazim and the solidarity among members of the Kavkazi community.)

### 3. Life in the Caucasus before Immigration

#### 3.1 Residential Patterns and Family Life

A significant number of the Kavkazi Jews who lived in towns such as Kuba and Nalchik lived in Jewish neighborhoods. This was less true for those who lived in big cities such as Baku. About three-quarters of the immigrants who lived in towns resided in spacious private homes with a large yard and garden, which served as a place to meet and entertain friends and members of the extended family. Against this background, it is easy to understand the sense of deprivation felt by families compelled to suffice with a three-room public housing apartment in Israel.

The pattern of marriages was almost completely endogamous: there were almost no marriages to non-Jews and only a few to Jews who were not members of the community. The girls were married at a very young age to husbands chosen by their parents (15% of the interviewees in the 1997 study married between the ages of 14-17 and 40% married between the ages of 18-20). Their husbands were generally considerably older. The young couples usually lived in the home of the husband's parents, where the husband's mother ran the household and her daughter-in-law had to obey all her instructions and do most of the housework.

The husband's father was considered the head of the family and the sole decisionmaker, primarily in matters outside the household. For example, the question of the daughter-in-law's studying at a

university was his decision to make. In a significant number of the families, unmarried siblings, married siblings and/or other relatives also lived in the household.

The family exerted strong social supervision over its members, particularly over the unmarried girls. A man's honor and the honor of the family were crucial values. This contributed to the Kavkazi immigrants' reluctance to discuss their problems and difficulties with anyone outside of their families, and sheds light on their reservations about approaching the social service system for assistance and the acts of violence committed by Kavkazi men in the name of the family's honor.

The family unit was stable and there were almost no cases of divorce. In Israel, there has been a rise in the divorce rate and in the number of single mothers. This is related to their encounter with Israeli reality: the equality of men and women, the state support for single mothers, the acceptance of divorce as normative, as well as to the fact that some of the men remain abroad or return to the Caucasus to take care of their businesses.

### 3.2 Education

There is a great deal of variation within the Kavkazi population with regard to educational levels. Over a third of the Kavkazi immigrants aged 21-64 have post-secondary education: 9% have a university degree and 27% graduated from technical institutions. This reflects the practical orientation of the Kavkazim towards education, especially with regard to males. In contrast, close to a third only completed 8 years of school or less.

### 3.3 Employment in their Communities of Origin

Over 90% of the men and 80% of the women of primary working ages were employed in the Caucasus, the majority as salaried employees. About 10% (6% of the men and 12% of the women) worked in unskilled jobs; about 40% (60% of the men and 20% of the women) were employed in skilled labor in industry and construction; about 25% (17% of the men and 31% of the women) were employed in office work, commerce or services, and about 25% (16% of the men and 36% of the women) were employed in academic, professional, technical or managerial occupations. There is some ambiguity concerning the extent of self-employment. According to Altschuler (1990), during the sixty years of the Soviet regime, the decisive majority of Kavkazi Jews became salaried employees. It appears, however, that some of them made a living from commerce in addition to their salaried positions, sometimes on a seasonal or occasional basis. In the villages, there is more evidence of a pattern of agricultural employment and the peddling of agricultural produce. *Perestroika* led to an increase in the number of Kavkazim who opened businesses as a primary career.

### 3.4 Jewish and Communal Life

The local community was composed, to a large extent, of extended families that were related by marriage. The extended family preserved and transmitted traditional religious and national values and symbols (Sarig, 1998). At the heart of community life were the Jewish holidays and rites of passage such as circumcision, bar mitzvah, marriage and burial, observed in strict conformity with

Jewish law. It is noteworthy that small Kavkazi communities managed to maintain their Jewish tradition although they were cut off from Jewish centers and had little possibility to communicate with one another because of the mountainous region where they lived.

The synagogue (if it had not been closed by the Soviet regime) served more as a community and cultural center than a center of religious learning and prayer, particularly in view of the fact that the Kavkazi Jews had no religious leadership for about 100 years. This background explains the aspiration of the Kavkazi Jews in Israel to a synagogue of their own, despite the fact that they are not orthodox in their religious practices.

### 3.5 Motives for Immigration

One of the motivations of Kavkazi Jews to immigrate in the 1990s was the general lack of security in the Caucasus, caused by the wars between the various national and ethnic groups in the region (the most prominent being the war between Chechnya and Russia, during which the city of Grozny was totally destroyed and its Jewish community ceased to exist), and the undermining of personal security as a consequence of a rise in crime. In Chechnya, the education and employment systems collapsed due to the war and the lack of political stability, and the Jews who immigrated from there were, in effect, refugees. Other common reasons included a desire to avoid anti-Semitism, to live in a Jewish state, to give their children a better environment, and to join family members who had already immigrated in the 1970s.

### 3.6 Immigrants of the 1970s

The Kavkazi immigrants of the 1970s were less educated than the immigrants of the 1990s. They came mainly from towns and villages and worked in a small range of occupations, primarily in agriculture and industry. They were characterized by traditional norms, for instance, attributing little importance to upward mobility through higher education, and emphasizing the centrality of the family as a mediating agent between the individual and his surroundings. The main motives for their immigration were religious and identification with the State of Israel.

Immigrant absorption policy in the 1970s was not adapted to their needs. They were not sent to ulpan to learn Hebrew, since in the 1970s this was only granted to immigrants with professions (most of the immigrants from the Soviet Union had higher education). They gathered in a number of towns, some of which were disadvantaged areas, due, in large measure, to their desire to live in large groups based on their area of origin in the Caucasus. This concentration decreased their integration into the greater community. Professionals in the social services failed to establish effective communication with them and complained that they were unable to "penetrate" the Kavkazi community and win their cooperation. The Kavkazim, in turn, developed feelings of alienation from the "system".

Their hostility towards the absorption system on the one hand, and the lack of familiarity on the part of the service providers regarding their historical background and culture on the other hand, led to the creation of a negative image of the Kavkazi immigrants. Even the second generation did not

manage to breach the barrier of alienation, and they still harbor feelings of discrimination and frustration. The pattern of absorption of the Kavkazi immigrants of the 1970s and their position of socio-cultural marginality, directly affected the absorption process of immigrants in the 1990s, since the earlier immigrants were significant absorption agents for the newcomers (Bram, 1998).

Against this background, we will now review the needs, policies, intervention strategies and challenges in seven basic areas (see page 3) related to the integration of immigrants from the Caucasus in Israel. We begin with employment.

## 4. Employment

Integration into employment is one of the major goals of the absorption process. Employment allows an individual to support himself and his family and provides an opportunity to establish contacts with non-immigrants and to become acquainted with the norms of society. An immigrant's ability to support himself and his family reduces the burden on society at present and in the future.

The following description of the employment situation is based on the data of a study conducted by the JDC-Brookdale Institute in the second half of 1997 (King, 1998). Since then, no national data have been gathered on the employment of Kavkazim. According to professionals who were interviewed for the purpose of this review, the situation has not improved. It may even have deteriorated, due, in part, to the worsening of the conditions in the labor market. We first discuss the current situation and the factors that impede the employment integration of Kavkazi immigrants. We then describe the policies for promoting employment and current intervention programs, and present several dilemmas felt by service providers. We conclude with a section on future challenges in the area of employment.

### 4.1 Current Situation and Needs

According to the 1977 study findings, Kavkazi immigrants are characterized by:

- a) Low rates of participation in the labor force, particularly among men;
- b) A very high concentration in low level jobs among those employed, and extensive downward job mobility.

#### **Low Percentages of Participation in the Labor Force**

- ◆ According to the survey, only 59% of those aged 21-64 participated in the labor force in 1997; 50% (57% of the men and 43% of the women) were employed, and an additional 9% (10% of the men and 9% of the women) were unemployed but were seeking employment (see Table 1).
- ◆ The employment rates of Kavkazi immigrants are low compared to all FSU immigrants during the period of the study (72% of the men and 55% of the women) and to the Jewish population in Israel aged 18-64 (66% and 53%, respectively).
- ◆ These rates are even lower in comparison to the employment rates of the Kavkazim prior to immigration (93% and 74%, respectively); 46% of the immigrants who were employed in

the Caucasus are not employed in Israel and only a few are seeking employment. One-third of this group are adults aged 55 and over whose difficulties in entering the job market are expected; however, the rest are younger.

- ◆ In 1997, the rate of unemployment among Kavkazi immigrants reached 16%, reflecting the difficulty of finding work. This rate is calculated as the rate of job seekers from among those who belong to the labor force, which includes both the employed and the job seekers.
- ◆ The information obtained in the in-depth interviews with the professionals raises the hypothesis that the low rates of employment among the men, particularly ages 35-44, do not fully reflect the real employment situation since they do not include informal economic activity. It is common among Kavkazi men to work at unreported odd jobs, for example, in house painting and renovations; however, the scope of this work is unknown. It should be noted that these jobs are a source of income but can not be considered steady employment that ensures benefits in the present and the future (for example, disability benefits or pension benefits).
- ◆ The rates of employment vary among occupational groups: among the men, the highest rate of employment is among those with prior employment in industry and construction, and among the women, among those with prior academic, professional and technical occupations (see Table 2). This means that male Kavkazi with post-secondary education have a particularly difficult time in obtaining employment, whereas among women the less skilled have more difficulty.
- ◆ An interesting trend is the entry into the labor force of women with no employment background (37%), apparently due, to a large extent, to the unemployment of the husband. While this change contributes to the family income, it may diminish the status of the man as the provider and, as a result, disrupt the traditional balance of power in the family and create family tension.
- ◆ After three years in Israel there is a rise in the employment rates of men and women alike, but the trend is not consistent or continuous (see Table 2). In other words, it cannot be assumed that the employment situation of Kavkazi immigrants will improve over time as a natural process, without special intervention programs.
- ◆ In 23% of the families with both spouses of working age, neither one of the spouses is employed (in a third of these cases there is another provider), in 26% of them only the husband is employed, in 15% only the wife, and in 36% both are employed. This, of course, has ramifications for the general welfare of the family. In families with children in which neither of the parents is employed, there are also ramifications regarding the parents as role models for the children.

**Table 1: Employment Status of Kavkazi Immigrants Aged 21-64 in 1997, by Gender and Age (percentages)**

	Total	Employed	Unemployed but seeking work	Unemployed and not seeking work
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>41</b>
<b>Men</b>				
Total	100	57	10	33
21-34	100	69	10	21
35-44	100	57	9	34
45-54	100	67	11	22
55-64	100	20	15	65
<b>Women</b>				
Total	100	43	9	48
21-34	100	47	14	39
35-44	100	55	7	38
45-54	100	53	10	37
55-64	100	11	1	88

Source: King, J. 1998. The Absorption of Immigrants from the Caucasus in the 1990s. JDC-Brookdale Institute (p. 23)

**Table 2: Kavkazim Aged 21-64 Employed in 1997, by Gender, Length of Time in Israel and Occupation in Country of Origin (percentages)**

	Total	Men	Women
<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>43</b>
<b>Time in Israel</b>			
Up to three years	38	55	23
From three to four years	59	68	51
From four to six years	49	48	50
From six to eight years	54	61	47
<b>Occupation in the Caucasus</b>			
Academic, professional, technical, managerial	52	48	54
Clerical, sales, services	48	59	42
Skilled labor in industry and construction	60	64	46
Unskilled labor in industry and construction	42	64	31
Did not work	41	45	38

Source: Ibid, p. 24.

### **Employment in Low Level Jobs**

Half of the employed hold unskilled jobs (see Table 3). In comparison with immigrants from the FSU, the percentage of Kavkazi immigrants employed in academic and professional occupations is low – 4% compared with 25%. This is also true with regard to those employed in office work and sales – 13% compared with 33% among immigrants from the FSU. Taking into consideration the fact that even before immigration the occupational composition of the two populations was

different, it still appears that the Kavkazi immigrants are experiencing a far greater degree of downward mobility as a result of their immigration. The disadvantage of unskilled jobs lies not only in the decline in professional status compared with the situation in the Caucasus and the low pay, but also in employment insecurity. Two-thirds of the workers in these occupations are employed on a daily or hourly basis without social benefits and without any certainty that they will have work tomorrow. This situation leads to lack of job satisfaction among the employees, and may impair the motivation of the unemployed to start working.

**Table 3: Current Occupations of Kavkazi Immigrants, by Gender and Occupation in the Caucasus (percentages)**

	Total	Academic professional and technical	Clerical, sales and services	Skilled labor in industry and construction	Unskilled labor in industry and construction
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>49</b>
<b>Sex</b>					
Men	100	3	6	49	42
Women	100	6	21	16	57
<b>Occupation in the Caucasus</b>					
Academic, professional, technical and managerial	100	14	13	21	52
Clerical, sales and services	100	1	10	29	60
Skilled labor in industry and construction	100	1	9	48	42
Unskilled labor in industry and construction	100	-	23	31	46
Did not work	100	7	18	28	47

Source: Ibid, p. 25.

In recent years there have been changes in the Israeli economy that could worsen the employment and economic problems of the Kavkazi immigrants (as well as those of other vulnerable groups). Noteworthy among these changes are a rise in the level of unemployment, in general, and in places in which there are large concentrations of Kavkazim (Ofakim, Sderot, Acco), in particular; structural changes that have led to a decrease in industries that are based on unskilled labor; an increase in the number of foreign workers who compete for these jobs; and a sharp decrease in the wages of unskilled workers in comparison with skilled workers.

#### 4.2 Effect of the Employment Situation on the Welfare of the Family

The high rate of unemployment and the nature of the occupations of those who are employed have lead to widespread poverty which finds expression in several ways:

- ◆ Low level of family income: the study data show that the **overall** income of 23% of the households does not exceed half the average wage in Israel and only 30% have an income at, or exceeding, the level of the average wage.
- ◆ Even in households in which there is a provider, the overall income of 26% of the households does not exceed half the average wage. Only when there are two providers does the family income rise enough so that 56% of the families with two providers have an income at, or exceeding, the level of the average wage.
- ◆ At the time of the survey, 16% of the households in which the husband and/or the wife were employed were below the poverty line compared with 7% of families in which the head of the household was a salaried employee in the general population in the same period.
- ◆ About half the families claimed to be unable to pay for most of their basic daily needs such as food, rent and electricity.
- ◆ A significant number of the families with children claimed to be unable to pay for the school supplies required by the children and their participation in extracurricular activities.
- ◆ The immigrants are very pessimistic about the chances of improving their situation.

The behavioral patterns rooted in the Kavkazi culture make it even more difficult for them to cope with their economic situation. The tendency to avoid rental housing (due to the perception that a man with a family must be a homeowner) leads them to purchase an apartment at an early stage and to undertake large mortgages. Gifts given at family events and even just the entertaining of guests must be lavish, even if the family cannot afford it. As a result, they run into debt and their financial problems grow.

Integration into employment has important ramifications beyond the economic significance:

- ◆ It constitutes the main channel for creating ties with non-immigrant Israelis.
- ◆ The service providers claim that due to parental unemployment, there is a growing trend of youth going out to work since they feel an obligation to help support the family. Thus, many of the youth leave school, which blocks their channels of social mobility. In the study of Kavkazi immigrant youth, it was found that a quarter of the youth, boys more than girls, were working part-time in order to have pocket money and also to help to support the family (Ellenbogen-Frankovits and Noam, 1998). As expected, the percentage of those working is higher among school dropouts than among those learning in schools supervised by the Ministry of Education (31% compared with 17%, respectively). The youths and their mothers disagree on the effect of their employment on their studies. Almost all the youth (95%) who study in some kind of framework claim that they do not miss classes due to their jobs and that their functioning in school is not impaired. Even the dropouts did not cite the need to work as the reason they dropped out of school. In contrast, 14% of the mothers believe that work disturbs their children's studies, and 15% of the mothers of the dropouts reported that their children left school because of work.

### 4.3 Factors that Impede the Integration of Kavkazi Immigrants into Employment

There are several barriers to the integration of Kavkazi immigrants into the job market, including limited human capital resources, perceptions held by the immigrants, limitations of the system responsible for vocational training and placement, and attitudes of employers.

#### **Limited Human Capital Resources**

- ♦ Lack of occupation (true for a minority of the immigrants): As noted earlier, those who lived in villages prior to their immigration were engaged in agriculture and in the sale of their agricultural produce. Some of those who lived near the cities worked as unskilled laborers in industry and services. Although some of the women had completed secondary school studies, they did not acquire an occupation due to marriage at an early age. In other words, part of the immigrants arrived in Israel without an occupation and without relevant employment experience, a factor that hampered entry into the job market. Only a minority (14%) acquired an occupation in Israel in the framework of vocational training courses.
- ♦ Limited education: 22% of the adult immigrants (ages 21-64) completed only six to eight years of school, 5% studied for only one to five years, and 2% did not study at all. In other words, close to 30% of the immigrants of working age face the barrier of limited education.
- ♦ Poor command of Hebrew, primarily in reading and writing skills: The Kavkazi immigrants' command of Hebrew, particularly reading and writing, is poor and does not improve significantly over time in Israel. Even among those who have been in Israel for over six years, 45% are unable to write a simple letter in Hebrew, and 34% are unable to read such a letter. The percentage of immigrants who studied in or completed an ulpan is relatively low (53% and 38%, respectively). This is because many of the immigrants, particularly the men, preferred to go to work immediately in order to support their families, and also because they thought that it was possible to learn Hebrew without an ulpan. However, the possibility of their acquiring the language in day to day life is limited for the following reasons: a) they tend to live within their own community so they do not have much need of Hebrew in their contacts with neighbors; b) most of them (71%) do not have social encounters with non-immigrant Israelis, a situation that would compel them to use Hebrew; c) in contacts with the services, it is generally possible to manage in Russian; d) the employed among them work in jobs in which there is a concentration of new immigrants, and the language predominantly spoken is Russian. Thus, they do not have many opportunities to improve their knowledge of Hebrew in the framework of their place of employment.

A number of employment coordinators who work with Kavkazi immigrants and participated in the study day discussion group on employment integration agreed that poor command of Hebrew represents a serious obstacle. They said that many employers make Hebrew proficiency a job requirement, even if it is not essential to the job.

#### **Attitudes of Kavkazi Immigrant Men**

In the interviews, the professionals noted several attitudes prevalent primarily among Kavkazi men which, in their opinion, make their integration into employment more difficult.

- ♦ A lack of willingness to pay for, even partly, Hebrew or vocational studies. Several interviewees claimed that it is difficult to persuade Kavkazi men to invest time and resources in vocational training. They claim that if a Kavkazi immigrant is currently employed and earning a salary, albeit in temporary and unskilled work from which he is liable to be dismissed, he is not prepared to invest time and money in studying in the framework of an evening course in order to improve his vocational resources (upgrading). The study findings do not fully corroborate this claim; 42% of the Kavkazim who were employed at the time of the interview and had not yet studied in a vocational course claimed that they were interested in doing so.
- ♦ Lack of willingness by the men (in contrast to the women) to take just any job, in other words, a refusal to undertake hard, physical labor and for low pay. Referrals to cleaning and service jobs are perceived by them as a slight to their honor, while the placement agencies claim that they must take any job they are offered. These conflicting views increase the lack of communication between the Kavkazim and the establishment.

### **Difficulties in Encounters with the System and with Employers**

- ♦ Non-fulfillment of the criteria for acceptance to vocational training courses of the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs. Due to the combination of limited education and lack of sufficient command of Hebrew, many of the Kavkazi immigrants do not meet the criteria for entrance into the vocational training system of the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs.
- ♦ Difficulty in passing acceptance tests for jobs, particularly psychotechnic exams, because they are not accustomed to these and are not skilled in this type of examination.
- ♦ According to the national employment coordinator of Kavkazi immigrants, due to their lack of vocational skills, limited education and poor command of Hebrew, the Employment Service tends to define them too easily as unplaceable, and hence as entitled to income maintenance benefits and exemptions from the employment test. This definition perpetuates their state of unemployment.
- ♦ Unsympathetic attitudes of employers and placement officers. Several placement professionals mentioned a problem stemming from reservations by employers to hire Kavkazim due to their image as difficult, short-tempered and unwilling to accept authority. The employment coordinator, herself Kavkazi, noted during the discussion group that factory owners clearly tell her that they "do not want Kavkazis." Hence the need to make an effort to convince employers to hire Kavkazi workers on a trial basis. The Kavkazi employment coordinators also accused employers of tending to fire Kavkazi workers who had been taken on in the framework of a special immigrant hiring program once the six-month subsidy period is over despite a pledge to retain the worker for a comparable period. Placement workers who are not part of the Employment Service also complained of the unsympathetic attitude towards the Kavkazim on the part of Employment Service placement officers, due to the claim that the Kavkazim do not want to work, yet, at the same time, they work in unreported jobs. The study found that the Kavkazim, for their part, perceive service providers, including the Employment Service, as treating them disrespectfully (37%), not understanding their problems and needs (38%), and not really trying to help (50%). They

themselves will not ask for help because it would be perceived as an affront to their personal honor. Some 28% feel that the service providers discriminate against them. It appears that there is a serious problem in communication between the Kavkazi immigrants and the employment and placement services.

#### 4.4 Policies and Programs to Promote Kavkazi Immigrant Employment

As already mentioned, the Kavkazi immigrants were not recognized as a unique immigrant population with special needs until 1997, and employment has only become a focus of national intervention in the last year or two. It can be said that a comprehensive policy has not yet been formulated for promoting the integration of Kavkazi immigrants into jobs. The system is, to a large extent, still in the stage of experimenting, learning and attempting to formulate models suited to the unique characteristics of this population. The operators of the modular employment program in S'derot (see below) noted during the discussion group that employment is a good channel for starting to work with the Kavkazi community at the local level because it is viewed as non-political and meets an essential and immediate need. Addressing the area of employment creates a sense of trust on the part of the community and paves the way for the provision of care in other areas.

The organizations leading the activities in this field are: the Immigrant Employment Division of the Ministry of Absorption, and the Immigrant Integration Division of JDC-Israel. They are working together with the Employment Service and the Vocational Training Division of the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, the Project Renewal Division of the Ministry of Housing, and local authorities in which there are large concentrations of Kavkazi immigrants. Today, this cooperation exists primarily at the municipal level and focuses on developing and implementing specific programs. An employment forum is currently being established which will include representatives of the Ministry of Absorption, JDC-Israel, the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, the Employment Service, the National Insurance Institute, the Project Renewal Division of the Ministry of Housing and the Sacta-Rashi Foundation. The purpose of the forum is to find ways to pool resources and to develop effective programs. Collaboration among these different organizations presents a challenge because the proper balance must be found among the various populations served by the different organizations, each of which has its own priorities. The Employment Service is a universal service that provides standard services to all residents of Israel. It is not set up to formulate special programs for populations with special needs. Project Renewal develops programs for all residents (immigrants and non-immigrants) who live in a Project Renewal neighborhood, while the Ministry of Absorption and the JDC-Israel Immigrant Integration Division focus on immigrants.

Several developments in employment programming and policies for Kavkazi immigrants have taken place in recent years. They draw on lessons learned from programs operated for other populations with special problems in integrating into the job market, for example, Ethiopian immigrants and elderly immigrants. These are described in the next section.

### **Extending the Entitlement Period for Wage Subsidy and Vocational Training to Ten Years**

As part of the policy to promote employment, the Ministry of Absorption offers employers a subsidy for immigrants' salaries at a rate of half the minimum wage, for a period of six months, in exchange for a pledge by the employer to continue to employ the immigrant for a comparable period. In addition, the immigrant is entitled to study in evening courses up to 100 study hours, free of charge or for a token payment. The entitlement period was extended to ten years after it was understood that the Kavkazi immigrants have a longer and more difficult period of adjustment to Israel. During the first three years they are not sufficiently aware of the significance of the entitlements and do not take advantage of them.

### **Developing a Modular Continuum of Employment Services Model**

This approach is intended to provide a response to the various needs of subgroups in the unemployed and underemployed population among the Kavkazi immigrants. The complete model includes components that are designed to address those obstacles that make it difficult for Kavkazi immigrants to participate in employment and vocational training tracks, such as poor command of Hebrew, limited education, lack of clear personal job goals, and lack of familiarity with the employment world in Israel.

The continuum includes the following components:

- ◆ Employment empowerment (preparatory workshop for employment in which the participants define individual vocational goals, learn about the job market, strengthen their ability to present themselves to potential employers, and so forth);
- ◆ Additional Hebrew instruction;
- ◆ Completion of basic education;
- ◆ Vocational training;
- ◆ Job placement;
- ◆ Accompaniment in the workplace;
- ◆ Entrepreneurship;
- ◆ Combining the learning of vocational skills along with basic skills for running a small business;
- ◆ Upgrading in the place of employment.

There was agreement in the discussion group on employment integration about the importance of a continuum of employment-promoting services, and the referral of individuals to certain programs, with an eye toward the ultimate goal of employment integration and long-term job security. For example, it is not enough to refer a person to a course to complete his basic education; it should also be ascertained that he will then be accepted to a vocational training course. Another idea, adopted from an intervention program for Ethiopian immigrants, is a three-pronged program of academic studies at an accredited institution (local college), on-the-job vocational training, and oversight and follow-up.

One of the discussion group's participants, herself an employment preparation facilitator, emphasized the importance of personal empowerment as the continuum's starting point, specifically the construction of a personal employment program based on a person's needs, abilities and desires in order to ensure a better match between the job and his unique characteristics and to build self-confidence so that job dismissal does not lead to despair but to a renewed effort to seek employment.

Participants in the study day emphasized the importance of learning Hebrew and the need for a Hebrew language instruction system for the entire community. It was suggested that for those who find it difficult to learn in courses there should be small home study groups.

During the discussion group, emphasis was also placed on the heterogeneousness of the Kavkazi community and the need to address the needs of its various sub-groups, including demobilized soldiers, women and young girls.

There are still differences of opinion about how to implement the model: program developers differ regarding the desired balance between the investment in job placement and the investment in pre-placement preparation. In other words, should the emphasis be on job placement in which case more funds should go for oversight in the work place, or on vocational training, Hebrew studies and job seeking skills?

Regarding the existing continuum of employment services, there is a dilemma as to which should come first – vocational training or employment. Various arrangements concerning in-service training combine both of these approaches and even increase the prospects for employment at the end of the training period. Nonetheless, the study day participants noted two possible shortcomings in these arrangements: a) in most instances there is no follow-up regarding the employer's stated commitment to actually train the employee; b) there are instances in which the employer enjoys the services of the employee for free, and at the end of the employment period fires him. The representative of the Vocational Training Division who participated in the study day explained that in arrangements in which the employee studies on the premises (as in one of the in-service training tracks), the employers are monitored; in other arrangements the monitoring is weak, and instances of exploitation should be reported to the Ministry.

The integration-segregation dilemma (i.e., the implementation of separate programs for Kavkazi immigrants versus their inclusion in programs with other immigrants or with the general population) is one that arises in all areas of life. It was addressed in the discussion group on employment in the framework of completing basic education requirements. The representative of the Vocational Training Division reported on the successful implementation of a number of classes for Kavkazi immigrants only. In her opinion, homogeneous classrooms are more effective for such studies because it is easier to provide the needed support. It should be noted that homogeneity does not refer solely to ethnic origin, but also to such factors as command of Hebrew, military service, employment experience, etc.

So far, several programs have implemented different components from the complete model. All the programs have been implemented on a small scale. Among them are:

- ♦ **Preparatory classes** in Hebrew, English, general education and basic computer skills as a precursor to vocational courses (Ministries of Labor and Education).
- ♦ **Employment empowerment workshop** (funded by JDC-Israel). A number of such workshops were held for young women who had no employment history, after it became clear from interviews that in the Kavkazi community there is a marked trend of young women who are not content with their traditional role of homemakers and want to go out to work. (The 1997 study findings also corroborate this.) Personal empowerment workshops, including formulating personal employment plans, were successfully conducted in Kiryat Yam, and a shorter version (and less successful, according to the national Kavkazi employment coordinator) was also held in Acco.
- ♦ **A workshop combining employment empowerment with the study of Hebrew.** In Beersheva, two afternoon programs were implemented which included an employment empowerment workshop and 60 hours of Hebrew classes. About 30 women attended these programs. A similar program was implemented in Kiryat Gat during morning hours with more time devoted to learning Hebrew (200 hours). Some thirty men and women attended and in the end, about half the men were placed in jobs by the Employment Service and about half of them entered vocational training courses provided by the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs.
- ♦ **Focused activity in specific vocational groups:** Classes in technical Hebrew (primarily reading and writing) for those in technical occupations (electricians, plumbers and so forth) who do not require a vocational course (Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs); Kavkazi teachers who did not meet the requirements of the Ministry of Education for obtaining an Israeli teaching certificate, but who know Hebrew and know how to teach, underwent training given by the Ministry of Education and teach Hebrew in the evenings to working-age Kavkazim. In the framework of MATACH (the Center for Technological Education), a program for training Kavkazi teachers to teach math is in planning stages. The program is aimed at science teachers who hold a teaching license recognized by the Ministry of Education in Israel. It is a three-year program, in which the focus shifts each year: from learning information technologies and teaching methods in the first year, to part-time supervised teaching in the second year, to full-time teaching with monthly support sessions in the third year.
- ♦ **Vocational upgrading:** Encouraging Kavkazim employed in low-level jobs to study in vocational evening courses for the purpose of professional upgrading, with a commitment by the training institute to place 70% of the graduates in jobs in the vocation studied in the course (Ministry of Absorption in cooperation with JDC-Israel). In this framework, a course was held in 2001 in Hadera on building Internet websites (for men and women), as well as a course in managing a computerized warehouse (for men). The criteria for acceptance to the course were a knowledge of English and a basic knowledge of computers. A course in computer maintenance (for men) is being planned for Kiryat Gat, as well as two courses in

the computerized office (for mixed groups of Kavkazi and Ethiopian women). There is also a program for upgrading engineers of Kavkazi origin who are underemployed, similar to the program that was successfully implemented for engineers who immigrated from the FSU.

- ♦ ***Combining vocational and business skills:*** With the aim of expanding the variety of employment opportunities, an attempt was made to provide the students of a vocational course with an introduction to the field of entrepreneurship (see details below on entrepreneurship). For example, in a course on building Internet websites, the participants are also given several lectures on the subject of entrepreneurship, given that many of those who work in this occupation do so from home, and opening a home business is a real possibility for them.
- ♦ ***Employment-oriented Hebrew language studies.*** Since Hebrew proficiency is essential for employment integration, a program combining Hebrew studies with a preparatory workshop for employment will be implemented during the 2002-2003 academic year. The program, to be implemented by JDC-Israel with funding from UJA Federation of New York, is for unemployed adults of working age with 7-15 years of schooling. Within the framework of the program, each group will receive 200 hours of Hebrew study and 30 hours of employment preparation. It will be conducted in four locations: Acco, Or Akiva, Kiryat Yam and Sderot and will include 240 participants in 12 groups.

In recent months, the complete modular program has begun in Sderot in cooperation with JDC-Israel, the Ministry of Absorption, the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, the project Renewal Department in the Ministry of Housing, *MATI* (the Center for Promoting Entrepreneurship), two local associations: Kolot BaNegev and Gvanim, and a local employer – Hollandia International (sleep engineering) – which undertook the vocational upgrading part.

During the discussion group, the coordinators of the program in Sderot presented the program which combines many of the components of the continuum of services. The model consists primarily of a local coalition of all services relating to employment – the Employment Service, Project Renewal, *MATI*, and the Unit for the Development of Human Resources of the local social services bureau – and assistance from Kavkazi residents in key positions at their place of employment. In coordination with one another, they formulate solutions. (It is worth noting that despite the efforts to enlist the cooperation of employers, they are not included in this forum.) Additional sites in planning stages for implementing this program are: Acco, Kiryat Yam and Or Akiva.

A special sub-population brought up during the discussion is young girls who marry while they are still minors. There is a desire to expose these girls to information on academic study and employment tracks in order to provide them with an alternative to an early marriage. However, such a step requires sensitivity to the family's expectations and the community's social and cultural codes. Efforts to advance these girls must be taken in cooperation with the family and arrangements undertaken must enable married women to be integrated into training and academic frameworks.

## **Developing Entrepreneurship**

Entrepreneurship is an accepted employment solution among immigrants in general given their difficulties in integrating into the job market. The entrepreneurship track is considered particularly suitable to Kavkazi immigrants as some of them had a business background in their country of origin.

Three years ago, a national project was initiated to encourage entrepreneurship among Kavkazi immigrants. In 2001, the project budget was about half a million shekels and was funded by the Ministry of Absorption and JDC-Israel. *MATI* Hadera was chosen to serve as the national center for the project. The national center includes a national coordinator, regional coordinators and assistants, all members of the Kavkazi community.

### ***Project Goals***

1. Finding potential entrepreneurs and small-business owners and providing them with information on assistance and services provided by *MATI*;
2. Easing the apprehensions involved in requesting assistance from institutional entities;
3. Providing the tools to improve the business and managerial capabilities of the Kavkazi business owners.

### ***Project Services***

1. Disseminating information on the subject of entrepreneurship by means of: advertising in the media (radio, and the national and local press) in Hebrew and in Russian; informational activities: workshops for activists in the Kavkazi community, conferences for the general public, for potential entrepreneurs and businessmen; and distribution of general and professional information material;
2. Courses in basic entrepreneurship (40-48 hours at a charge of NIS 200 per participant) and workshops on specific subjects for those who have a businessmen;
3. Professional support: professional mentoring and support including up to two hours of professional consulting before opening a business, preparation of a business plan and 20-30 hours of mentoring for implementation of the business plan (compared with 10 hours given to other immigrants) for a fee of NIS 25 per hour;
4. Assistance in raising capital from foundations with which *MATI* works to finance implementation of the business plan and assistance in raising matching capital;
5. Development of local business clubs.

### ***Project Outcomes***

There is evidence of the success of the entrepreneurship project, despite the fact that it is still in its initial stages. In the three years since the national center was established, and particularly in the past year and a half, there has been considerable growth in entrepreneurship among Kavkazi immigrants, primarily in the area of Hadera.

- ◆ From March 2000 to September 2001, some 75 businesses were opened or expanded, most with financial assistance received through MATI, and hundreds of entrepreneurs received counseling;
- ◆ From March 2000 to February 2001, 13 courses in basic entrepreneurship were held in which 230 men and women participated (the women were in the minority);
- ◆ 4 workshops were held for owners of businesses;
- ◆ 1 business club with 35 members was opened in Or Akiva;
- ◆ More than 30 informational events were held (conferences, informational evenings, parlor meetings and so forth) for local leadership, for the Kavkazi community.

### ***Characteristics of the Businesses***

According to data from a survey of Kavkazi-owned businesses conducted by the Gilat company in April 2001, about 70% of the businesses are commercial, mainly food, businesses. They are mostly family businesses; there are almost no partnerships. Close to 70% do not employ salaried workers, but, in many cases, family members help without receiving any pay during the initial stages. The national coordinator estimates that most of the Kavkazi businesses survive for several reasons: the owners save the costs of the middleman by transporting the goods themselves, offer reduced prices, and take only a small portion of the profits for themselves. At first, they look mainly for customers who live in their own community or, at least, are Russian speakers, based on personal acquaintance and because of the language barrier, but later on, the clientele expands.

### ***Characteristics of the Business Owners***

The decisive majority of the business owners are men. Women who established businesses are generally single. Two-thirds of the business owners are aged 31-50. More than half (52%) have post secondary education and 20% have an academic education. Almost none have managerial training but two-thirds had managerial experience abroad. Some 50% established the business within the first five years after their immigration.

Developers of the programs to promote entrepreneurship among Kavkazi immigrants believe that the activities should be expanded to additional towns, and the connection with the local MATI program should be strengthened. They are deliberating whether to focus on potential entrepreneurs who have a good chance of obtaining assistance from MATI, or to invest in a larger group which also includes those whose chances are less good, thereby risking “failure” and discouraging other potential entrepreneurs.

### **Developing Programs to Promote Employment within the Framework of a Comprehensive Municipal Program**

In a number of localities with a large concentrations of Kavkazi immigrants, for example, Kiryat Yam, Acco, Hadera, Beersheva and Sderot, comprehensive programs are being developed to improve the situation of the Kavkazi immigrants. Within the framework of these programs a variety of interventions in different areas – scholastic assistance for youths and children, enrichment, early childhood, support for single mothers, community development, and employment – are

implemented simultaneously, with the expectation that the cumulative effect of all these programs will bring about a comprehensive change in the life of the town's Kavkazi community. Thus, the *Maslul* program, to integrate people aged 55-64 into jobs, was developed in Acco with the cooperation of *ESHEL* and the Craftsmen's Cooperative in the city, less because of its importance as a stand-alone program and more as part of the overall intervention program in the city. (In the framework of the program, the participants are supposed to work and be paid up to a level that will not prevent them from continuing to receive their full income maintenance benefits.) In Beersheva, an employment center that includes a data base of employers and of Kavkazi job seekers has been set up in the framework of such a comprehensive program.

### **Involving Community Members - Volunteers and Paid Professionals - in Implementing Employment Programs**

All those interviewed believe that this is a vital component in the implementation of any program designed for the Kavkazi community. It meets the need of the Kavkazim to have people from their own community who, they feel, understand them and upon whom they can rely. It also meets the need of the system to recruit the immigrants for the programs. The participation of community members is on three levels:

1. Using Kavkazi volunteers to help in existing and planned programs;
2. Employing Kavkazi professionals and paraprofessionals in programs;
3. Implementing programs by associations established by members of the community.

**Volunteers:** Volunteers assist in marketing the programs to the community and in recruiting participants for the programs. An employment center has been established in Beersheva which is operated by members of the community. The center, which includes a data base of Kavkazim seeking work and a data base of employers, is intended to assist people for whom no solution has been found in other frameworks. In Sderot, members of the community who have key positions in various workplaces use their contacts to recruit additional workers from the community and create an information network regarding available positions.

**Paid staff:** The involvement of the community is expressed in the employment of a full-time national employment coordinator, jointly funded by the Ministry of Absorption and JDC-Israel, part-time employment coordinators in several towns with concentrations of Kavkazim (for example, Hadera and Kiryat Yam), and six Kavkazi placement officers in the regular employment bureaus in towns with large Kavkazi populations (Migdal Ha'emek, Hadera, Haifa, Sderot, Kiryat Gat and Beersheva). The jobs of the placement officers are funded by the Ministry of Absorption in the framework of promoting employment. In addition to their jobs, they are allowed to work on special projects for Kavkazim one day a week. The Kavkazi placement officers, together with placement officers of Bukhari and Ethiopian origin, took a course, under the auspices of JDC-Israel and the Employment Service, to upgrade their professional abilities. In the course they learned, among other things, how to locate jobs, how to approach applicants, and how to show two-way cultural sensitivity – towards both the immigrant groups, and the employers. According to the employment psychologist from the Employment Service, who participated in the discussion group on

employment integration, this has led to significant changes in the work being done with Kavkazi immigrants, increased the immigrants' motivation, and raised their rates of job placement.

Members of the Kavkazi community who participated in the discussion group complained that there are not enough Kavkazim employed by the various services involved in employment integration, both the Employment Service and *MATI*. The employment coordinator from Sderot, herself Kavkazi, emphasized the advantages she has over other placement workers due to cultural familiarity and a sense of trust. One of the national coordinators of the employment initiative for Kavkazi immigrants raised the need for additional Kavkazi coordinators in the local *MATIs*. It was also proposed that successful Kavkazi business people become mentors to beginning business people.

**Associations:** The activities of the associations can be illustrated by the activities of the “Tikva LeAtid” – “Hope For The Future”, an association of Kavkazi immigrants in Acco which runs its own employment programs for the city’s Kavkazi immigrants in the framework of the comprehensive community program. It is already operating the *Maslul* program mentioned above. In this endeavor, the association will receive professional support and advice from an organizational consulting firm.

#### 4.5 Future Challenges

- ◆ Professionals involved in the field of employment agree that there is a need for a comprehensive national policy relating to all stages of the employment integration process that operates in conjunction with all the organizations involved, i.e. the various training institutes, placement organizations, employers and, of course, the community itself. The intervention models must be comprehensive, on the one hand, and flexible, on the other hand, in order to meet the differential needs of various subgroups in the Kavkazi population and be adaptable to local conditions. Government agencies must do their part, and nongovernmental organizations, which are more flexible, can implement the parts that the government has difficulty implementing. The modular model of the continuum of employment services presented in this chapter appears to meet these requirements and needs to be expanded.
- ◆ A special effort should be made with regard to young Kavkazi women, some of whom have never worked and some of whom are working in low level, temporary jobs, and show motivation to work. Their needs for assistance include the formation of realistic personal aspirations regarding employment, learning a profession, placement and arrangements for childcare while they are studying or working. In addition there is a need to assist them in dealing with the ramifications of their employment on the overall family system.
- ◆ Increasing awareness of the importance of completing basic educational requirements and of vocational upgrading for people employed in unskilled jobs in order to reduce their chance of losing their jobs, increase their chances of job advancement and raise job satisfaction.
- ◆ Expanding the field of entrepreneurship, which is proving to be a suitable channel for Kavkazi immigrants, to additional towns in Israel in which *MATI* operates. It is particularly

important to increase the utilization of training and consulting opportunities by potential entrepreneurs, in order to increase the chances of survival of the business.

- ◆ Utilization of the resources within the community for developing programs, marketing them within the community and recruiting participants, as well as publicizing the success stories (for example, owners of successful businesses) and increasing the prestige of successful businessmen so that they will serve as role models to identify with and imitate.
- ◆ Recruiting professionals and paraprofessionals from the community for roles that require direct contact with the Kavkazim. This is doubly important in the area of entrepreneurship in which the potential entrepreneur is supposed to disclose to the coordinator his business idea and his financial resources.
- ◆ Developing cultural sensitivity among professionals in the training and placement systems in order to increase understanding and improve communication between them and the Kavkazim.
- ◆ Recruiting the community of employers as partners in promoting the integration of Kavkazim into jobs, also, but certainly not only, with the help of financial incentives.

## 5. Community

### 5.1 Seclusion and Integration

One of the images of the Kavkazi community is that of a closed, secluded community, striving to safeguard its traditions and values, create separate social-cultural frameworks for its members, and abstain from forming social ties with non-immigrant Israelis. In this chapter we will try to examine the basis of this contention, distinguish between seclusion and the desire to preserve a unique culture, and explain the historical and current reasons for this perception.

The community's residential pattern is perceived as one expression of its seclusion. The main consideration of Kavkazi immigrants of the 1990s in choosing their places of residence in Israel was whether their relatives, some of the immigrants from the 1970s, resided in that location (68%). A less common, but similar consideration was whether other Kavkazi immigrants, not necessarily relatives, lived there (13%). As a result, there are large concentrations of Kavkazim in a number of small cities, such as Hadera, Or Akiva, Acco, Kiryat Yam, Nazareth Ilit and certain parts of Beersheva (Bram 1998). Forty two percent of the interviewees reported that many Kavkazi immigrants live in their neighborhood (King 1998). There are advantages and disadvantages to such large concentrations. For example, it provides continuity and familiarity that constitute a kind of "anchor" in a new environment but it also limits the opportunities to use Hebrew and to form social relations with immigrants from other countries and with non-immigrant Israelis.

The main barriers to relations with non-immigrant Israelis, according to the interviewees, are the language barrier (55%) and different mentalities (35%). It is interesting to note that the immigrants do not attribute sole responsibility for the limited contact to a lack of interest on the part of the non-immigrants: about 25% felt that the Kavkazim bear responsibility because they feel more

comfortable among themselves - and the same percent attributed the lack of contact to a lack of interest on the part of non-immigrant Israelis.

While a majority of Kavkazi immigrants (67%) wanted a separate synagogue, only a minority wanted a separate social club (29%). It should be noted that the Kavkazi synagogue focuses more on rites of passage and holidays than on the religious activity that generally characterizes synagogues in Israel and therefore has more social than religious significance.

The endogamous marriage patterns also reflect a desire to safeguard the community's boundaries. Almost all of those interviewed in the 1997 study who were already married, had a spouse who was Kavkazi. Half of them preferred that their children would also marry a Kavkazi. Moreover, there is evidence that at least some of the young people (including the second generation of Kavkazi immigrants of the 1970s) continue to find a spouse among Kavkazi families with whom their own families are acquainted. The immigration of the 1990s provided a new "inventory" of suitable spouses.

The limited use of social services, despite the needs that exist, is attributed by social service providers to the reclusiveness of the community's members and their tendency to solve problems within the extended family.

Kavkazi immigrants have a strong collective and individual identity as Kavkazim. Most (66%) of the adults aged 21-64 perceive themselves as entirely Kavkazi (32%) or primarily Kavkazi and only slightly Israeli (34%). The Kavkazi identity is less prominent among the young adults (those in their 20s and 30s), and weakens with time in Israel. However, even after six or more years in Israel, this percentage is still 50%. The Kavkazim express a deep commitment to preserving Kavkazi tradition in Israel: their traditions (79%), family values (85%), and educating their children as it was done in the Caucasus (74%). Commitment to Kavkazi tradition is largely maintained as time of residence in Israel increases.

How can this tendency towards seclusion be accounted for? Throughout their history in the Caucasus, the seclusion of the Kavkazi Jews can be explained by the desire to maintain their Jewish identity in a society with a multiplicity of ethnic groups. In Israel, one of the principal reasons for their seclusion stems from their negative image in the eyes of Israeli society. Among the general public and among many of the social service workers, there is a widespread tendency to divide immigrants from the FSU into "Europeans" as opposed to "Asians", and "cultured" as opposed to "uncultured". Kavkazi immigrants have been negatively labeled as poorly educated and hot-headed. In effect, the negative stereotypes were created during encounters with the immigrants of the 1970s and were transferred to the immigrants of the 1990s. Immigrants from the European republics of the former Soviet Union who were hired for jobs involving contact with the Kavkazim due to their command of a common language – Russian – contributed to the negative labeling out of the desire to emphasize the difference between themselves and the Kavkazi immigrants.

Findings from the 1997 study show that service providers (who can be seen as representatives of general Israeli society) do not win the confidence of the Kavkazi immigrants. Forty percent of the immigrants perceive the service personnel as not understanding their problems or needs (beyond the language barrier); only 63% feel that the service providers treat them with dignity (as noted, personal and family honor are particularly important values in the Kavkazi culture); and only 50% feel that the service providers are really trying to help them. The feeling that service providers do not understand their problems and needs (a feeling shared by the professionals themselves), originates in the inter-cultural gaps that hamper effective communication, far beyond the language barriers. In addition, certain aspects of Israeli culture, particularly what is perceived as permissiveness towards girls, are a threat to the Kavkazi community, which reacts by closing itself off.

At the same time there are significant signs of growing openness on the part of the Kavkazim towards Israeli society:

- ◆ 71% of the adults interviewed in the 1997 study reported that they are interested in having more contact with non-immigrant Israelis. An even larger percentage of young people responded similarly.
- ◆ Even with regard to marriage, half of the respondents preferred that their children married someone who is not Kavkazi.
- ◆ The situation of Kavkazi youth differs from that of their parents. While 40% do not have a single Israeli friend, 60% do have Israeli friends. While 30% of the youth feel that non-immigrant Israelis ignore them at school, 70% do not share this feeling. While half of the youth do not go out socially or exchange visits with non-immigrant Israelis, this is similar to the finding for non-Kavkazi youth from the FSU (although the latter had been in Israel for a shorter period at the time of the survey). Half of the Kavkazi youth would like to expand their social contacts with non-immigrant Israeli youth.
- ◆ There are significant numbers of Kavkazim who are changing those norms that are most in conflict with Israeli norms such as with respect to marriage patterns.

In discussing immigrant absorption, it is important to distinguish between areas in which it is legitimate for ethnic groups who live in a pluralistic society to try and preserve their uniqueness, and areas in which insularity prevents them from fully participating in the general society. Thus the feeling that it is more comfortable to be with other members of one's ethnic community (*landsmanshaft*) is natural and understandable as long as social contacts with other groups are also encouraged. The desire for a separate synagogue and social-cultural club is also true for other ethnic groups in Israel. The aspiration to preserve a community's cultural uniqueness should be respected. At the same time, the dilemmas that arise from conflicts between traditional values and accepted practices in the general society cannot be ignored and need to be addressed.

### **Relationship between Kavkazi Immigrants of the 1970s and the 1990s**

An important aspect in the discussion of the Kavkazi community is the ambivalent relationship between immigrants of the 1990s and immigrants of the 1970s. On the one hand, the 1970s

immigrants perceive the new immigrants as having come to Israel due to the economic distress and lack of personal security in the Caucasus, while they themselves immigrated for ideological Zionist reasons. This difference gives rise to a certain sense of superiority among them. In addition, there is a certain degree of jealousy on the part of the earlier immigrants vis-à-vis the new immigrants, since the latter receive assistance and benefits, particularly with regard to higher education, which the earlier immigrants did not receive. On the other hand, there are close ties between the two groups which is reflected in the social networks that are based on family relationships. However, it is these very ties that have led to the creation of tensions based on the differences in mutual expectations: the new immigrants expected much more help (in accordance with the norms in the Caucasus) than the earlier immigrants were prepared to give (according to Israeli norms). As a result, the earlier immigrants felt they were being taken advantage of while the newer immigrants were disappointed.

There is also ambiguity at the community-political level: some of the 1970s immigrants, particularly the community activists among them, see in the new wave of immigration an opportunity to change the status of the community and its image, while others perceive the new group, which is numerically larger and more educated, as a threat to their positions of power.

Despite all this, Kavkazi immigrants of the 1970s and the 1990s perceive themselves as one community. Various organizations that develop programs for Kavkazi immigrants agree with this perception and are making efforts to include the earlier immigrants in their programs (even if it exceeds their mandate) with the argument that “they deserve it because they did not receive these things when they were new immigrants”.

## 5.2 Policies and Programs

### **Efforts to Strengthen the Community**

Strengthening the collective image of the Kavkazim in their own eyes and in the eyes of the general population has been an objective of the Ministry of Absorption with regard to this population, even before it was defined as a unique immigrant population group. For this purpose, support was given to folklore troupes, to holding exhibitions of Kavkazi artists and to preparing an exhibit on the history of Kavkazi Jews in the Israel Museum. Support was also given to the Association of Kavkazi Immigrants and preliminary attempts were made to form a cadre of activists.

It is hoped that cultural and heritage programs will not only strengthen the collective self-image of the Kavkazim, but will also bring the Israeli public closer to the community. The principal programs today are *Diwan*, the Center for Music of the East (the Caucasus, Bukhara, North Africa and others) which was established at Bar Ilan University, the exhibit on Kavkazi Jews at the Israel Museum and the film, “The Last Jewish Town”, that describes the Jewish way of life in Kuba in the Caucasus. In addition, community activists initiated the renewal of the Kavkazi *Jubjil*, which is analogous to the *Maimouna* celebrations, a traditional holiday celebrated the day after Passover.

In effect, all the programs to advance formal and informal education for various age groups are intended to contribute to the strengthening of the community beyond their contribution to the individual participants. These programs will be addressed in detail in the following chapters.

In order to bridge the inter-cultural gap between the Kavkazi community and the non-immigrant community, in general, and the services, in particular, a large number of mediators are employed by Government ministries (e.g. Absorption, Education, Project Renewal in the Ministry of Housing), local authorities, non-profit organizations and foundations. The problem is that the role of the mediators has not been clearly defined, many of them have not been adequately trained, and they have little opportunity for professional exchange. JDC-Israel and the Project Renewal Department in the Ministry of Housing have developed a training program for community mediators for the various immigrant communities – Ethiopian, Kavkazi and Bukhari. The goal of the program is to establish a joint forum of mediators for purposes of mutual learning and pooling of resources. In the first stage, the program is to be implemented on an experimental basis in 2-3 towns with a large concentration of immigrants.

### **Kavkazi Community Leadership**

Community leadership development programs are, in the opinion of all the professionals who were interviewed, of major importance in developing the resources of the Kavkazi community.

In the last few generations, the Kavkazi Jewish community has been characterized by a lack of leadership. The social organization patterns of Kavkazi Jews that grant much autonomy to the head of the family create potential tension with community leadership. Simultaneously, the limited traditional leadership was greatly weakened in the wake of the wars in the Caucasus and the activities of the Soviet regime (Bram, 1998).

In the 1970s, the Israeli establishment made an attempt to cultivate community leadership. However, this leadership was based on interest groups and kinship groups, and its mode of operation was not based on a broad vision involving the entire community. In the 1990s, a different community leadership began to evolve, at first at the initiative of the establishment, out of professional ideology, and as a means to improve communication with the community. Later, the community itself played an increasingly greater role in leading the process, always with the support of voluntary organizations and the government. The transition from the earlier leadership, which was composed mostly of local political activists, to the new leadership, characterized more by professionals, has not occurred without tension. Power struggles still persist to a certain extent among different activist groups.

Kavkazi activists have attained leadership positions in the local political arena. In the last municipal elections twelve were elected to city council in localities with concentrations of Kavkazi immigrants and two were elected as vice mayor.

At the beginning of the 1980s, the Association of Kavkazi Immigrants was registered as a non-profit organization, with an elected, national administration of 29 members, and 24 urban branches, in addition to “professional” branches – the Kavkazi Writers Association and the Artists Association. The Association is supported by the Jewish Agency and the Ministry of Absorption and receives funds for specific projects from JDC-Israel. In addition, there are other national

organizations of activists, such as *Amikam* and the Council of Kavkazi Students and Professionals (which is another branch of the Association), and local activist organizations, which, in several towns, have established non-profit associations (for example, *Tikva LeAtid* - Hope for the Future, in Acco). The various organizations cooperate in terms of activities, but also compete for resources provided by government and non-government organizations for implementing programs.

The policy is to develop community leadership at different levels (national, local) and among different groups in the Kavkazi population (adults, students, youth, women). For this purpose, several training programs have been implemented and additional efforts are planned:

- ♦ **National leadership.** The first course in national leadership was held in 1996 at the School for Educational Leadership in Jerusalem, and the second course – advanced national leadership – was held in 2000. Both courses were funded by the Ministry of Absorption, JDC-Israel, the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs and the Ministry of Housing. The goal of the courses: "Formulation of a leadership group with national influence, both on the community and Israeli society, that will represent the community before the ministries, will take part in developing programs for the advancement of the community and will raise important issues on the agenda of the decisionmakers" (from the document: Mapping National Programs for the Advancement of the Kavkazi and Bukhari Communities, JDC-ISRAEL, April 2001). They were attended by community activists who immigrated in the 1990s and members of the second generation of the 1970s immigrants.
- ♦ **Local leadership.** A 70 hour course was held a few years ago in 10 towns with large concentrations of Kavkazim, funded by the same organizations, whose goal was: "Formulation of leadership groups with influence in the community for joint work with service providers in the town", and improved community access to locally available resources: information, existing services, activity budgets, etc. The contribution of the Kavkazi activists at the local level is vital to the intervention programs, as they are familiar with the needs of the community and have standing in the community due to their volunteer activities. In the words of a service provider from Acco: "They do it from the heart. They care and they come out of love and the desire to help." They can help in formulating programs, in distributing information about the programs in the community, in finding suitable participants and in persuading them to participate. In certain places, they themselves run the programs, such as a social club in Acco or summer camps for children in Hadera. With the aim of upgrading their activities, they are given training courses to acquire new skills, such as writing program proposals, mobilizing resources, being active in municipal committees and so forth. However, some of the interviewees felt that the contribution of the training courses lies more in creating an opportunity for the activists to meet and to exchange information than in skill acquisition. Some are convinced that the activists need not implement programs, but should instead serve advocacy groups representing their needs before the various authorities and pressing for the implementation of programs.
- ♦ **Youth leadership.** ADAM (art, dialogue, leadership) was initiated in 1999 with funding from the Ministry of Absorption, the Ministry of Education and JDC-Israel, and implemented by the Association of Community Centers. The aim of the program was to develop leadership

among immigrant youth by creating a dialogue between Kavkazi and Bukhari immigrant youth and non-immigrant youth who are active in various art fields. It was unique in that it both developed leadership among Kavkazi youth and also created a bridge between them and non-immigrant youth. The program was discontinued for administrative reasons.

"Challenges" – an alternative program for youth leadership development which focuses on challenge sports. It is running successfully in Acco in the framework of the Association of Community Centers. The program is more fully described in the chapter on informal education.

Kavkazi youth council – based on the PELE program (see Chapter 7 on Formal Education). This program includes thousands of Kavkazi students in various locations in Israel. The youth council operates on a regional basis.

- ♦ **Military leadership.** This program prepares teenage boys to become officers during their future army service. It is described in detail in Chapter 12 – Army Service.
- ♦ **Women's leadership** (in the planning stages). Due to the large number of women volunteers there is a plan to formulate a national group of activists from various towns and train them to run projects for the welfare of Kavkazi families in the town.
- ♦ **Religious leadership** (in the planning stages). The idea originated with one of the community's central activists due to the need of Kavkazi immigrants for religious instruction, primarily in religious rituals, that would accord with the unique Kavkazi tradition, which is not religious in the accepted sense in Israel. The program would create a cadre of spiritual leaders who would be sensitive to Kavkazi tradition.

There is an interesting pattern of cross-fertilization and cooperation between Kavkazi immigrants who are volunteer activists and Kavkazi immigrants who are paid to work in programs for the Kavkazi community. Members of the community who hold paying jobs (for example, national entrepreneurship coordinator for Kavkazim, national employment coordinator) are assisted by volunteers during the various stages of formulating and implementing programs. Since they are given recognition by both the community and the establishment, they are able to come to both from a position of power ("they are not yes men").

There are also transitions from one level of activity to another. For example, in the course of time, several Kavkazim who volunteered for the *PELE* program moved to paid jobs in the framework of this program; other volunteers were later hired as neighborhood or community workers. There is no doubt that while engaging in volunteer activities they acquire qualifications and contacts that will assist them in paid jobs with the community.

In the framework of the all-day seminar conducted on July 9, 2002, one of the discussion groups addressed questions related to community leadership: What is community leadership? Who are the leaders of the Kavkazi community in Israel? How are they chosen and how should they be chosen? What is their current role? What kind of relationship should they have with the establishment?

During part of the discussion there was considerable tension between some of the representatives of the establishment (senior figures in government service and in the local authority) and community activists stemming from disagreement concerning the perceived roles and authority of the community leaders.

There was also a serious discussion about the different types of leaders arising from the ranks of community activists. The discussants identified leadership on different levels – national versus local, and of different types: political leaders, community activists (primarily volunteers), and professionals. Each type of leader has different functions to fulfill vis-à-vis the community and training programs need to be adapted to the various functions.

There was general agreement among representatives of the local authorities on the importance and contribution of leaders from the Kavkazi community. However, there were distinct differences in emphasis on the various roles. Some of the local authorities' representatives preferred to view this leadership primarily as a group of public-minded volunteers from the community working to strengthen the connection with the Kavkazi population and to ensure that there are participants in the various programs. Community activists, along with other local authority representatives, felt that it was important to develop leadership that will join the ranks of decisionmakers at various levels and play a part in local and national politics, enabling the community to have a greater impact.

A related (important) issue that arose is the patterns of cooperation created with the community and its leaders in the development of services. While representatives of the local authorities and various organizations feel that there is a high level of cooperation, some of the community activists disagreed.

As the discussion continued, it became clear that one of the reasons for these differences in perception stems from differences in expectations. Some of the Kavkazi activists expected that the Kavkazim themselves would be the central decisionmakers and implementers in all the projects developed for the community, while representatives of the local authorities felt that it was enough that they participate in the decisionmaking forum. This issue has not been resolved. However, there is considerable openness on all sides to continue this dialogue as to how best to involve the community.

### 5.3 Future Challenges

- ◆ Coordinating expectations between community activists and representatives of the local authorities regarding joint work patterns, the roles of the activists, the areas of activity and the nature of the involvement of the local leaders, the national leaders, and the various Kavkazi community associations.
- ◆ Training of local and national activists for the roles and areas of responsibility that will be determined jointly, as described above.

- ♦ Expanding the knowledge and skills of professionals and service providers related to culturally-sensitive subjects.
- ♦ Developing programs and joint activities for non-immigrants and Kavkazi immigrants, primarily youth and young adults, in common areas of interest, to increase their mutual understanding.
- ♦ In order to change the negative image of the Kavkazim, the Israeli public needs to be exposed to the strengths of this community: To its history and its long-standing ties with the Jewish people and the Land of Israel, to its unique culture and folklore and to current cultural heroes (singer Sarit Hadad), and successful members of the community.

## 6. Family

### 6.1 Instability and Solidarity

The family is the main frame of reference and affiliation for Kavkazim. It was severely affected by the process of immigration, and the adjustment problems of members of the community in various areas are ascribed, to a large extent, to the undermining of the family.

The survey data indicate that in 1997, 66% of Kavkazi immigrants aged 21-64 (77% of the men and 57% of the women) were married; 15% (7% of the men and 22% of the women) were divorced (12% of all divorcees were divorced after their arrival in Israel); and 11% were single. Of the families with children up to the age of 18, 15% were single-parent families, a much higher percentage than the corresponding percentage among the general non-immigrant population. Most families of Kavkazi origin have a small number of children: 38% have one child, 35% have 2 children, 17% have 3 children. However, there is a considerable group of large families: 7% have 4 children and 3% have 5-9 children.

There are indications of two principal processes of change in family patterns: the undermining of the dominance of the extended family, primarily the status of mothers-in-law, and a change in the division of roles between men and women and between parents and children.

Cracks in the pattern of the multi-generational, patriarchal and patrilocal extended family had already begun in the Caucasus. Even before immigration, a pattern of nuclear families living separately but with a strong link to the extended family, had begun to develop, particularly in the cities. The transition to Israel accelerated this process, despite the fact that housing problems led to multi-generational residences, particularly a widowed parent living with his or her children. Of the households that were examined in the framework of the 1997 study, 19% contained three generations. Despite the similarity in the residential pattern, there is a substantive difference compared with the situation in the country of origin. This difference is best expressed in the words of a mother-in-law from Kiryat Yam: "There, she (i.e. the daughter-in-law) lived in my house; here, I live in hers." These words reflect the loss of the dominant status of the husband's parents,

particularly that of the mother, in running the affairs of the home and supervising the conduct of family members.

Housing conditions make it more difficult to strengthen and consolidate the extended family framework: living in a small apartment in an apartment building does not allow for lavish entertaining of a large number of family members which was possible in the one-family homes with large internal courtyards in the Caucasus. Attempts to conduct these types of events in the courtyard or entrance to the apartment building aroused strong opposition from non-Kavkazi neighbors.

The traditional division of roles and the traditional balance of power between spouses was undermined in Israel by the Israeli system of values that promotes equality between the genders and similar roles for men and women, as well as the reality in which women, some of whom were not employed outside the home in the Caucasus, now go to work while the husband, whose traditional role is to support the family, is unemployed. Many of the women began to become aware of their power (something that is clearly reflected in their involvement in the community and in their volunteer activities), to exhibit more independence in their behavior, at times to the point of ending marriages in which they were not happy, which they would not have dared to do in the Caucasus.

The rise in the percentage of divorce also stems from the separation of couples due to the husband's traveling to the Caucasus for the purpose of conducting business or closing down a business. Another contributing factor is the relatively generous government support for single-parent families (income maintenance and related benefits), which provides the divorced woman with her own independent sources of income. However, it appears that the Kavkazi single mother does not enjoy the same measure of freedom as her Russian counterpart, and she is subject to social supervision (albeit less than a young single woman), and restrictions regarding employment (for example, she cannot work as a waitress) and relationships with a partner. Community activists emphasized that single Kavkazi mothers are in a period of transition in which they do not yet know how to cope with the freedom and how to conduct their lives and the lives of their children independently. For this reason, there is a particular need for intervention programs to assist them.

The undermining of the traditional authority structure in the family has also occurred in the relationships between parents and children. The 1997 study found that the inter-generational balance of assistance has changed: the mothers feel that they, themselves, and the fathers are less able to help their children in Israel (85%), and, on the other hand, they are helped more by their children (65%) (Ellenbogen-Frankovits and Noam, 1998). Moreover, more than two-thirds of the mothers report that they and the fathers are busier and have less time to be with their children. Despite this, it appears that, in general, the transition from the Caucasus to Israel did not cause a crisis between youths and their families. Most of the youths (93%) and most of the mothers (92%) report that they get along with each other in a similar manner or even better than they did before their immigration to Israel.

Reports by service providers raise concern that there is an increase in violence in the family related to the difficult economic situation of the Kavkazi immigrant families and the socio-cultural changes

that they are facing. The violence is directed both at spouses and children. However, it should be emphasized that the extent of the phenomenon has not been examined systematically, and the information on this subject is based solely on the impressions of the service providers, who are exposed to the more problematic family situations.

Along with the family patterns that are changing, there are patterns that have been preserved. Some constitute factors that make the integration of the Kavkazi immigrants more difficult, while others are a source of strength that can ease the adjustment. Thus, for example, the mother-in-law's problems in adjusting to Israeli norms and her reluctance to give up her position of power in the family make it more difficult for the younger generations in the family to adopt new patterns (for example, in infant care, use of leisure time, and so forth). However, the honor of the grandfather and grandmother has been preserved, and the family members avoid rebelling against them. With mothers of small children going out to work, the potential contribution of the mother-in-law in helping to care for the children and the household is all the more important.

Another custom that prevails, despite its illegality, is the marriage of female minors. In the study on Kavkazi immigrant youth (Ellenbogen-Frankovits and Noam, 1998), most of the mothers expressed the opinion that the desirable age for girls to marry is up to age 20, and more than half the girls thought so, as well. However, reports of service providers show that the phenomenon of female minor marriage (which is prohibited under Israeli law) is not uncommon. The girl goes to live in the home of her husband's parents, and when she reaches the age of 17, she is considered legally married. By then she is generally already a mother, or becomes a mother within a short time. This custom blocks the paths of mobility for the girl.

At the same time, it appears that the Kavkazi family is succeeding, to a significant extent, in maintaining its solidarity, and patterns of mutual assistance. For example, siblings will assist and work without pay in a business established by another sibling, until it begins to show a profit.

## 6.2 Policies and Programs

The declared policy of the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs for Kavkazi immigrant families is to strengthen the Kavkazi family, with the understanding that the undermining of the traditional structure, without providing an alternative, creates a vacuum and anomie. There is a desire to help all members of the family to internalize the major values of Israeli society and to adapt to the patterns prevalent in Israel, without clashing with the traditional patterns, and, as far as possible, to integrate the two.

Despite recognition of the great importance of strengthening the family and the need to assist families to integrate into Israeli society as families, there are not many intervention programs designed to strengthen the family and their dissemination is limited.

- ♦ One important initiative with regard to strengthening the ties between parents and children is "The Family Network", a program that has been implemented in five towns by the Association of Community Centers and is funded by JDC-Israel and the Ministry of

Absorption. Parents and children prepare material on Kavkazi traditions by means of computerized data bases, and in the process acquire computer skills. In addition to strengthening the family, the program's goals include familiarizing the parents with computers, familiarizing the children with the Kavkazi traditions, and enhancing the self-image of the community.

- ◆ The mothers-in-law project in Kiryat Yam: At an early stage in the absorption process of the Kavkazi immigrants in the 1990s, the service providers began to understand that there was a need to address the needs of the mothers-in-law, if the programs to promote the younger generations of the family were to succeed. In Kiryat Yam, a mothers-in-law support group meets once a week and is facilitated by a woman from the community. The group also goes on trips. The goal is to help them to understand and to accept the changes in their lives and in the lives of their families following immigration and to provide emotional and social support.
- ◆ A related program is the preparatory program for pregnancy, birth and parenthood at family health centers in Or Akiva, Pardes Hana and Sderot, in which the expectant mother and the mother-in-law participate together. The program was developed after daughters-in-law encountered strong opposition at home on the part of their mothers-in-law regarding the methods of caring for infants, which were taught at the clinics. The joint instruction is designed to prevent conflict between the guidelines of the clinics and advice from the family. The mothers-in-law continue to be invited for visits at the clinic after the birth of the baby and they learn, together with the mothers, the routine care of the infant and how to contribute to its development.
- ◆ A workshop for single mothers at the Family Health Center in Kiryat Yam, designed to promote empowerment and provide the mother with the appropriate skills related to the care of, and interaction with, the child, and how to manage her life independently.
- ◆ In the planning stage is a project for disadvantaged girls aged 14-18 and their mothers in Pardes Hana (Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs).

### 6.3 Future Challenges

- ◆ Important initiatives to assist the family through the processes of cultural transition are in various stages of development. However, these limited efforts require additional investment as well as broader dissemination.
- ◆ It is important to raise the awareness of professionals who are implementing intervention programs in areas such as education, early childhood and employment about the impact of the participation of a family member in such programs on the balance and relationships within the family. Thus, many of these programs may need to develop and include elements aimed at addressing these changes and involve the entire family in parts of the intervention programs. An example of this are joint programs for mothers-in-law and young mothers that focus on childrearing practices.
- ◆ Greater efforts need to be made to assess the extent and nature of family violence so that it can be addressed effectively.

## 7. Formal Education

### 7.1 Introduction

The successful integration of Kavkazi immigrant children and youth into the education system is of decisive importance to their future integration into Israeli society. Moreover, the success of the younger generation in the realm of higher education will impact upon the image of the community in Israeli society.

The integration of children and youth into the education system and their ability to contend with the challenges they face in and out of school are affected by the changes affecting the family. As noted in previous chapters, a large proportion of the families must cope with difficulties with the Hebrew language, employment difficulties and economic hardships. For example, the study findings show that 17% of the mothers interviewed stated that their son/daughter never participates in school trips due to the difficulty of covering the expenses; 11% stated that this happens frequently, and 23% stated that it had happened once or twice. Six percent of the mothers stated that their son/daughter is always lacking school supplies due to economic difficulties; 16% of them stated that this happens to them frequently, and 27% stated that it had happened once or twice (Ellenbogen-Frankovits and Noam, 1998). Another source of strain on the families are the changes in family patterns, as described in Chapter 6. These changes obligate many families to cope with changes in family relationships and in the family's composition.

Another factor which is likely to negatively affect the children's integration into the education system is the relatively limited involvement of the parents in school. The parents have difficulty helping their children with school-related matters and find it difficult to communicate with the education system. The findings of the study show, for example, that about two-thirds of the mothers (64%) did not initiate a conversation or a meeting with anyone on the school staff during the school year in which they were interviewed and that about half of them (53%) reported that no one on the school staff initiated a meeting or conversation with them. Moreover, a high percentage of the mothers (38%) are interested in speaking with someone at the school but have not done so for a number of reasons: language difficulties (57%), lack of time (26%), and also the feeling that "no one can help" them (25%). In general, 85% of the mothers said, "We are less able to help our children than non-immigrant Israeli parents." However, there is a growing awareness regarding the importance of education among members of the community.

A number of organizations implement programs for Kavkazi immigrants in the field of formal and informal education. As in other major areas, the organizations have different perspectives and policies. Some organizations, for instance the Police and certain divisions of the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, implement special programs for immigrant children and youth without distinguishing between Kavkazim and other immigrant populations. Other organizations, such as some of the divisions of the Ministry of Education, the Student Administration, the Ministry of Absorption and JDC-Israel, develop special programs for Kavkazi immigrants. The leading

organizations in initiating and implementing special programs for promoting the educational integration of Kavkazi immigrants are the Ministry of Absorption, JDC-Israel and the Immigrant Student Absorption Division of the Ministry of Education. These bodies employ coordinators, program directors or other professionals specifically for the Kavkazi immigrant population, and together with a wide range of other organizations are developing innovative initiatives at the national and local level for Kavkazi immigrant children and youth.

This chapter will deal extensively with the situation and the needs of Kavkazi immigrant children and youth in the field of education, the policies and intervention programs that currently exist for assisting this population and the challenges in improving the situation of the Kavkazi immigrants in this field. It is divided into three sections: early childhood, primary and secondary school, and higher education. Chapters 8 and 9 will discuss informal education and social integration, and non-normative (at risk) behavior among Kavkazi youth.

## 7.2 Early Childhood

### **a. Current Situation and Needs**

The 1997 study findings indicate that the extent of participation in early childhood educational frameworks among Kavkazi immigrants is lower than among the general Israeli population. Thus, for example, at age three, 44% of Kavkazi immigrant children were integrated into these frameworks, compared with about two-thirds of the general Israeli population.

A large proportion of the Kavkazi children of pre-school age spend most of the day at home with their mothers and grandmothers. They are not exposed to the same environments and stimuli to which most of the Israeli children are exposed, and do not acquire the skills that are generally acquired in pre-school frameworks, such as the development of learning skills, the ability to draw and use scissors, the ability to work independently, and the ability to form relationships and play with other children in a structured manner. Additionally, these children are not exposed to the Hebrew language, which is not spoken at home. This situation creates difficulties in the integration of the children into frameworks. Some of the professionals interviewed expressed the view that the Kavkazi immigrant families have a low level of awareness of the importance of the participation of their children in early childhood education. This is due in part to the fact that many Kavkazi immigrants view women (the mother and the mother-in-law) as those responsible for looking after the children and raising them until school age. In addition, the difficult economic situation of many of the Kavkazi immigrants makes it difficult for the families to finance participation in early childhood voluntary frameworks.

Another reason for the relatively low extent of participation in pre-school frameworks was raised during the discussion group: some of the participants said that they and other women prefer to keep the children at home so that they will learn their “mother tongue” and become familiar with Kavkazi culture. Participants sought to emphasize the importance of being attentive to parental preferences concerning their children’s education, and not to assume that integrating the children into an educational framework at a very young age, as is done in Israel, is the best thing for this

population. Creative ways must be found to allow parents to choose what is best for them from a variety of alternatives.

Some of the discussion group participants noted that in cases where Kavkazi children were integrated into early childhood frameworks, the teaching staff often had difficulties meeting these children's special needs, because they had not acquired the tools required to work with this population. Similarly, they lacked the tools for diagnosing and treating learning disabilities, a prerequisite for placing the children in the most appropriate frameworks.

## **b. Policies and Programs**

There is currently no national program dealing specifically with intervention among Kavkazi immigrant families with pre-school age children and there is no special allocation of funds for programs or teaching hours for these children by the Ministry of Education. These children and their families can utilize the services available for the general population such as Family Health Centers and pre-schools; however, there is only a very limited focus on their unique needs. There are a number of programs for early childhood aimed especially at the Kavkazi population that have been locally initiated and implemented. In addition, Kavkazi families with young children may also receive assistance through the several programs that support disadvantaged children.

- ♦ **“Etgar”** and **“HaTaf”** are national programs implemented in the home. In Or Akiva and Pardes Hana the programs have been culturally adapted for the Kavkazi population. The goals of **HaTaf** are to raise parental awareness of the importance of pre-school education in preparing the children for integration into the schools and empowering the parents as educators. The goals of **Etgar** are to prepare children for school and to increase the involvement of the parents in their children's education. Both programs include individual instruction in the family's home once a week, with a special program kit of books and toys, joint activities for a group of parents and children once a month and activities for parents and children at special events, such as the Jewish holidays.
- ♦ **Early Childhood Centers** in Or Akiva and Pardes Hana employ special developmental counselors for Kavkazi immigrants who work with the toddlers and their mothers.
- ♦ **Family Health Centers** also in Or Akiva and Pardes Hana are set up to care for Kavkazi immigrant mothers and toddlers in a culturally sensitive way. Recently, the centers in these localities, in collaboration with Ashalim, have begun operating a program in which clinic nurses can initiate and operate programs for disadvantaged children and families according to the local needs that they have identified. In Kiryat Yam, Beersheva and Sderot the nurses have elected to focus on the Kavkazi population.
- ♦ The **Kat-Gan** program in Acco is being conducted in the community center, funded by the Association of Community Centers and the Helen Bader Foundation. It is a combined day care center for immigrant and non-immigrant children. In the program emphasis is placed on working with the parents. The 15 Kavkazi immigrant families who participate in the program are aware of the need to integrate their two and three-year-olds into an educational framework, but cannot afford the tuition in a private framework. The program operates five days a week from 8:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. The children benefit from a preparatory program for

first grade and an enrichment program, and the mothers simultaneously benefit from the Hebrew ulpan at the site. The program has many goals including instructing the mothers in how to help integrate their children into Israeli society while preserving the special, cultural characteristics of the Kavkazi immigrants, strengthening and empowering the women, and providing the children with learning skills that will enable them to better integrate into the school system in the future.

- ♦ ***A pre-school training program*** has been developed for the coordinators and directors of the Department of Special Populations in the Pre-school Education Division of the Ministry of Education, and for educational mediators. It is aimed at developing a multicultural approach to work with young children and training the coordinators in leading a change in perception among kindergarten teachers in towns that absorb immigrants, so that they will be better prepared to address the needs of young Kavkazi immigrant children. The program combines advanced study days and a field project in various towns (in coordination with the Ministry of Education, *ASHALIM*, and JDC-Israel).
- ♦ ***Preparation for first grade*** – A special program was implemented in Sderot in 2001 for Kavkazi immigrant children by the *Yedid* Association; 23 children participated. The program operated in an extended school day format, along with afternoon meetings for the parents to encourage their involvement in the school. The program implementers monitored the children's scholastic situation in the first third of their first grade studies and reported satisfactory results. The program was discontinued with the termination of funding.
- ♦ ***A program that teaches Hebrew using theatre*** is being implemented in two kindergarten classes and a first and second grade class in Givat Olga and Hadera. Some 100 children, primarily Kavkazi immigrants, are participating. It is currently being funded by JDC-Israel, the Ministry of Education, and the local authority.

### **c. Future Challenges**

- ♦ Finding ways to expand the percentage of children who participate in early childhood education frameworks.
- ♦ Providing a range of pre-school education and enrichment alternatives that allow the children to acquire important skills for integrating into the educational system, on the one hand, while respecting the parents' preferences, on the other hand.
- ♦ Developing awareness among the Kavkazi population of the importance of emphasizing the development of young children and preparing them to contend with the challenges they will face in the school frameworks.
- ♦ Providing suitable training for the educational staff in early childhood frameworks: There is a significant lack of information on, and understanding of, the Kavkazi culture, as well as culturally sensitive ways to approach the children and parents and to address their special needs.
- ♦ Basing the formulation of policies and the development of early childhood programs on systematically-gathered information regarding the needs and preferences of children and their families in the Kavkazi immigrant population.

## 7.3 Primary and Secondary Education

### **a. Current Situation and Needs**

The findings of the 1997 study and the interviews with key informants identify a number of key problems. These are:

1. Low scholastic achievements reflected in a low percentage completing the matriculation exams and high rates of youth who drop out or who are hidden dropouts.
2. A tendency to choose vocational tracks of study and to have difficulties with transitions, particularly from elementary school to junior high school and from junior high school to high school.

#### ***Low Scholastic Achievements***

The key informants who were interviewed consistently report low scholastic achievements for Kavkazi students. Data from the 1997 study show, for example, that 79% of the youths reported that they were having problems with one or more subjects, and about half the youths (45%) reported that they were having problems with three or more subjects. While 53% did not fail any subject, 13% failed three subjects or more (Ellenbogen-Frankovits and Noam, 1998). Undoubtedly, difficulties with Hebrew affect their scholastic achievements. One of the interviewees described additional reasons for the low scholastic achievements of Kavkazi immigrant youth: "A frustrated child, to whom the general population relates as a violent child without ability, is not receptive to learning. Many of them also come from problematic situations of poverty, unemployment, or single parent families." Other professionals emphasized the lack of adequate assistance that would enable them to close the gaps in scholastic achievement.

One of the major expressions of low achievements is the success or lack of success on matriculation exams at the end of high school. Despite the fact that there are no precise data on the percentage of those eligible for matriculation certificates among Kavkazi immigrants, key informants indicated that the percentages are low among Kavkazi immigrant youth. In Israel, the matriculation certificate is the entry ticket to higher education and, from there, to social and economic mobility.

The 1997 study found that only about 44% of twelfth grade Kavkazi students were studying towards full matriculation and intended to take all the matriculation exams. However, not all students who strive for full matriculation succeed in all the exams. Ministry of Education data show that in 1997 (the year in which the study was conducted) two-thirds of the immigrants from the former Soviet Union who took all the matriculation exams earned matriculation. If we also take into account the particularly high dropout rate among Kavkazi immigrant youth then it can be estimated that a low percentage (15-20%) of the relevant cohort will be eligible for matriculation certificate compared to 40% of the general population of Jewish youth.

#### ***Dropouts and Hidden Dropouts***

The scholastic difficulties encountered by Kavkazi immigrant students, the difficulty with Hebrew, the financial problems of the families and the problems experienced by the youths in integrating into the general population are significant factors in dropping out of school.

The dropout rates among Kavkazi immigrant youth are very high. Most of the key informants emphasized the high drop out rate both in comparison with non-immigrant students and other immigrants from the former Soviet Union. The 1997 study showed that about 25% of the youth aged 14-17 are not studying in Ministry of Education frameworks (compared with 5.5% in the Jewish sector and 21% in the Arab sector), and about 10% do not study at all (Ellenbogen-Frankovits and Noam, 1998).

However, findings from a national follow-up study conducted at the end of 2002 by the JDC-Brookdale Institute in cooperation with the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Absorption and JDC-Israel reveal that there has been a significant decline in the dropout rates: While in 1997 25% of the youth from the Caucasus ages 14-17 did not study in Ministry of Education schools and 10% were not studying at all, in 2002 14% did not study in Ministry of Education schools and 6% were not studying at all.

In addition to the dropouts – i.e., students who leave the education system – there are others in school who exhibit behavior patterns or characteristics that place them at risk for leaving the educational system, or are not really benefiting and participating in the educational process. These students are referred to as “hidden dropouts” and they are characterized by high rates of absenteeism, low scholastic achievements, serious social problems in school, feelings of alienation from the school, and serious behavioral problems. This phenomenon in the overall population is examined extensively in a report prepared by the Brookdale Institute on the subject of dropouts and hidden dropouts (Navot, Ellenbogen-Frankovits, Reinfeld, 2001).

We examined the phenomenon of hidden dropouts among Kavkazi immigrants using the 1997 survey data. According to this analysis, about 21% of the students reported that they were absent from school three or more days a month and 22% reported feeling alienated at school. Half of the youth are characterized by at least one of the characteristics of hidden dropouts mentioned above – 17% by two and 8% by three or more. These data show that the percentages of “hidden drop outs” among Kavkazi youth are similar to those among the general population of students. Nevertheless, this phenomenon must be viewed against the background of the relatively high percentages of Kavkazi youth who have already dropped out of school.

The main reasons for dropping out, according to key informants, are scholastic difficulties and problems with social integration. However, there is another, albeit less common, factor – the families’ expectations that the youth help them, even if it requires being absent from school. Girls are expected to help with the housework and to care for small children; boys are expected to work and earn money.

According to a representative of one of the services: “In recent generations, the Kavkazi Jews internalized the value of acquiring an education. They even sent their daughters to school. However, when they arrived in Israel and encountered socio-economic problems, they regressed with regard

to these values and discontinued their children's studies, in order for them to help with the housework and with supporting the family."

Moreover, the principals of various schools reported that compared to the parents of other student populations who take an active part in remedying the situation, it is often the parents of the Kavkazi youth who demanded that their children miss school in order to help the family.

While there are no quantitative data that examine the relationship between the scope of dropping out among Kavkazi youth and the extent to which they help out at home, reports by key informants indicate that this situation requires further investigation.

The findings of the study (Ellenbogen-Frankovits and Noam, 1998) show that dropping out is more common (although not confined to) among youth from a lower socio-economic stratum. For example, about 40% of the youths whose fathers had a high school education or less dropped out of Ministry of Education supervised schools, compared with 22% of youths whose fathers had post-high school education. Moreover, 42% of the youths whose fathers were unemployed received failing grades in two or more subjects, compared with 27% of those whose parents were employed.

### ***Difficulties with Transitions***

Key informants attest to the fact that Kavkazi immigrant youth have problems in particular with transitions: the transition from kindergarten to first grade, the transition from elementary school to junior high school, and the transition from junior high school to high school. At these new starting points, such as in the first year in junior high school, large scholastic gaps between Kavkazi immigrant children and non-immigrant children become apparent, and they widen as time passes. One of the community activists says: "The crises of the students in the transitions from elementary school to junior high school and from junior high school to high school are sometimes so hard that they do not survive them. Without significant help for students at the time of the transition, they are liable to find themselves in a process of gradual deterioration."

Moreover, the students are not familiar enough with the education system: they are not aware of the various study tracks and they have difficulty establishing contact with those providing counseling and guidance. Their parents are not familiar with the educational system either, do not feel comfortable contacting its representatives, and, thus, cannot accompany and help their children during these transitions.

### ***Study Tracks***

The study track in which a student enrolls has a critical effect on his continued integration into higher education and employment. In the Israeli system, high school students can participate in one of three educational tracks: An academic track leading to matriculation, vocational tracks that also include academic studies leading to matriculation, and vocational tracks that do not lead to matriculation, thus limiting the opportunities to enter higher education. The Kavkazi immigrant population, primarily the boys, has a strong preference for studying in vocational tracks. Most of the

youths (83%) and mothers (89%) ascribe great importance to the study of a vocation while in high school that will enable them to work in the field immediately upon completing high school. In many cases they do not distinguish between the vocational tracks leading to matriculation and those that do not. In 1997, only 30% of Kavkazi immigrant students in tenth grade and above were studying in an academic or vocational track leading to matriculation, compared with over half (55.4%) among the general Israeli population and 81% among the Jewish students (National Council for the Child, 1996).

The director of the Absorption Division of the Ministry of Education reported that there has recently been a change in these attitudes as a result, in particular, of the introduction of cultural mediators into the schools (see below): “The mediators encourage the parents to send their children to academic study tracks. They provide the parents with information on the school frameworks that exist after ninth grade. This is the reason why there is an increasing tendency among parents to send their children to academic studies, which lead to a matriculation certificate, rather than to vocational tracks...”

### ***Language Difficulties***

One of the major findings of the 1997 study that is consistently confirmed by all the key informants interviewed is the students’ difficulty integrating into school because of their limited command of Hebrew. Even earlier Kavkazi immigrants continue to have difficulties with Hebrew. A representative of one of the organizations that work with Kavkazi immigrants describes the problem as follows: “One of the reasons that this population is more problematic than other populations stems from the fact that they do not speak Hebrew. They still do not sufficiently appreciate the long-term advantages of knowing Hebrew and so they do not take the time to learn.” Long-term difficulties in Hebrew are corroborated by the 1997 study data: 22% of the youth who have been in Israel six years or more reported that they had trouble answering exam questions because of difficulties with Hebrew. The percentage of those who have long-term difficulties with Hebrew is higher among Kavkazi immigrants than among immigrant youth from the former Soviet Union as a whole. In Carmiel, only 12% and in Rehovot only 5% of the immigrant youth from the FSU who have been in Israel five or more years, stated that they have difficulties answering questions on exams and tests (Noam, Ellenbogen-Frankovits, Wolfson, 1996).

### ***Minimal Support from the Family in School-Related Matters***

Many families find it difficult to give their children the support they need to cope with the challenges they face in school. The key informants emphasized a variety of reasons for this: the parents’ lack of awareness of their influence as parents in school-related matters, limited familiarity with the education system, and the relatively lower importance that some of them attribute to schooling. Moreover, the lack of financial resources, problems with the language, and unfamiliarity with the subjects taught in school make it difficult for the parents to provide the required support.

It is important to note that in the 1997 study we found that the decisive majority of mothers participated in parent-teacher meetings during the school year (95%). While about a third reported

that they would be interested in initiating a meeting with the school about their children, they did not do so.

Data on the integration of Kavkazi children in educational frameworks reflect the situation in 1997. A preliminary analysis of findings of a new national study conducted at the end of 2002 by the JDC-Brookdale Institute in conjunction with the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Absorption and JDC-Israel, shows a decrease in the dropout rates and additional favorable changes in the situation of Kavkazi youth.

## **b. Policies and Programs**

The programs are divided into categories of those that are being implemented nationally or in a large number of localities and programs that are confined to one or two towns.

### ***Programs Implemented Nationally or in a Large Number of Locations***

- ♦ ***Supplementary hours*** - The Ministry of Education allocates supplementary hours for Kavkazi immigrant students on a national basis. The supplementary lessons are provided to Kavkazi immigrant students in addition to a weekly hour of learning Hebrew, to which every immigrant student is entitled in his first year of studies in Israel. As of the second year of studies, the assistance is on a group basis: in elementary school, every 4 students receive an additional weekly supplementary lesson, and in junior high school every 3 students receive such a lesson. The schools create different combinations of “immigrant hours” with the funding given to them. In elementary school, the supplementary lessons are utilized for additional reinforcement in Hebrew. In contrast, in junior high school or high school the supplementary lessons are utilized more for help in the subjects in which the students experience difficulties.
- ♦ ***PELE program*** - This major afterschool program strives to improve the scholastic achievement of Kavkazi immigrants. It is intended for youth in seventh to twelfth grade, and is conducted in 25 localities. The *PELE* program is implemented by the Department of Education and Learning in the Association of Community Centers in cooperation with the Ministry of Absorption, the Glencore Foundation, JDC-Israel, and the Ministry of Education. It began to operate in 1998.

The overall goal of the program is to bring about a significant improvement in the scholastic achievement of Kavkazi immigrant children and youth, and to increase the numbers of those eligible for a matriculation certificate. In addition, the program tries to develop awareness among the immigrants regarding the importance of higher education. According to the director of the *PELE* project: “We believe that a Kavkazi child has a poor future in the education system but with a push from the *PELE* program, he has a chance for a better future.” She adds: “We will not have a coordinator who thinks that it is not so terrible if the Kavkazim become hairdressers and carpenters. We all believe that all the Kavkazi children can succeed in their studies and reach university.”

The program goals go beyond academic achievement. According to the director of the *PELE* center in Acco: “We want to empower the youths. We place the child in the center and surround him with a range of activities.” Thus, there is a reason that these programs are called *PELE* centers (an acronym which in Hebrew means “miracle”). They include a wide range of social activities, such as preparatory programs for the IDF, challenge sports programs, science programs, art programs, and the “Family Network” program, which was created for Ethiopian immigrants, but was culturally adapted for Kavkazi immigrants. Along with these programs, regional events, such as trips, are organized from time to time. The program also organizes get-togethers between immigrant and non-immigrant youth. The participants are also nurtured as a leadership group that will serve as a role model for their community in the future.

Today, 2,400 youths participate in the program - half in grades 10-12, and half in grades 7-9. While the program is aimed primarily at Kavkazi immigrants, it is possible to include 15% of youths from other ethnic communities in case not enough Kavkazi immigrant youths have been identified. The program employs 15 coordinators, 6 mediators, and 30 professional teachers of Kavkazi origin.

Data gathered by the *PELE* program give indication of considerable success: in the 2000-2001 school year, it was found that a high percentage of *PELE* participants made the transition from junior high to full matriculation high school track (70%). Moreover, high success rates were found among *PELE* participants, who took the matriculation exams in subjects in which they had had particular problems. For example: 93% passed the matriculation exam in math at the 3-5 credit level, and 92% passed the matriculation exam in English.

Participants in the discussion group at the study day praised the contribution of the *PELE* program to the students’ success. However, one of the speakers noted that in large cities, students who live a great distance from the program venue find it difficult to attend, and occasionally are unable to participate. What’s more, it is important to allow students to begin participating in the program while in the sixth grade, thus reducing the difficulties involved in the transition from elementary school to junior high school. An additional point emphasized during the discussion was that it is very important to find a way to link *PELE*, as an informal educational framework, to the schools. A continuum of learning and social activity that begins in the school and continues during after-school programs must be created.

- ◆ ***Sha’al*** (the Hebrew acronym for Hebrew Lessons for Immigrants) is a program devoted to improving Hebrew proficiency. It is being implemented in 30 schools in Beersheva, Hadera, Sderot and Or Akiva and is funded by JDC-Israel and the Ministry of Education.
- ◆ ***Professional training for the teachers*** to improve the ability of the school staff to contend with the challenge of integrating Kavkazi immigrant youths into the school system. There are currently two national counselors from the Ministry of Education, one in charge of the northern region and one in charge of the southern region. They visit the schools that have many immigrants, counsel the school faculty on the Kavkazi immigrant heritage and culture,

and, like the mediators, also conduct activities to bridge the gaps between the parents and the schools.

- ♦ **“Educational mediators”** mobilizes members of the Kavkazi community in assisting their own community. The overall goal of the project is to forge cooperation between Kavkazi immigrants and the various educational frameworks, in order to enhance the integration of Kavkazi students. The project supports the concept that the transition process from the country of origin to the country of destination is not a process of cultural assimilation. Through inter-cultural mediation, the immigrant child/youth can combine elements of his culture of origin and Israeli culture (Weil, 2000). The specific goals of the project are mediating between the students’ families and the school teachers and principals, providing information to the teachers and the various educational agents on Kavkazi culture, encouraging the participation of Kavkazi immigrant students in special programs in the schools and community centers, and preventing Kavkazi immigrant students from dropping out of school.

The director of the Absorption Division of the Ministry of Education reported that there has been significant improvement due to the mediators program: “Recently, there has been a change in the tendencies of the parents regarding their children’s studies. The parents tend to be a little more involved in what is happening in the schools. The mediators distribute information to the students and their parents, and endeavor to include and guide the parents in forming a more appropriate connection with the various service providers.” One of the community activists described the trend of improvement in the following words: “Today the Kavkazi parents are more involved in everything that happens in the school, and we can see the Kavkazi children participating a little more in school activities, in school trips and in parties, in comparison with the past.”

The mediators, all of whom are Kavkazi immigrants, are trained and funded by the Ministry of Education and JDC-Israel. Currently 14 mediators operate in local authorities, in which there are large numbers of Kavkazi immigrants. This number has grown from four since the inception of the program in 1996. However, the mediators as well as other service providers, indicate that there is still a need for additional mediators and that the mediators need more extensive training and support.

- ♦ **Parents Active for Education** - As noted, one of the weaknesses in integrating Kavkazi immigrants in the education system is the low level of involvement of the parents. Parents Active for Education is a program designed to address this problem. The program includes the establishment of active groups of parents who will conduct a dialogue with their children and with the school establishment, and the integration of immigrant parents into the parent-teachers association at the school. The program is operating in ten towns, in cooperation with the Association of Community Centers, the Ministry of Absorption, the Ministry of Education, JDC-Israel and the UJA Federation of New York. At this stage the cultural mediators are working with groups of parents, in order to develop their ability to recruit and mobilize additional parents from the Kavkazi community.

- ♦ ***Facilitators for Parents' Groups*** - Another course intended to raise parental involvement in the education system is an academic course held at the Kibbutz Seminar. During a two-year program, 23 Kavkazi and Bucharian immigrants learn to be facilitators for Kavkazi or Bucharian parents' groups. Upon completion of the course, the participants receive parent group facilitator certificates. The course is financed by JDC-Israel, the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Absorption.
- ♦ ***Courses for Education Activists*** – Another program is a course for Education Activists in Acco, Kiryat Yam, Hadera, Or Akiva, Sderot and Beersheva. A group of 20-25 education activists is established in each location. The activists are parents, students, retirees, youths or other people who want to contribute to education in the local community. The program is implemented and funded by the Ministry of Absorption and JDC-Israel. During the course participants receive training to be facilitators of parents' groups, with an emphasis on inter-cultural aspects. It is a two-year course that includes practical training. Upon completion of the course, participants receive group facilitator certificates.
- ♦ ***Training course for Kavkazi immigrant teachers*** - The integration of Kavkazi immigrant teachers in the schools is also perceived as a means of improving the integration of Kavkazi immigrant children and youths in addition to finding suitable employment for members of the community. In view of this, the Center for Educational Technology is planning a course for training Kavkazi immigrant teachers to teach math (for details see the chapter on employment).

#### ***Programs Implemented on the Local Level or in a Small Number of Towns***

- ♦ ***Transitions*** is a program that supports children in the critical year of transition to junior high school, and attempts to have an effect on the child's self-image and the expectations of the parents and teachers. It also identifies youth who have dropped out of the education system during the transition and reintegrates them into a suitable framework. The program is conducted in Acco, in cooperation with the Acco Community Center, the Youth Advancement Service in the Ministry of Education, the Columbus Foundation, JDC-Israel and the UJA Federation of New York, and is being expanded to include four additional local authorities.
- ♦ ***Prevention of Dropping Out and Closing Scholastic Gaps*** is a project conducted for Kavkazi immigrant fourth grade children in Sderot. It includes two groups of 17-20 children each.
- ♦ ***"Wings"*** is a comprehensive program for improving student achievement that was implemented until a year ago by the Education and Youth Division and the Immigrant Integration Division of JDC-Israel at the Rabin School in Sderot. Its overall goals are to improve the achievements of Kavkazi immigrant students studying in elementary and high schools in the emotional, social and scholastic areas. Its strategy is focused on providing the teachers with tools and skills and with knowledge about the cultural background of Kavkazi immigrants. Another component of the strategy is to transform the school into a more flexible and less formal organization that is prepared to adapt to the changing needs of its students. The program operated in several areas. In the psycho-social area, it included getting

to know the youths and their families. In the pedagogical area, it included formulating an individual study plan for every youth, according to any special needs that were identified. The program was formulated together with members of the school faculty, and included mapping of needs and problems.

- ◆ A new program for improving learning skills, mastering Hebrew and improving the scholastic achievements of sixth and seventh grade Kavkazi students has started in the current (2002/2003) school year. The program was initiated by the UJA Federation of New York and implemented in cooperation with JDC-Israel.
- ◆ **Connections** is another program for improving student achievement. It is implemented in Hadera and Pardes Hana, in junior high schools with a concentration of Kavkazi and Bukhari immigrant students. Similar to the Wings program, the overall strategy of this program is to strengthen the educational staff: to develop its cultural sensitivity and train it for the task of assisting weak students. The program also strengthens the connection within the family between parents and children and between the family and the school. The program is implemented by JDC-Israel and ASHALIM.
- ◆ The *Mirkam* program focuses on improving Hebrew language skills and proficiency, developing a multi-cultural approach in the school and designing learning materials, teaching methods and special activities adapted to Kavkazi students. In the 2002/2003 school year the program is being implemented in Sderot, it is financed by the UJA Federation of New York in cooperation with JDC-Israel, the Ministry of Education, the Center for Educational Technology (*Matach*), the Ministry of Absorption, Project Renewal, and foundations.

### ***Comments of Key Informants Regarding the Intervention Programs and Assistance Currently Provided to Kavkazi Students***

The key informants emphasized the importance of the new programs that have been developed over the last few years. Yet they raised a number of concerns.

1. The assistance provided to students in the form of supplementary lessons is given in such a way that the student is taken out of his primary class to receive the assistance, which creates scholastic gaps with regard to his homeroom class.
2. There has still not been an organized follow-up to examine whether the assistance is in fact reaching the immigrant youth, or whether the relative freedom given to school principals in utilizing the assistance hours leads to it being diverted or used ineffectively.
3. Efforts at counseling and guidance with regard to personal and social problems are undermined when the youth abstain from seeking help from the school faculty due to shyness, or the fear of being misunderstood.
4. Scholastic problems also characterize students whose parents immigrated to Israel from the Caucasus in the 1970s, but they are not entitled to the special assistance to which the 1990s immigrants are entitled. Finding suitable ways to help them as well must be considered.
5. The extent of assistance is still insufficient and is not reaching all those in need.

### **c. Future Challenges**

- ◆ Continuing the efforts to improve scholastic achievements: As indicated, in recent years there have been major national efforts in this area, and their impact is being examined in a national study currently underway. However, it is important to continue the efforts to improve achievements and strengthen the existing programs in areas in which unmet needs are discovered. It is important to focus assistance on the transitions between elementary school and junior high school, and between junior high school and high school.
- ◆ Continuing to expand the awareness among Kavkazim of the importance of thinking about the options for higher education when choosing among the different high school tracks.
- ◆ Reducing the dropout rate and finding suitable alternatives for students who have dropped out, that will meet the needs and preferences of this population.
- ◆ Coping with difficulties with the Hebrew language: The education system allocates hours for Hebrew classes for Kavkazi immigrants. However, the manner in which it is taught is in dispute. Experts claim that teachers must be specially trained in teaching Hebrew as a foreign language and that teachers who have not received such training should not be doing this job.
- ◆ Improving communication between the parents and the school: As indicated, programs in this area are rather limited and include mainly training and recruiting mediators in schools with a large Kavkazi population. Though this program has been expanded significantly, there is still a need for additional mediators and better training for them. There is also a need to develop the communication between the schools and the parents in additional ways.
- ◆ Providing appropriate training for teachers and school personnel: There is a significant lack of information about and understanding of the Kavkazi culture, and of culturally sensitive ways to approach students and parents and address their needs. Educational professionals are crying out for information of this type and admit that they are not adequately equipped to effectively educate this population. Non-Kavkazi students are also an important target group in this regard.
- ◆ In light of concerns that some of the many resources earmarked for Kavkazim immigrant students are being used for general school needs, it is important to examine the extent to which these resources are actually reaching and serving the intended population.

### **7.4 Higher Education**

One of the important objectives in the absorption of Kavkazi immigrants is the integration of the young immigrants into institutions of higher learning. The integration of the younger generation into institutions of higher learning is also likely to improve the image of the community.

In recent years, there has been a dramatic improvement in the integration of Kavkazi immigrants into higher education. Until 1998, Kavkazi students in institutions of higher learning only numbered several dozen; today, some 700 Kavkazi immigrants are studying in institutions of higher learning. This considerable increase stems from two main factors: first, a significant rise in the awareness of members of the community regarding the importance of acquiring higher education, and second, increasing the scholastic, economic and social assistance provided to Kavkazi immigrants in these institutions. Kavkazi students study in a variety of fields: a quarter study sciences, about one-third

social sciences, a fifth humanities, a tenth study engineering and the remainder other fields of study. As one of the interviewees stated, the integration of young Kavkazis into institutions of higher education contributes to the community's self-esteem and its integration into Israeli society.

#### **a. Policies and Programs**

Kavkazi immigrants benefit from affirmative action in higher education. In 1997 a decision was made in the Nation Student Administration of the Ministry of Absorption and the Jewish Agency for Israel to help Kavkazi students beyond the assistance given to the other immigrants from the former Soviet Union, and provide them with:

- ◆ Full tuition for four years (a year longer than other immigrants from the FSU).
- ◆ A subsistence stipend of NIS 600 per month during their studies (not granted to other students).
- ◆ The option of commencing their studies with entitlement to assistance from the Student Administration at any time they choose for ten years, starting in January 1990, in contrast to other immigrants, who receive funding for their studies from the Student Administration only within three years from the date of their immigration to Israel.
- ◆ The option of beginning their BA studies at a later age: up to age 28 (compared with age 26 for others), and an MA up to the age of 30.
- ◆ The Student Administration conducts special activities for Kavkazi immigrants (such as a national conference of Kavkazi immigrant students). Kavkazi immigrant students are given the option of working in the framework of Shahak (socio-communal service) in their community in return for a tuition scholarship.
- ◆ Another special benefit for Kavkazi immigrants is extra scholarships for students in certain colleges and in specific fields of study: technology and sciences, education, engineering, and nursing. The rationale behind this preferential treatment is to work with institutions of higher learning that cooperate in supporting and assisting the absorption of Kavkazi immigrants, as well as focusing on fields in which there is a relatively good chance of finding work at the end of the studies. The assistance includes a subsistence stipend of \$1500 per year per student, and another \$700 per year for scholastic assistance. This is in addition to assistance received by these students from the Student Administration, as noted above. This program is implemented by the Sacta-Rashi Foundation.
- ◆ With regard to higher education, it is important to mention that the Kavkazi students have a Kavkazi Student and Professionals Organization. The organization has 29 board members from all over Israel, who are active in education and in communal affairs and who serve as positive role models for the younger generation.
- ◆ **“Sachbak”** (Students Active in the Community) is a program that acquaints Kavkazi youth with the higher education system by joint activities for these youth with Kavkazi university students. This program is in initial stages of operation in Sderot, Or Akiva, Acco, Beersheva and Kiryat Yam and is operated by JDC-Israel, The Student Administration, the Jewish Agency, the Community Center Association and PERACH - the student mentoring program.
- ◆ **Halom Kavkaz** (Students Learn a Vocation) – a program for high school graduates was implemented by the Jewish Agency in the Caucasus. It was aimed at Kavkazi youths aged 17-20 who completed at least ten years of school. The goal of the program was to bring them to Israel

and prepare them to integrate well into jobs or to better integrate into the IDF, by teaching them the Hebrew language and by placing them in vocational training programs. Eighteen youths participated in the program. The program did not continue beyond the one group.

- ♦ ***Rising to Higher Education*** is a program planned for the future by the JDC. It is designed to prepare students already in high school for higher education by raising their self-image, familiarizing them with the variety of institutions of higher learning in Israel, and preparing them for the psychometric exams.

### **b. Future Challenges**

One of the major challenges emphasized by the key informants interviewed relates to the links between existing intervention programs and the mobilization of the inner forces of the community – more precisely, to develop activities in which the Kavkazi immigrant students will be given the opportunity to contribute to the community and to serve as positive role models. For example, encouraging Kavkazi students who receive a stipend to be active in programs for school-age children such as the *PELE* program, and having *PELE* students who have improved their scholastic achievements serve as mentors for younger students. Moreover, in light of the dramatic success of existing efforts it is important to ensure their continuation and to strengthen awareness regarding the importance of higher education among members of the community.

## **8. Social Integration of Youth and Informal Education**

Social integration is a vital step in the overall process of absorption and is likely to impact on school integration, motivation to serve in the army, and overall satisfaction with life in Israel. Informal educational activities including youth movements, after school enrichment and social activities, and youth leadership programs are an important vehicle for promoting social integration and can contribute significantly to success in school. In this chapter, we will describe the situation regarding the social integration of Kavkazi immigrant students inside and outside of school and their participation in informal and after school activities.

### **8.1 Current Situation and Needs**

The current situation regarding the social integration of Kavkazi immigrant students in school is complex and there is considerable variation in the quality of social integration. On the one hand, most of the students (86%) expressed general satisfaction with the attitude of non-immigrant students towards them. However, key informants report that many Kavkazi immigrant students feel social alienation in school, and negative attitudes towards them. The study corroborates that 18% of the youths reported that non-immigrant students bully them, and a third stated that they ignore them.

The situation regarding the social integration of Kavkazi immigrant students with non-immigrants outside of school, is also not uniform. Key informants reported that the youths tend to maintain a cultural social enclave, such as meeting in the afternoons primarily with Kavkazi immigrant youths.

However, the study findings show that half the students go out with non-immigrant students at least once a month and 41% reported that they and non-immigrant students visit each other's homes at least once a month. Moreover, about half the youths are interested in expanding social contacts with non-immigrants.

Moreover, many teachers, guidance counselors, principals, and others in the education system are not familiar with the Kavkazi culture and the special needs of the Kavkazi immigrant students and thus feel that it is difficult for them to help with the social integration of these youths.

Informal educational frameworks (after school programs such as extracurricular activities, youth movements, youth clubs and tutoring assistance) may make a significant contribution to the social integration of the immigrants. In these frameworks, youths can broaden their social contacts, become more familiar with Israeli culture, stand out in a particular subject, spend leisure time in an enjoyable and effective manner, etc. The findings from the 1997 study and interviews indicate that the participation of Kavkazi immigrants in these activities is very limited. The study data show that key informants indicate that only 3% of Kavkazi immigrant youths participate in youth movement activities and only 17% participate in any kind of extracurricular activities. These percentages are much lower than among the general Israeli population (Ellenbogen-Frankovits, 1998). The key informants reported several reasons for this:

- ◆ The high cost of the activities compared with the financial situation of the families. This difficulty is even more severe in families with many children.
- ◆ The activities offered in the framework of informal education in Israel are not always suited to the characteristics of Kavkazi culture. For example, girls will not be allowed to go alone to an activity in the evening.
- ◆ Activities that match the areas of interest of Kavkazi immigrant youth are not offered, such as Kavkazi dance, or sewing for the girls.
- ◆ The feeling of alienation on the part of Kavkazi immigrant youth and their difficulty in “opening up” in integrated activities offered together with other population groups. While there have been successful attempts to include immigrant and non-immigrant youths in joint social and cultural activities, these attempts have also frequently failed.

## 8.2 Policies and Programs

In general there seems to have been relatively limited activity focused solely on the social integration of Kavkazi immigrants. However, it is important to note that many of the programs whose main goal is to advance scholastic achievements, also include components aimed at improving social integration.

- ◆ *Shalhevet* (“Flame”), is a program aimed at facilitating the social integration of Kavkazi immigrants in schools. It is implemented in 20 elementary schools in Israel that were selected because of their high concentration of Kavkazi immigrant students. The program includes enrichment activities on the culture and heritage of Kavkazi Jews, and afternoon social activities. The project is funded and implemented by the Ministry of Education.

- ♦ The *PELE* program, (described in detail above) focuses primarily on scholastic achievement but also includes social activities such as challenge sports, science and the arts.
- ♦ *Encouraging participation in enrichment programs at the community centers.* The community centers in Acco and Kiryat Yam provide financial support for the participation of Kavkazi children and youth in after school enrichment activities operated by the Centers. Kavkazi youths are offered a subsidy of 50% of the price of the activities.
- ♦ *“Niv” (Youth Create in the Community).* Within the frameworks of “NIV”, youths engage in a joint production in the fields of theater and dance. A professional artist coaches the groups. The ultimate goal is to present a finished product (in this case, a play or a show) to the general public. Another goal is to increase awareness among the youth and their parents about the services offered at the community centers, and to strengthen intergenerational ties through the involvement of the parents in the activity. A representative of one of the organizations that conduct the program says: "The model for this program was born out of the cultural schizophrenia from which they suffer. They are torn between cultures. In addition, they are going through the crisis of adolescence. They are looking for someone or something with which to identify, and the art and the group that creates the art together, gives them a feeling of belonging and of identity." This program is implemented in cooperation with *Omanut La'am* (Art for the People), the Association of Community Centers, JDC-Israel and the *TELEM* school. It is conducted in Kiryat Yam, Beersheva and Mitzpe Ramon.
- ♦ *ADAM (Art, Dialogue, Leadership)* combines recreational activities, leadership training and improving inter-group relations. It is described in detail in the section about community leadership. As indicated, this program stopped operating recently due to administrative difficulties.
- ♦ *Kavkazi dance troupe in Sderot:* The director of the troupe, the musicians and the dancers are all Kavkazi immigrants. This is a high quality troupe that is considered the best Kavkazi dance troupe in Israel and appears at events throughout the country. The troupe is a source of pride for the Kavkazi community in Sderot.
- ♦ *Youth Club in Sderot:* A neighborhood youth club will soon be opened in Sderot by the community development project of "Zionism 2000". While not intended only for Kavkazi immigrants, since it will be located in the heart of a neighborhood with many Kavkazi immigrants, this population will make the most use of its services. The operators of the club intend to provide various musical activities and to encourage the youth to participate in the various youth movements.
- ♦ *Ga'ash (Pride and Empowerment in the Neighborhoods)* is a program aimed at establishing sports clubs in neighborhoods with a large concentration of Kavkazi immigrants. Ashalim, JDC-Israel, the Ministry of Education and ELEM are sponsoring this program in Sderot, Or Akiva, Kiryat Yam and Beersheva.

### 8.3 Future Challenges

- ♦ The key informants emphasized that much more could be done with regard to the social integration of Kavkazi immigrant youth.

- ♦ Two major challenges are to implement activities to improve the image and self-image of Kavkazi immigrant youth and to create more and more varied opportunities for positive social interaction between immigrants and non-immigrants.

## 9. Non-Normative Behavior (Risk Behaviors)

### 9.1 Current Situation and Needs

In the words of an educational mediator from the Kavkazi community: “The first stigma that I encountered when I entered the school was that the Kavkazim are violent, criminals, and junkies. I thought to myself, ‘Oh, no. I’m a Kavkazi, from a big Kavkazi family. None of my siblings is a criminal and none of the people around me in the Caucasus was a criminal. So how is it that in Israel we are all viewed as criminals?’”

Many of the key persons interviewed expressed concern about the significant scope of non-normative, risk behavior among Kavkazi youth. Contrary to these views, the 1997 study shows that the scope of risk behavior among Kavkazi immigrant youth is no more extensive than that of youth in general in Israel and, in certain aspects, it is even lower. One-third (32%) of Kavkazi immigrant youth reported that they had been involved in a physical brawl during the past school year compared with 40% among the general population of youth in Israel. A lower percentage of Kavkazi immigrant youths reported being involved in harassing and bullying compared with all youth (18% compared with 40%, respectively). A comparison of the data on alcohol abuse among Kavkazi immigrant youths and youth in general in Israel shows that the percentage who reported drinking (whether ever or in the past month) was much lower among Kavkazi immigrants. For example, 18% of the Kavkazi immigrant youth reported that they drank alcohol during the past month compared with 30% of all youth (Harel, Ellenbogen-Frankovits, Molcho and Habib, 2002; Ellenbogen-Frankovits and Noam, 1998).

It is possible that the key people interviewed have more contact with marginal Kavkazi youth who are more prone to non-normative behavior, a fact that is liable to affect the overall image of the community. Data collected by the Youth Advancement Service regarding youth in their care indicate that fewer Kavkazi immigrant youth drink alcohol (5.5%) compared with immigrants from Georgia (10%), Bukhara (12.3%) and Western Europe (20%). However, a higher percentage of Kavkazi immigrants use drugs (10.2%) compared with members of other communities (10% among Georgian immigrants, 8.2% among Bukhari immigrants, 8.6% among Western European immigrants). The findings of the survey also indicate a percentage of delinquent and violent behavior that is twice as high among Kavkazi immigrant youth as among immigrants of other communities: 33.8% behave violently compared with 15% of Georgian immigrants, 14.4% of Bukhari immigrants and 23.3% of Western European immigrants; 28.3% engage in criminal behavior compared with 9.2% of Bukhari immigrants and 14.6% of Western European immigrants (internal document).

The key informants explain the non-normative behavior of Kavkazi immigrant students as behavior that is in accord with the social codes of Kavkazi immigrants. According to them, the values of “personal honor” and “family honor” are the central values in Kavkazi culture and a student whose honor or whose family honor has been impugned feels obligated to defend it, even violently. The various interviewees, however, indicated a deterioration in the behavior of Kavkazi immigrant youth to behavior that is considered non-normative, even according to the cultural codes of Kavkazi immigrants, such as stealing, extortion, belonging to violent gangs, using drugs, etc. The interviewees explain the reasons for the deterioration of the youths into non-normative behavior as follows: “They are filled with feelings of inferiority and discrimination, even vis-à-vis other immigrants. When their need for achievement has no positive outlet, it is funneled into violence and internal struggles.” Representatives of other services report that “the dropouts have trouble finding other scholastic or employment alternatives, so they often find themselves loitering around and linking up with marginal and delinquent youth.”

A representative of the Youth Advancement Service who participated in the group discussion during the study day emphasized that the severe shortage in personnel who are suited to working with disengaged Kavkazi immigrant youth prevents these youth from receiving care. “Youth Advancement has suitable programs for the integration of Kavkazi youth. We also know how to adapt programs to various needs. What we need is workers and personnel, facilitators and street counselors. But we don’t have any.”

During the group discussion, the issue of youth aged 19-20 was also raised. On the one hand, they are not qualified to serve in the army or have already dropped out of the army. On the other hand, no agency or organization has taken responsibility for helping them. As one of the participants in the discussion group said: There is nothing for these youth. They hang out in the streets. No one thinks about them; they fall between the cracks.”

Data from the Israel Police are an additional source of information on non-normative behavior. To date, the police do not have any separate data on Kavkazi immigrants. However, it is important to note that immigrant youth from the former Soviet Union are over-represented among youth with criminal files compared with their percentage in the population. In 1996, 13.5% of youths with criminal files were immigrants from the FSU who immigrated to Israel before 1990 (compared with their percentage in the population which, in 1995, was 8%). Most of the youth with criminal records are aged 16-17. In contrast, delinquent immigrants from the FSU are younger. Among the immigrants from the FSU, there is a particularly high percentage with files for vice and drug offenses (28% compared with 19% among overall youths) and for property offenses (71% versus 62%) (Habib, Ben-Rabi and Argov, 2000).

## 9.2 Policies and Programs

There is a wide variety of services in Israel for youth at risk that are operated by a range of organizations. However, most of these services do not have separate programs or policies for Kavkazi immigrants. While some provide services for the Kavkazim within the framework of programs for immigrants in general, others do not have such programs and deal with Kavkazi and

other immigrants within the regular service activities. In this section we will describe several examples of how these programs deal with Kavkazi immigrant youth at risk:

- ◆ ***The Youth Advancement Service*** of the Ministry of Education is treating 664 Kavkazi immigrant youths at risk, representing 19.1% of all the youth treated by the Service. One of the unit's guidelines is to employ a youth worker who is a member of the community. Thus the service employs Kavkazi workers in places with large concentrations of Kavkazim. Currently there are three Kavkazi workers. At the policymaking level there is a special national team that addresses the needs of this group of Kavkazi immigrants, including facilitators who are assigned to this population. According to the Director of the Service: "The job of this team is to keep in touch with the changing needs of the population and to formulate programs to address them." Most of the care given to Kavkazi immigrant youth, however, is similar to that given to other populations and includes individual treatment of personal problems, guidance and instruction for the parents, varied study programs, vocational training courses, leadership training, preparatory programs for the IDF, programs on sexuality, drug prevention, and realizing personal potential, such as creative programs in the various arts. Some of these programs work with disengaged youth and normative youth together.
- ◆ ***The Youth and Adult Development and Corrections Services of the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs*** treats Kavkazi immigrant youth who commit offenses or are at risk of delinquency. The Youth Protection Authority provides out-of-home services to severely delinquent youth or youth with severe emotional problems that require out of home care. The Youth Probation Service, treats minors aged 12-18 who have been referred by the police as suspects in a crime; the Department of Drug Abuse develops programs to rehabilitate drug abusers; the Youth Rehabilitation Service operates the *Miftanim*, the special rehabilitative framework for youth who have dropped out of all other educational frameworks or schools. Finally, the Women's and Girls' Services deals with disadvantaged girls and battered women. None of these services distinguish between Kavkazi immigrants and immigrants from the other FSU countries; representatives of the various departments and divisions did not report any special efforts or approaches.
- ◆ ***A Dropout Prevention Program*** was developed in Acco for dealing with Kavkazi immigrant youth who are at risk of dropping out. In this program, youth at risk of dropping out are integrated into various activities in the community center or in other intervention frameworks in the city. New activities suitable for this population are also developed and implemented in the framework of this program, by pooling municipal and governmental resources. One of these activities is the employment of a special youth worker who reaches out to Kavkazi youth dropouts in neighborhoods and areas where they "hang out". The program operates in full cooperation with truancy officers, educational advisers, Probation Service social workers, representatives of the Employment Service and other agencies. The program is implemented by the Community Center Association, the Youth Advancement Service in the Ministry of Education, the Columbus Federation and JDC-Israel.
- ◆ ***Hafuch al Hafuch*** information and counseling centers for youth are operated by *ELEM* in cooperation with Ashalim, local authorities and in partnership with a range of government ministries and youth organizations. They provide an important resource for youth who need a

place to turn to for advice, brief counseling, information or referral to other community services. Since 1999 a network of such centers has been established. These centers currently operate in some 20 local authorities, many of which have large concentrations of Kavkazim. One of the major operating principles of the centers is cultural adaptation and many employ mediators. However, the centers do not have specific programs for Kavkazim that are distinguished from those aimed at other FSU immigrants.

- ♦ **Israel Police:** Kavkazi immigrant youth who have committed criminal offenses are handled mostly by the police youth departments that employ special youth police officers. Police youth departments work according to special regulations that direct their intervention with youth in general and protect the youths' rights. According to the southern district juvenile officer: "The police have a uniform policy regarding the entire youth population, without distinguishing between immigrants and non-immigrants." However, some special programs for immigrants have been developed. These include mostly recruiting youth officers from immigrant communities and establishing links with community leadership. A police representative says that a policy is being formulated for conducting special programs for immigrants in general, but there is opposition to implementing segregational programs for specific groups of immigrants.

### 9.3 Future Challenges

The review of the ways in which the services for youth at risk address Kavkazi youth indicates that these services are making initial efforts to understand and devise ways of meeting the unique needs of this population. In order to support these services in developing policies towards this population group there is a need for:

- ♦ More systematic information about the extent and nature of risk behaviors among Kavkazi youth, beyond the available anecdotal evidence provided by field professionals. This information will be provided by the second national survey of Kavkazi youth which is currently underway.
- ♦ More systematic and specific information concerning the extent, characteristics and unique needs of Kavkazi youth that are already in the care of the services for youth at risk.
- ♦ Provision of training for the professionals in these organizations concerning the unique characteristics of the Kavkazi population and culture as a basis for developing better adapted policies and interventions.

## 10. Military Service

The IDF (Israel Defense Forces), in addition to its most important function – maintaining the security of the State – is also a socializing agency. It prepares young people for civilian life and impacts on professional paths and social stratification. New immigrants, in general, and Kavkazi immigrants, in particular, go into the army with lower than average personal profiles. This is due in part to their difficulties with the Hebrew language, and in part to their limited knowledge of Israeli heritage and culture. Hence there is a danger that their military service will reinforce their social marginality. The military is aware of this danger and attempts to avert it. Its policy is to serve as an impetus for social mobility and to create equal opportunities. It therefore conducts intensive army

preparation courses for immigrants and uses alternative ways to screen them prior to their enlistment so as to advance and support them during their service and after their discharge.

In this chapter, we will describe the situation of Kavkazi immigrants in the army and their special needs. We will detail the army's policy regarding their integration and the programs implemented for this purpose. Finally, we will relate to the achievements and the challenges that remain.

## 10.1 Current Situation and Needs

There is a need to distinguish between young men and women because the Kavkazi community has different expectations for each of them with regard to military service. While military service for boys is considered legitimate and as contributing to their manly image, military service for girls is not at all legitimate in the eyes of the community.

### ***The Situation Regarding the Military Service of Kavkazi Immigrant Boys***

The data from the 1997 study of Kavkazi immigrant youth indicates that the decisive majority of the boys intend to go into the army and that most of them think that the army can contribute to their future. In fact, the enlistment of Kavkazi immigrant boys approximates the average percentage in the general population. Although Kavkazi immigrant boys serve in a wide variety of jobs, only a small percentage serve in combat units and an even smaller percentage serve as officers.

Despite their relatively high willingness to enlist, about 70% drop out before the end of their military service by applying to the Mental Health Officer and obtaining a discharge based on a "mental health profile" (these are generally soldiers in administrative duties and not soldiers who volunteered for field units). The reason for the high dropout rate, as explained by the head of the Immigration Section in the army, are the many social and economic problems of the soldiers' families. These problems worsen during their military service and the soldiers feel obligated to return to help support their families, as they did before enlisting. Thus, the principal needs of Kavkazi soldiers are to expand their integration into combat units and command functions, and decrease their dropout rate from military service.

### ***The Situation Regarding the Military Service of Kavkazi Immigrant Girls***

The data from the 1997 study show that only a third of the girls reported that they intended to go into the army. Most of the girls even stated that their parents would not allow them to serve in the army and about half agreed with the claim that girls should not serve in the army.

According to a social counselor in the *PELE* program in Acco: "If a Kavkazi girl goes into the army, it lowers her status in the community. The conclusion is that she is immoral. In basic training, she generally lives on a closed base, far from the supervision of her family, and who knows what she does there. So as a result of duress and pressure at home, many Kavkazi girls feel they cannot go into the army."

This trend was confirmed in statements of graduates of the *PELE* program, with whom we spoke in a group interview. One of the youth who said, that in the wake of his success in his studies in the *PELE* project, he intended to study medicine, answered the question: "What do you think about girls going into the army?" as follows: "If I had a sister, I would never let her serve in the army. It impugns my honor and the honor of my family. Besides, I don't think that the army is a place for girls." In the course of that same group interview, a Kavkazi immigrant female officer, also a *PELE* graduate, entered the room, causing astonishment and great tension among the boys. One of them said: "You can't be Kavkazi...". After she proved her Kavkazi origins, they tried to scare her with the social sanctions that their community could enforce on someone who did what she had done. In the discussion group held during the study day, one Kavkazi participant admitted, "I, too, did not send my daughter to the army, because it's been said in public, even on television, that girls serve as prostitutes in the army." Another factor responsible for non-service is the traditionally early marriage of Kavkazi girls.

Data that we have received from the Immigration Section of the IDF support the trend noted in the above interviews. While the army is interested in raising the percentage of Kavkazi immigrant girls who enlist in the IDF, according to army officials in the Immigration Section, they are not integrated into the IDF preparatory courses at the request of the community. Most of the Kavkazi immigrant girls who are in the army serve in administrative positions (such as office clerks), and are given almost no opportunity to integrate into professional positions because of the language problem and personal profile data. There is, however, an increasing attempt to integrate them into more professional positions.

## 10.2 Policy and Programs

In order to help young Kavkazi immigrants to be well-integrated into the army and, subsequently, into civilian life, the army follows a policy of "total comprehensive care." This includes the preparation of all Kavkazi immigrants prior to enlistment so that they will be at a better starting point at the time of induction and the training of a cadre of Kavkazi immigrants to serve as officers and commanders. The IDF strives to work with the broader community through joint activities. During military service, the army monitors the integration of Kavkazi immigrants and endeavors to support and prepare the soldiers prior to discharge. Below we describe the various programs implemented by the IDF at the various stages of military service in greater detail.

### ***Programs to Prepare for Military Service***

In order to prepare immigrant youth for their military service, the army operates preparatory programs in high schools. In addition to programs that are available to all youth, there are more intensive and extensive programs for immigrants. IDF preparatory programs include an explanation of the structure of the IDF and the various service options, as well as experiencing a "Gadna week" and a visit to various army bases and units. For the purpose of liaising better between the youths and the military system, the programs are implemented by counselors and immigrant soldiers who have undergone cultural sensitivity training.

The only IDF preparatory program specifically developed for Kavkazi immigrants is an IDF leadership and officer preparatory program. This is a pilot program implemented in cooperation with the Ministry of Absorption, JDC-Israel, the Association of Community Centers, and the IDF Education and Gadna Corps. The goal is to identify a group of motivated youth and integrate them into the IDF command system. It is hoped that, as commanders, they will serve as role models for members of the community and encourage them to enlist in the IDF and undertake leadership and command positions. Thirty youths in the north of Israel are participating in the program. They are studying in a matriculation track and participate in weekly meetings throughout the year and in concentrated activities during vacations. The program operated throughout 2002 and included: command and leadership workshops in connection with the IDF Leadership Section, acquaintance with the IDF and the various corps, learning about the part played by the Kavkazim in building the State of Israel and their integration into the IDF system, improving their combat fitness, and preparation for the entry tests for the more select army units.

### ***The Connection between the IDF and the Community***

Since the community is an important entity for Kavkazi immigrants, the military establishment maintains contact with the community and hopes that this will help Kavkazi youth to better integrate into and complete their military service. Contact with the community takes the form of participation of community members in developing IDF preparatory programs, joint activities between the various IDF units and the community during the military service, and providing advice and support to parents and families during the service.

### ***Caring for Soldiers during their Military Service***

These frameworks include special basic training for new immigrants whose Hebrew is below the level required by the IDF, a preparatory course for new immigrants for service in combat units, a pre-basic training course, an ulpan for new immigrants destined for officer positions, and a course in Judaism and Zionism to supplement knowledge of the heritage and history of the Jewish people. The army trains the staff in special frameworks for immigrants in cultural sensitivity and understanding of the special needs of Kavkazi immigrants. Army commanders outside these special frameworks also undergo special training to develop their cultural sensitivity to Kavkazi immigrants. "Disadvantaged youth" of Kavkazi origin who serve in the army are closely monitored throughout their military service.

### ***Preparing Soldiers for their Discharge from the IDF***

To prepare soldiers for their discharge from the IDF, the army operates a discharge preparatory course. These preparatory courses last for about three weeks and include workshops for employment and choosing a vocation. Parallel to these preparatory courses, which are designed for all soldiers, four discharge courses are held each year specifically for Ethiopian immigrants which, according to the various interviewees, are very successful. The army intended to give parallel discharge preparatory courses to Kavkazi immigrants, but due to budgetary constraints the army has not yet done so. Scholarships for post-army education are given to Kavkazi immigrant soldiers who are discharged from full military service. It is important to note that since many Kavkazi youth drop

out of the army before the formal discharge and most girls do not participate in military service, these young people do not receive any support to prepare them for adult life in Israeli society.

### *Achievements*

The head of the immigrant section in the army cited an increase in the number of girls enlisting in the army. He also believed that the success of the IDF leadership and officer preparatory project, would soon lead to significant progress in this area as the graduates enter the army. Similarly, he noted that there is a general feeling that Kavkazi immigrant soldiers are now integrating better into the IDF.

### 10.3 Future Challenges

- ◆ Increasing the percentage of Kavkazi immigrant boys in combat and leadership positions in the army.
- ◆ Exploring better ways to prevent Kavkazi immigrant boys from dropping out of the army.
- ◆ Integrating Kavkazi immigrant girls into the army in a manner acceptable to the community.
- ◆ Placing Kavkazi immigrant girls in more professional positions in the army.
- ◆ Strengthening the special IDF preparatory programs for Kavkazi immigrants and implementing special discharge preparatory courses for Kavkazi immigrants.

## 11. Conclusion

There is no doubt that compared with other immigrants from the FSU, Kavkazi immigrants experience greater difficulties in integrating into Israeli society. Nevertheless, they have shown themselves to be a community with a great degree of potential that can be realized with the help of policies, appropriate means and intervention programs suited to their cultural-social characteristics. The enormous growth, within just a few years, of the number of Kavkazi students in institutions of higher learning, and the substantial scholastic improvement of Kavkazi students who participated in the *PELE* program, are just two examples of the possibilities for advancing members of the community. Models developed in other areas, such as greater employment integration and advancement, while still operating on a limited, trial basis, also appear to be promising and worthy of wider dissemination. It is recommended that a systems approach be adopted whereby the successful outcomes of a specific program be used to contribute to the success of a program in another area. Those actively involved in the community who have shown themselves to be deeply committed to the community and to have leadership skills, are a valuable resource in the development of programs and the promotion of change. In conclusion, it appears that a prudent investment in promoting the integration of Kavkazi immigrants in various areas of life will produce results in the near future.

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## Appendix 1: Towns with Large Concentrations of Kavkazi Immigrants

Town	No. of Kavkazi Immigrants*	Estimated No. of People of Kavkazi Origin**
1. Hadera	4,819	7,000
2. Beersheva	4,573	8,000
3. Netanya	4,105	6,000
4. Haifa	3,209	5,000
5. Tel Aviv	2,655	5,000
6. Or Akiva	2,472	7,000
7. Acco	2,366	7,000
8. Sderot	2,052	6,500
9. Ashdod	1,900	2,000
10. Kiryat Yam	1,772	7,000
11. Bat Yam	1,407	3,000
12. Rishon Lezion	1,328	3,000
13. Nazareth Ilit	1,222	2,500
14. Ashkelon	1,200	2,000
15. Pardes Hana	1,193	2,500

\* The data relate only to immigrants who immigrated to Israel from January 1, 1989 to December 31, 2001. Source: the information system of the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Absorption.

\*\* The data estimates prepared by local authorities and collected by JDC-Israel, include the children of 1990s' immigrants who were born in Israel, the Caucasus immigrants who came in the 1970s, and their children who were born in Israel.

## Appendix 2: List of Individuals Interviewed in the Framework of the Study

Name	Position	Professional Affiliation
Yaakov Bar Shimon	National Coordinator of Absorption of Immigrants from the Caucasus and Bukhara	Ministry of Absorption
Claudia Katz	Director, Integration into Employment Division	Ministry of Absorption
Sarah Cohen	Director, Department of Welfare	Ministry of Absorption
Boris Chanukayev	National Employment Coordinator for Immigrants from the Caucasus	Ministry of Absorption
Amihud Bahat	Director, Immigrant Students Division	Ministry of Education
Michal Sidon	National Supervisor of Immigrants from the Caucasus, Immigrant Students Division	Ministry of Education
Nira Kedman	National Supervisor of Populations with Special Needs, Department of Preschool Education	Ministry of Education
Chaim Lahav	Director, Youth Promotion	Ministry of Education
Dr. Ilan Shemesh	Director, the Institute for Youth Promotion	Ministry of Education
Lena Goldsman	National Counselor for Immigrant Youth at Risk, Youth Promotion	Ministry of Education
Chana Meraz	Nurse Supervisor of Immigrants from the Caucasus, Department of Public Health	Ministry of Health

Name	Position	Professional Affiliation
Yossi Dabosh	Head, Immigration Branch	Israel Defense Forces
Avshalom Busheri	Youth Probation Officer, Southern District	Israel Police Force
Avi Biton	Director, Project Renewal, Sderot	Ministry of Construction and Housing
Rimon Lavi	Director, Human Resources Development Division	Employment Service
Nina Davidov	Placement and Counseling Officer	Employment Service
Menahem Wagshal	Head of Division of Youth in Distress and Correctional Services	Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs
Dafni Mushayev	Supervisor of Immigrant Absorption, Service for Community Work	Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs
Rivka Weisberg	Supervisor of Immigrant Absorption, Service for Community Work	Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs
Itzik Kroner	Responsible for Pupils' Law	Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs
Danny Pines	Head, Immigrant Integration, Employment and Entrepreneurship Division	JDC-Israel
Arieh Chaviv	Senior Programs Director, Immigrant Integration, Employment and Entrepreneurship Division	JDC-Israel
Zehava Shimon	Head, Absorption of Immigrants from the Caucasus and Bukhara, Immigrant Integration, Employment and Entrepreneurship Division	JDC-Israel

Name	Position	Professional Affiliation
Dalia Bourgana	Senior Programs Director, Immigrant Integration, Employment and Entrepreneurship Division	JDC-Israel
Itzik Zahavi	Head, Education and Youth Area	JDC-Israel
Yaron Tzalach	Director, “Kesharim” Programs	JDC-Israel
Arieh Chalfin	Director, Higher Education	Sacta-Rashi Foundation
Zachary Harris	Program Director	Helen Bader Foundation
Dori Rimon	Director of Community Development for Immigrants from the Caucasus in Sderot	“Gvanim”, “Yedid”, and “Voices in the Negev” Associations
Zaci Charuv	Chairman	Amikam Association
Liz Eliezrov	Director, Rights Center	“Yedid” Association
Yonatan Mushayev	Chairman	Caucasus Immigrants’ Association
Chana Salomonov, Zoya Avshalomov, and Ida Gabai	Caucasus immigrant activists	Acco Community Center
David Soudri	Head, Student Administration	Ministry of Absorption and the Jewish Agency for Israel
Liora Shani	Director, <i>PELE</i> Project for Immigrant Children	Association of Community Centers
Orit Assayag	Early Childhood and Family Coordinator, Acco Community Center	Association of Community Centers
Avi Kasourelah	<i>PELE</i> Project Coordinator, Acco	Association of Community Centers
Mike Rosenberg	Director, Department of Immigration	Jewish Agency for Israel

Name	Position	Professional Affiliation
Rimona Wiesel	Director of the Planning and Information section	Jewish Agency for Israel
Mira Kedar	Director of Welfare, Department of Immigration	Jewish Agency for Israel
Uri Pinto	Director, Community Development in Sderot	Partnership 2000
Rachel Sagiv	National Coordinator of Absorption of Immigrants in Renewal Neighborhoods	Ministry of Housing

## Appendix 3: Executive Summary of "The Absorption of Youth from the Caucasus: Findings from a Follow-up Study"

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Myers-JDC-Brookdale Institute  
Engelberg Center for Children  
and Youth



Ministry of  
Education



Ministry of  
Immigrant  
Absorption



JDC-Israel

## The Absorption of Youth from the Caucasus: Findings from a Follow-up Study

Sarit Ellenbogen-Frankovits Viacheslav Konstantinov Dganit Levi

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## Executive Summary

During the wave of immigration of the 1990s, some 60,000 immigrants from the Caucasus region of the former Soviet Union immigrated to Israel. They were from the republics of Azerbaijan, Dagestan, Kabardino-Balkaria, and other areas. The vast majority of these immigrants are "Mountain Jews" from the Caucasus, who have a special identity and language – Judeo-Tat (Juhuri). Immigrants from the Caucasus tend to live close to their extended families in Israel, and therefore 80% of them are concentrated in 19 locales.

During the first years of this wave of immigration, the reports of service providers included many accounts of the special absorption difficulties confronted by immigrants from the Caucasus. In response, in 1997, the Myers-JDC-Brookdale Institute conducted a study among the population of immigrants from the Caucasus in cooperation with the Ministry of Absorption, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Social Affairs, the Housing Ministry, and JDC-Israel.

The findings of the 1997 study (Ellenbogen-Frankovits and Noam, 1998) exposed a worrisome situation: One-third of the families of youth (those leaving in two-parent households) had only one income-earner, and 14% of them had no income-earner at all. In addition, one-quarter (24%) of the mothers reported that their income was not sufficient to cover essential daily needs. Ten percent of youth were not studying at all. The difficulty of coping with the challenge of Hebrew proficiency was prominent. For example, 17% of the youth reported that they had difficulty understanding what was said in class, and 36% had difficulty answering questions on exams because of a lack of proficiency in Hebrew. A significant proportion (approximately 40%) reported a lack of social contact with non-immigrant Israelis, and approximately one-quarter reported a lack of social contact altogether; only a few participated in informal education frameworks.

These findings were the basis for a change in the policy governing assistance to youth from the Caucasus, and for the development of special services for them (which had not been implemented previously). These included expanding the number of hours of eligibility for academic assistance, and developing the "Other Learning Activities" program, funded by the Ministry of Absorption, which focused on improving academic achievements. The number of educational facilitators was also increased (for details on all of the services for immigrants from the Caucasus, see King et al., forthcoming). In light of the many efforts made to assist in the absorption of this group, there is a need to review and examine the integration process of youth from the Caucasus and the impact that the policy of assistance has had on their circumstances. Therefore, the Myers-JDC-Brookdale Institute conducted an additional study of youth from the Caucasus, in cooperation with JDC-Israel, the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Absorption.

The study aimed to present the situation of youth from the Caucasus in 2002, to examine the changes in their circumstances between 1997-2002, to examine the modes of utilizing various types of assistance, and to try to understand the impact of the policy of assistance.

The data were gathered from a national sample of 432 youth, ages 14-18, who immigrated to Israel in or after January 1989 and whose mothers identified themselves as "Mountain Jews" from the Caucasus, according to one of two criteria: (1) the mother reported that the language spoken in her childhood home was Judeo-Tat (Juhuri); or (2) The mother defined herself as a native of the Caucasus region.

The interviews were conducted in May-September 2002, by interviewers who were, for the most part, immigrants from the Caucasus. The study was conducted in three principal phases: (1) an interview was conducted with the mother of each youth to obtain socio-demographic information, followed by a questionnaire for screening purposes, in order to ensure that her children matched the criteria for the study population; (2) a face-to-face interview was conducted with each youth, followed by a self-administered questionnaire; (3) focus groups were held with youth from the Caucasus who varied in their characteristics, as well as with students and teachers.

This abstract has two main sections. First, we will present a selection of principal findings on a variety of areas examined in the study, and then we will discuss these findings and present recommended directions for continued assistance in the absorption of youth from the Caucasus.

## 1. Selected Principal Findings

### 1.1 Characteristics of the Youth's Families

With regard to some socio-demographic aspects, the situation of families of youth from the Caucasus was better in 2002 than it had been in 1997. The employment level of the parents was higher: The rate of those employed as skilled and unskilled laborers declined, and at the same time, the rate of those employed in sales and services, as clerks, and even as professionals, in technical fields, administration and academia increased. This trend was more pronounced among the mothers. The educational level of the parents was also higher. Even though approximately half of the parents had post-secondary school education or higher, only 13% had university degrees, in comparison with 32% of the Jewish population the same ages (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2002).

Conversely, in 2002, a higher percentage of youth were living in single-parent households (26%, versus 14% in 1997). In addition, in 43% of these families, the parent wasn't working.

Some of the families were still struggling with financial difficulties: 19% of the families had no income-earner, and approximately one-third of the youth described their family's financial situation as "poor", while another one-third described it as "average". The financial difficulties of some of the families made it difficult for the youth to become integrated into society and school, as detailed below.

## 1.2 Hebrew Proficiency

At the time of the study conducted in 1997, most of the youth had lived in Israel for 4.8 years; those interviewed for the study conducted in 2002 had been in Israel much longer - 8.4 years on average. Therefore, it is not surprising that the extended time spent in Israel led to an improvement in Hebrew proficiency. For example, 84% of the youth in the 2002 study reported being able to read a letter in Hebrew "fluently or almost fluently", and 81% of them reported being able to write a letter in Hebrew (in contrast to 67% and 65%, respectively, in 1997).

The improvement in Hebrew proficiency was also reflected at school. For example, in 2002, 27% of the youth reported having difficulty answering questions on exams because of a lack of proficiency in Hebrew, in contrast to 36% who reported this in 1997. Nevertheless, the findings reflect that a significant percentage of students were still experiencing difficulty with Hebrew proficiency at school, and this difficulty is likely to thwart their academic achievements.

Similarly, it is important to note that youth who were relatively new to Israel (those who had been in the country for up to six years) were less proficient in Hebrew than youth who had been living in Israel for a similar period of time in 1997. For example, in 2002, only 64% of the youth reported being able to converse fluently in Hebrew, in contrast to 85% in 1997. Furthermore, 31% of the students who had been in Israel for up to six years in 2002 reported having difficulty in understanding what the teachers said in class, in contrast to 19% in 1997.

## 1.3 The Relationship between the Youth and Their Families

The study findings indicate a positive situation with regard to the relationship between youth from the Caucasus and their families. The overwhelming majority of the youth reported that it was easy for them to converse with their families about issues that bothered them. This situation was even better than that among the general population of students in Israel: 77% percent reported they could talk about their difficulties with their mother, and 65% said they could talk with their father (Harel et al., 2002). These findings contradict the common belief that families in transition tend to experience a breakdown in their relationship, and that the relationship between children and parents is undermined. The findings with regard to the parents' involvement in school were also not in keeping with the broader perception among professionals that parents of youth from the Caucasus do not maintain consistent contact with the education system. Most of the students reported that their parents knew what was going on at school. It may be that the gap between the responses of the students and the perceptions of professionals was a result of the parents' knowing what goes on at school from their children, rather than through contact with professionals in the school system. However, the study indicates that the parents had difficulty in supporting their children's studies in a concrete way. More than half of the youth reported that their families (including their parents) were not able to help them with their homework.

## 1.4 Integration into School

The vast majority of youth were attending some education framework: 86% were attending a framework supervised by the Ministry of Education, and 8% were attending an alternative framework (mostly schools under the auspices of the Ministry of Social Affairs). Six percent of the youth were not studying at all. Even so, the vast majority of students in the higher grades were studying to receive matriculation certificates. Seventy-five percent were in a full-matriculation track: 83% percent of the girls and 67% of the boys. Most of the students reported intending to take matriculation exams (69% in 2002, in contrast to 59% in 1997), and most aspired to continue their studies after high school. Half intended to pursue an academic degree.

The information gathered in the study made it possible to estimate the probable rate of students who would be eligible for a matriculation certificate at the conclusion of their studies, on the basis of their declared intention to take matriculation exams. It was estimated that 39% of the 17-year-old immigrants from the Caucasus would be eligible for a matriculation certificate. This reflected a great improvement relative to 1997, although it was still lower than 52%, the figure for the Jewish population in 2002-3.

### **Difficulty and Success in School Subjects**

The scope of difficulties and failures in school subjects was similar in 1997 and 2002. In 2002, 43% reported having difficulty in three subjects or more, and 14% failed in three subjects or more (the rates were 45% and 13%, respectively, in 1997). However, it is important to remember that in 2002, a larger proportion of youth were studying overall, and a larger percentage of them were studying for full matriculation – a program of study that is characterized by higher academic standards and the need for a higher level of proficiency in Hebrew. In this context, we might have anticipated finding more difficulties and failures in studies. Bearing this in mind, the similar rates of difficulties and failures in 2002 and 1997 may have reflected the improved integration of students from the Caucasus into school and their improved academic achievements.

Attention should be focused on the noteworthy percentage of youth who reported having difficulty in three subjects or more, and on the smaller, though significant, group of students who reported receiving failing grades in at least three subjects. The findings indicate that poor proficiency in Hebrew is one of the variables related to difficulties and failures in school. For example, students who had significant difficulty in reading study materials in Hebrew had problems in an average of 4.2 study subjects, in contrast to having a problem in an average of 2.0 subjects among youth who did not have difficulty reading Hebrew.

### **Assistance Offered to Students**

As a result of the findings of the 1997 study (Ellenbogen-Frankovits and Noam, 1998), academic assistance was expanded for students from the Caucasus, and this was reflected in the data from

2002: The percentage of students who reported receiving assistance in their studies increased from 55% in 1997 to 80% in 2002.

Students from the Caucasus enjoyed a range of types of assistance within school: remedial instruction by a teacher or another student, help with homework, and financial assistance (to buy school books and for transportation costs). The "Other Learning Activities Program" is a central intervention program conducted outside of schools; 35% of the students in the towns where the program is conducted participate in it. The students who were newer to Israel and the students who had more difficulties and higher rates of failure in their studies received more assistance. Moreover, the large majority of students who received help expressed great satisfaction with the assistance. Because of the central role of the Other Learning Activities Program, the professional consultants to this study suggested examining whether the needs of the students had changed, and whether the implementation of the program should be changed accordingly.

Even though most of the students from the Caucasus were benefiting from some kind of assistance with their studies, the data revealed that not all needs in this area were being met, both among students who had difficulty in many subjects (83% of the students who were having difficulty in four subjects or more expressed interest in receiving more assistance) and among students who had difficulty in one subject (60% expressed interest in receiving more assistance).

### **The Relationship with the School Staff**

In addition to academic assistance, the study findings demonstrate that students from the Caucasus saw the school staff as a source of advice. Nearly all (95%) of the students reported having someone to whom to turn when they had a problem in school. Seventy-one percent of the students did in fact talk to a member of the school staff, and 68% of them expressed satisfaction with this. Most of the students turned to their homeroom teacher, but many also turned to a counselor or another teacher on the school staff.

Additional findings demonstrate the positive attitude of students from the Caucasus toward the school staff. Most (87%) of the students expressed satisfaction with the way in which the school staff related to them, and more than 70% reported feeling that they would receive additional help from the teachers when they needed it, and that the teachers treated them fairly. It appears that these findings and others, which are presented at greater length in the study, indicate that over the years, there has been an overall improvement in communication and the relationship between students from the Caucasus and the school faculty. In 2002, for example, 79% of the students reported that the school staff cared about their social situation (23% cited that the school staff "cared a great deal"), in contrast to 61% in 1997 (and only 3% who cited that the school staff "cared a great deal"). It is important to note that the attitudes of the students from the Caucasus toward school were more positive than those of the general population of students in Israel in 1998 (Harel et al., 2002) and in 2002 (data forthcoming).

## Dropouts

One of the issues examined at length in this study is that of dropouts. Dropouts are defined as youth ages 14-17 who haven't completed their high school studies and are not studying at all, or are attending an alternative framework (not supervised by the Ministry of Education). Study findings from 2002 indicate a significant improvement with regard to dropouts: There was a steep decline in the percentage of youth who were not studying at all (from 10% in 1997 to 6% in 2002), and in the percentage of youth who were attending alternative frameworks (from 15% in 1997 to 8% in 2002). Similarly, more than half of youth who were not studying at all reported intending to return to study. Nevertheless, the dropout rates were still high in comparison to the overall rate among the Jewish population in 2000-2001: 4% were dropouts (The National Council for the Child, 2002), versus 14% of the youth from the Caucasus.

These findings indicate substantial differences between boys and girls with regard to changes in dropout patterns. In 2002, 90% of the girls were attending frameworks supervised by the Ministry of Education, in contrast to only 72% in 1997. This change was much greater than the change among the boys (from 77% in 1997 to 83% in 2002), and may indicate a significant change in the perception of the importance of education for girls. In keeping with the dramatic increase in the percentage of girls who were integrated into schools supervised by the Ministry of Education, the proportion of girls who were attending alternative frameworks decreased significantly (from 23% in 1997 to 3% in 2002). There was a moderate increase in the rate of boys who were attending alternative frameworks (from 8% in 1997 to 13% in 2002). The percentage of girls who were not studying at all remained about the same during those years (5% in 1997, and 7% in 2002), although the percentage of boys who were not studying at all significantly decreased (from 15% in 1997 to 4% in 2002), dropping below the rate among girls.

The youth who had dropped out were asked about their current occupation: 59% reported attending an alternative framework; 19% were not studying at all, although they were working; and 22% of the dropouts were "disattached" (neither studying nor working). The percentage of disattached youth among all the youth from the Caucasus ages 15-17 declined from 6.7% in 1997 to 3.5% in 2002. This rate was lower than among the total Israeli population in the same year (7.5%) and lower than the rate among the Jewish population (5.5%) (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2003).

The youth who had dropped out were asked why they had left a normative framework. The main reasons they cited were related to the school and their studies: dissatisfaction with school, difficulties learning, or they "didn't feel like" or "weren't interested" in learning. The reasons were similar to those cited by youth from other groups of dropouts (Cohen-Navot et al., 2001). Many professionals believe that the principal reason youth drop out of school is to contribute to the family income. The responses of the youth reveal that only 6% of them left school because they preferred to work, and another 3% of them left school because they were compelled to contribute to the family income.

## **Hidden Dropouts**

In addition to the students who dropped out of schools supervised by the Ministry of Education, there are other youth in the education system whose behavior or characteristics place them at risk of leaving school at some stage, or not reaping the full benefits of school. These students are called "hidden" dropouts.

The following aspects of this phenomenon were examined: frequent truancy, students seeing themselves as a "weak" student, a feeling of disengagement from school, or of social exclusion, victimization, and exhibiting violent behavior.

In this study, the strongest expression of hidden dropping out was frequent truancy: One-third of the youth from the Caucasus reported that they had been absent from school for four days or more during the past month. This percentage was a great deal higher than the percentage in 1997 (15%). Truancy may be an expression of the difficulty of adjusting to school, and a first indicator that the student may drop out. In addition, it may be assumed that absence from school and from class will impair success in studies.

Half of the students had been absent for personal or family reasons. However, the principal additional reasons students cited for their absence from school were: feeling bored, not having prepared their homework, and having difficulty with their studies. Only 6% of the students reported being absent from school because they needed to work. This finding strengthens the premise that the need to contribute to the family income is not the main reason for dropping out of school.

Students from the Caucasus exhibited additional characteristics of hidden dropouts, but at lower rates: 14% were characterized by some form of violent behavior, 9% reported a feeling of detachment from school, and 2% reported a feeling socially excluded. As anticipated, students with difficulties who failed more in their studies manifested more characteristics of hidden dropouts. For example, students who exhibited at least two characteristics of hidden dropouts had difficulty in 3.4 subjects on average and failed in 1.8 subjects on average, compared with students who did not exhibit any characteristics of hidden dropouts, who had difficulty in 1.8 subjects on average, and failed in 0.5 subjects on average.

## **Lack of School Supplies and Financial Difficulties**

It seems that a significant number of families of youth from the Caucasus contended with financial difficulties that had an impact on the youth's integration into school. One-fifth of the students reported receiving financial aid. A larger percentage reported difficulties: 31% of the students reported lacking school supplies (mainly a personal computer and textbooks); approximately one-quarter had discussed their family's financial difficulties with a member of the school staff; and approximately one-third had cited financial difficulties as one of the two topics that concerned them the most. In addition, 14% of the students who were not receiving financial aide reported that they

wanted to receive aid, and 18% of the students who were already receiving aid reported greater needs in this area.

## 1.5 Social Integration

Another area of importance in the process of absorption of youth from the Caucasus is social integration with other youth, in general, and with non-immigrant Israelis in particular. The study findings reveal an improvement in various aspects of the youth's social integration. Among other indicators, it should be noted that most of the youth had a "best friend", and only 6% of the students reported that, during the past year, no other students wanted to spend time with them and they were alone. However, some of the youth from the Caucasus reported having difficulties in social integration. For example, close to half of the youth reported feeling lonely sometimes and 13% reported feeling lonely frequently. Difficulties in social integration were more prominent among youth who weren't studying at all, than among those studying (in normative and alternative frameworks). For example, most (84%) of the students had a "best friend", in contrast to only 76% of the youth who were not studying at all.

An improvement was also noted in the social relationships of youth from the Caucasus with other Israeli youth. Most of the youth from the Caucasus had at least one non-immigrant Israeli friend, and the vast majority were satisfied with the way other Israelis related to them (95% in 2002, versus 86% in 1997). However, it appears that the social relationships between youth from the Caucasus and non-immigrant Israelis took place primarily at school. For example, one-third of the youth from the Caucasus almost never went out socially with other Israelis. In addition, even though most of the youth from the Caucasus had had positive personal experiences in their social integration, the perception remained that the relationship between the different groups of youth was not positive. For example, more than half of the youth from the Caucasus reported feeling that youth from the Caucasus frequently got into conflicts and arguments with other Israelis, and that immigrant youth and non-immigrant youth do not understand each other.

## 1.6 Recreational Activity and Integration in Informal Education

The proportion of youth from the Caucasus who participated in informal education was relatively small: 29% participated in programs intended exclusively for youth from the Caucasus, 26% participated in some form of after-school activity, and 15% participated in volunteer activities or training. In comparison, among the general population of students in Petah Tikva, the rates were much higher: Approximately 45% participated in after-school activities and 38% in volunteer activities or training (Kahan-Strawczynski and Yurovitz, 2004). Dropout youth from the Caucasus participated in these activities at an even lower rate, if they participated at all.

Despite the relatively low rate of participation in informal education by youth from the Caucasus, the percentage of participants rose significantly between the years 1997-2002, with the increase being noted mostly among the boys.

## 1.7 Paid Employment

As of 2002, the percentage of youth, and especially students who worked for pay had decreased (from 35% in 1997 to 26% in 2002). The average number of hours worked by youth had decreased. Among students, the extent of employment during the school year was very low: 9% of the students in normative frameworks had worked during the school year, and 14% of the students in alternative frameworks had worked. Even so, the rate of those seeking employment had increased (from 16% in 1997 to 33% in 2002).

Two-thirds of the youth who were working in 2002 cited that they had worked mainly for their own pocket money. Even though contributing to the family income was not cited as a principal reason for leaving school, one-third of the youth who did work reported that they had worked to contribute to the family income. However, no relationship was found between working and the youth's assessment of their families' financial situation.

## 1.8 At-risk Behavior

The information about at-risk behavior, that is, violence, drug use, drinking alcoholic beverages, and smoking was gathered using self-administered questionnaires, with the promise of complete anonymity. The study data indicate two surprising trends: First, youth from the Caucasus were characterized by fewer at-risk behaviors than the general youth population in Israel. Second, among female youth from the Caucasus there was a sharp increase in involvement in at-risk behavior. Below are the principal findings.

### **Violence**

As noted, the rate of youth from the Caucasus who reported participating in violent behavior was slightly lower than that of the general population. This finding contradicts the perception of many service providers, who believe that youth from the Caucasus were more involved than others in violent behavior. Nevertheless, the rate was quite worrisome: 37% had been involved in a dispute at least once during the past year, versus 40% of all Jewish students and 44% of students from the former Soviet Union (Harel et al., 2002). The extent of the increase in this phenomenon among girls was especially worrisome: from 9% in 1997 to 25% in 2002. In addition, the percentage of girls from the Caucasus who had been involved in conflicts was higher than the rate among female students in the Jewish population (18%), and among female students from the former Soviet Union (22%) (Harel et al., 2002). The rate of those involved in conflicts was particularly high among those attending alternative frameworks (50%). Youth from the Caucasus also reported being victims of violence: 16% had been victims of a physical attack, and 23% had been robbery victims.

The multivariate analysis that examined the factors that had an impact on violent behavior revealed that the probability of being more involved in violent conflicts had decreased notably between 1997 and 2002, even when controlling for additional independent variables (such as gender, age, and

parents' education). The probability was higher among boys (even with the increase in involvement in violent behavior among girls), among younger youth, and among youth who had dropped out.

## **Drugs**

Only 1% of youth from the Caucasus reported having experimented with drugs even once. For the sake of comparison, data from the Anti-Drug Authority reveal that 5.4% of all students in Israel reported that they had used drugs illegally at least once during the past year (Bar-Harberger et al., 2002).

Approximately one-quarter of the youth from the Caucasus knew someone who used drugs. Youth who were students and had more non-immigrant Israeli friends also knew more peers who used drugs. For example, 20% of youth who didn't have a non-immigrant Israeli friend knew one or more peers who used drugs, in contrast to 28% of youth who had a majority of friends who were non-immigrant Israelis. The rates of boys and girls who knew someone who used drugs were very similar. However, there was a sharp rise in the rates among girls: from 16% in 1997 to 30% in 2002.

## **Alcohol**

Examination of this topic corroborated familiar trends: 22% of the youth from the Caucasus reported that they had drunk alcohol on at least one day in the past month. This phenomenon is widespread in Israel's general population: 38% of Jewish students and 47% of students from the former Soviet Union had reported this (Harel et al., 2002). Among girls from the Caucasus there was a sharp increase in alcohol consumption, from 4% in 1997 to 19% in 2002, in contrast to the decline among boys, from 29% in 1997 to 24% in 2002.

## **Smoking**

Approximately 21% of the youth from the Caucasus smoked cigarettes on a regular basis, 14% of whom smoked every day. Similar data were reported by the Anti-Drug Authority (Bar-Harberger, et al., 2002). In other words, the smoking patterns of youth from the Caucasus were similar to those of all Israeli youth. In 2002, 5% of the girls reported that they smoked every day, in contrast to 0% in 1997; while in 2002, 23% of the boys reported that they smoked every day (in contrast to 16% in 1997).

### **1.9 Contact with Service Providers and Information Needs**

As part of the study, information was gathered about the contact between youth from the Caucasus and service providers. The percentage of youth from the Caucasus who had contact (in the present or the past) with any education or social welfare service ranged from 2% to 19%. Youth had contact mainly with services for dropouts or youth in distress, that is, youth who were either not studying at all or who were attending an alternative framework. For example, 35% of those attending an

alternative framework and 25% of youth who were not studying at all had had contact with a truant officer. Surprisingly, only 2% of those studying in normative frameworks were in contact with a truant officer, even though 32% of those who attended these frameworks were often absent from school and 16% of them exhibited two or more characteristics of hidden dropping out. Those youth who did utilize services expressed satisfaction with most of them. Therefore, for example, 77% of the youth who had had contact with the youth probation service reported that they had been helped. Nonetheless, some expressed dissatisfaction. For example, only 30% of those who had been clients of the truancy service cited that they had been helped.

The youth were asked about the topics on which they needed information. Their reports reveal that the scope of their need for information had not changed over the years, and that a large proportion of youth needed information on a wide range of topics. The girls spoke about a need for more information on studies and the possibility of receiving counseling on personal issues; the boys cited a need for information on military service. Youth who were more recent immigrants also reported a need for information about their options for receiving guidance on personal issues. Youth who had wanted to request services but had not done so explained that they had not known to whom to turn, they had been embarrassed, they had been concerned about the cost, they had felt it would be undignified, or their Hebrew had not been good enough.

It appears that in order to respond to the needs of youth from the Caucasus, the services should provide better general coverage of those youth, and especially for those among them who are dropouts or in distress. The data reveal that a more in-depth knowledge of the characteristics and needs of youth from the Caucasus is likely to improve services. The differences found in the expectations and needs of boys and girls (see Chapter 16) suggest that services need to respond to these differently.

### 1.10 Evaluating the Absorption Process

The youth expressed a high degree of satisfaction with their absorption into Israel: 26% of them were "very pleased" and 49% were "pleased" with their families' absorption. Their satisfaction with their personal absorption was even higher: 33% were "very pleased" and 57% were "pleased". This was a clear increase in satisfaction compared to 1997, when the percentages were 12% and 64%, respectively.

Satisfaction with the family's absorption was greater among youth from families whose financial situation was good, and lower among youth from single-parent households. Satisfaction with personal absorption was lower among youth who were not studying at all.

Ten percent of all the youth (and 28% of the youth who were not studying at all) regretted the decision to immigrate to Israel. They explained that their regret was mainly due to financial difficulties, differences in language and culture, their feeling of disattachment, the security situation in Israel, and that life in their country of origin had been more interesting.

## 1.11 National and Cultural Identification

Ben Shalom (1997) contends that a person can have a number of identities simultaneously, without having to adopt the majority culture, or abandon his original identity. The findings of this study reinforce this contention. The youth in this study were asked if they considered themselves Jews, Israelis, "Mountain Jews", or Russians. More than half of them defined themselves as having more than one identity. Thus, for example, one-fifth of the youth defined themselves as being both Jews and "Mountain Jews"; 67% of them defined themselves as being Jews; 60% defined themselves as being "Mountain Jews"; 39% defined themselves as being Israelis; and only 5% defined themselves as being Russians.

With regard to religious identity, the majority (66%) of the youth defined themselves as being secular or not religious, 30% as being traditional and only 4% defined themselves as being religious or very religious.

## 1.12 Future Orientations

To a great extent, this study was devoted to the life situation of youth from the Caucasus: the difficulties they confronted and the areas in which there was improvement. In addition, the future orientation of the youth (ages 16 and older) was examined in key areas such as military service, gender roles, and personal aspirations.

### **Military Service**

The vast majority (90%) of boys intended to serve in the army (92% in 1997). However, only 75% of the boys who were not studying at all intended to service in the army. Half of the girls intended to serve, in contrast to 39% in 1997.

The youth were asked how military service might contribute to their lives, and about their concerns with regard to military service. The main contributions cited by the youth were to become more mature and independent; learn an occupation and receive professional training; become integrated into society; improve their self-confidence; and improve their physical fitness. On the other hand, they estimated that they would encounter difficulties, principally, that their parents would worry, that they might be assigned to an uninteresting post, and that they would have to contend with military discipline. The boys also had reservations regarding the physical demands, and the girls expressed concern about the danger of military service (18% of the girls were interested in serving in a combat role), basic training, and the treatment by officers. In light of the high rate of boys who did not complete their military service (King et al., forthcoming), it is very important to share with military officials the findings of this study with regard to the expectations and concerns of youth from the Caucasus prior to their military service, and expand their knowledge of the characteristics and needs of youth from the Caucasus, their families and the community.

Because of the relatively low percentage of girls who intended to service in the army, we found it appropriate to examine this issue more closely. The responses of the girls indicated that they did not want to serve in the army primarily for cultural reasons (66%): because girls should not have to serve in the army, for religious reasons, because they intended to marry; but also because they did not want to devote the time to it, and they needed to study or work (43%). In addition, approximately half (48%) of the girls felt that their parents would not allow them to serve in the army. The reasons they ascribed to their parents were similar to those they themselves cited: because girls should not have to serve in the army, didn't know enough about the army, and should continue their studies.

### **Personal Aspirations and Gender Roles**

Over the years, there has been a change in the gender attitudes of youth from the Caucasus. This change was reflected in an increase in the percentage of girls who study and who intend to serve in the army. In addition, there was a sharp increase in the proportion of both boys and girls who believe women should work after marriage and after they have had children.

However, a comparison between the two time periods reveals that the large gap (of 29 percentage points) between the genders with regard to women working was not reduced. The rate of girls who reported being interested in working after marriage increased from 65% in 1997 to 87% in 2002. There was also a significant increase in the boys who thought women should work after marriage, from 32% in 1997 to 58% in 2002. This trend was similar to the one found with regard to women working after they have had children. There was an increase in the support for women working after having had children in a comparison between the time periods (among girls, from 42% in 1997 to 52% in 2002, and among boys, from 15% to 24%, respectively.) It is interesting to note that both boys and girls tended to be less supportive of women working after they had children.

According to the youth, there are gender-related differences with regard to needs and expectations in all of the subjects that were presented to them, especially chores and caring for family members, military service, earning a living, going out with friends, and marriage. The girls perceived the differences between the genders as being greater than did the boys, principally concerning chores and caring for family members, going out with friends, and marriage.

## **2. Discussion**

The study findings from 2002 and data from the 1997 study (Ellenbogen-Frankovits and Noam, 1998) provide an overview of the situation of youth from the Caucasus and a characterization of the dynamics that affected their situation during that period. This in-depth information has been useful in determining directions for continued efforts to improve their absorption. The many topics examined in the study can be concentrated into four central areas: family, school, peers and non-normative behavior.

## 2.1 The Family

In 2002, as in 1997, a considerable proportion of the families were struggling with significant financial difficulties. Approximately one-third of the youth evaluated the financial situation of their family as being "poor". This situation had a direct impact on the youth. For example, one-third reported that they lacked school supplies due to financial difficulties, and many were prevented from becoming integrated into informal activities, in part because of financial difficulties. In light of this, it is important to find ways to reduce the impact of the families' financial difficulties on the integration of the youth, both in school and outside of school. There are a range of ways to realize this goal, including subsidizing the cost of informal activities, and providing aid to buy school supplies and scholarships for studies.

The study findings indicate a positive relationship between the youth and their parents. Many youth reported feeling that their parents and families were good listeners to a greater extent even than among the general youth population in Israel, and a large proportion reported that their parents were aware of what was going on at school. Even so, more than half of the youth reported that there was no family member (including parents) who could help them with their homework. These important findings must be taken into account when designing policy to assist youth from the Caucasus. The families can be a source of support and strength for the youth in personal and social matters, and it is important that this potential be realized in practice. For this reason, it is important to integrate the parents into planning and formulating plans for their children, to expose the parents to what takes place in and outside of school, and to encourage them to become involved in the integration of their children.

It should be borne in mind that a substantial proportion of the families of these youth observe traditional values and norms, which are reflected in relatively close social supervision. Thus, for example, various prohibitions are placed on girls with regard to recreational and social activities, and military service, and they are expected to marry at a relatively early age. Bearing this in mind, it is important that the efforts to involve parents in meeting the needs of youth be culturally sensitive and cognizant of the many intergenerational differences between the youth and their parents.

## 2.2 School

Integration into school is a major factor in the quality of the youth's integration at present and in their future employment and financial and social situation.

The findings indicate a dramatic improvement in the integration of youth into all aspects of school. There was an impressive decrease in the rate of students who dropped out of school, and similarly, in the increase in those who were studying in matriculation tracks. Furthermore, the data indicated that the rates of those eligible for a matriculation certificate would rise. However, the dropout rate and eligibility for matriculation of youth from the Caucasus were still worse than those of the

general population in Israel. It is important to continue the trend of improving and making progress in these key areas.

In this context, it is also important to emphasize that by 2002, in contrast to 1997, nearly all of the youth from the Caucasus had internalized the impact that earning a matriculation certificate would have on their future education and employment. However, at the same time, most believed that it was also important to acquire a practical occupation during their high school years. This finding challenges the education system to find a response to this perception and to the needs it generates.

An additional key improvement took place in the interaction between youth from the Caucasus and school staff, and in the degree to which schools meet the needs of these youth. While only half of the youth had received some kind of academic assistance in 1997, in 2002 this rate had risen to 80%. Moreover, the great efforts being made by schools to improve communication between youth from the Caucasus and school staff were reflected in the data: There was an improvement in the students' perception of the way their teachers treated them, and in their appreciation of the teachers' involvement and care. In fact, the attitude of the students from the Caucasus was better than that of the general Israeli student population (Harel et al., 2002).

Improvement in the youth's scholastic integration was also reflected in their aspirations for further education. Two-thirds of the youth reported that they intended to continue with post-secondary or academic studies.

It is important to note that the significant improvement in the integration of youth from the Caucasus into school was concurrent with a significant increase in the resources and efforts allocated to this area. It is of prime importance to continue this support in order to achieve more significant improvement in the scholastic achievements of youth from the Caucasus and in the percentages of those eligible for a matriculation certificate. It is also important to reexamine the services provided and to adjust them in light of the weak points that emerged in this study. Two principal weak points were revealed in the integration of these youth into school, which are worthy of special attention: a significant increase in the rate of truancy, and difficulty attaining Hebrew proficiency.

Absence from school is a first signal that a student may become a dropout; it is an expression of the difficulty that the student is having adjusting to school. The significant increase in the number of those who were absent four times or more during the past month, from 15% in 1997 to 30% in 2002, is worrisome. Even though more youth had become integrated into school by 2002, the large number of absences indicates that, at least with regard to a certain segment of these youth, integration into school is not an easy goal to achieve. For this reason, it is important to identify the hidden dropouts, examine their needs closely, initiate a process that provides a response to their needs, and closely monitor developments in their situation.

In order to continue to lower the dropout rate, it should be kept in mind that youth who are dropouts experience more difficulty in all areas of life, which affects their absorption. A smaller proportion of the youth who dropped out reported that they had a non-immigrant Israeli friend, and a greater proportion of them reported that most of their friends were from the Caucasus; they were less likely to define themselves as being Israeli, and had more problems with Hebrew proficiency. In addition, these youth confronted difficulties similar to those encountered by non-immigrant Israeli dropouts. A low rate of dropout youth from the Caucasus reported having a "best friend" and intending to serve in the army.

In order to deal with all of these difficulties, the education system and other services must ensure that youth from the Caucasus receive special assistance in Hebrew proficiency and attention to their special emotional and social needs.

In order to raise the level of achievement of immigrants from the Caucasus, it is important to continue to reinforce their accomplishments in achieving matriculation certificates, to consistently support activities that increase the number of youth who are eligible for matriculation, and to continue to provide academic assistance. In addition, efforts to improve communication between school faculty and both students and parents must be continued. In these areas, in which an improvement was noted, it is important to examine whether the responses that has been provided to date are still suitable and effective, and what, if any, changes should be introduced.

The study indicates that a significant percentage of the youth had difficulty with Hebrew proficiency. It is important to note that among more recent immigrants (those who had been in Israel for up to six years) Hebrew proficiency declined in comparison with the findings from 1997. One would have anticipated that the rate of difficulty with Hebrew proficiency would be lower among those who had lived in Israel for a relatively long time (an average of 8.4 years). The study data reveal a different situation. For example, approximately one-fifth of the youth were still having problems doing their homework because of a lack of proficiency in Hebrew. The principal difficulty in learning Hebrew is writing and reading; this is typical not only of youth from the Caucasus who are relatively new to Israel. Lack of Hebrew proficiency may lead to gaps in academic achievements and failure in various subjects, a feeling of boredom and frustration, and, in the long term, to disengagement and detachment from class activities, or even to the more extreme situation of dropping out of school altogether. Indeed, the study findings indicate a correlation between Hebrew proficiency and academic success. The education system allocates significant resources to the study of the Hebrew language, although professionals claim that the approach to teaching the Hebrew language to immigrants is inappropriate and ineffective (Levine et al., 2003). Another focus of criticism is the limited number of years during which immigrant students are eligible for assistance with learning Hebrew (Levine et al., 2003). The students stop receiving aid regardless of their level of Hebrew proficiency, which is not even checked. Bearing this in mind, the assistance with language proficiency that has been given to students to date should be closely examined and upgraded to ensure that the students will be proficient enough in Hebrew to successfully confront the challenges at each stage of their studies.

## 2.3 Social Integration and Peer Groups

Meeting the need for social integration is complex and challenging. Even so, it is clear beyond a doubt that social integration in general, and in school, in particular, especially during adolescence, is important to successful absorption.

In both social and academic integration, youth from the Caucasus have made significant progress, and in some areas a positive trend was noted. For example, there was a decrease in the rate of youth who reported a lack of social relationships with their peers and an increase in the rate of youth from the Caucasus who expressed satisfaction with the way non-immigrant Israelis related to them. In addition, a larger proportion of the youth had non-immigrant Israeli friends, and a significant proportion of them wanted to expand their social relationships with non-immigrant Israelis.

Despite this positive trend, the data reveal that many challenges remain in achieving social integration for youth from the Caucasus. For example, one-third of the youth almost never went out socially with non-immigrant Israelis. The friendships were confined to school and did not extend beyond school hours.

Even though youth from the Caucasus reported having relatively positive personal social experiences with non-immigrant Israelis, the relationships between groups (immigrants versus non-immigrants and immigrants from the Caucasus versus immigrants from other places) were perceived as being negative by youth from the Caucasus. In addition, there was a change for the worse in the perception of relationships between youth from the Caucasus and immigrant youth from other places. Another worrisome finding was the low rate of participation in recreational activities and informal education.

In recent years, those involved in the absorption process have dedicated most of their efforts to improving the academic achievements of youth from the Caucasus, on the assumption that their most pressing problems were in this area. Work has been done on social issues, but to a lesser extent. It is important to expand efforts in this area, while focusing on unresolved issues: Ways must be found to integrate youth from the Caucasus into informal frameworks, whether by developing special frameworks to meet their needs, by reinforcing their integration into existing frameworks for the general youth population, or by developing additional frameworks for the general youth population into which they may be integrated. It is also important to find operative ways to reduce the feeling of alienation between youth from the Caucasus and their peers, both non-immigrant Israelis and other immigrants from the former Soviet Union. Opportunities must be created for positive interaction between these groups. It is important to examine the information and experience acquired in intervention programs that are already active in the field, as a basis for designing and planning future activity. In addition, it is important to utilize the many positive resources in the community of immigrants from the Caucasus.

An examination of the study findings reveals that it is worthwhile to devote special attention to girls from the Caucasus, because of the significant changes that they have experienced during absorption, and because they are in the midst of a cultural transition more intense than the one being experienced by boys. On one hand, we found that in some of the areas the girls had become better integrated into Israeli society. Their reports indicate that they have a stronger feeling of being Israeli, and that they have more non-immigrant Israeli friends than do boys. They also demonstrated more significant progress in school, and there was a more significant decline in the proportion of girls who dropped out. The vast majority were studying for full matriculation. In addition, the attitude of the community toward educating girls seems to have changed. By 2002, educating girls was perceived as normative and even desirable. Therefore, it is not surprising that the girls had high professional aspirations, even higher than those of the boys.

On the other hand, the girls' family and social environment does not always agree with the changes in their situation and perceptions. Greater social restrictions are placed on the girls, especially in their leisure time activities. It seems, therefore, that the girls are prepared to make the cultural transition, but there is a risk that the opposition of part of their community to this change might put them in conflict. This could lead to at-risk situations, and might be connected to the prominent increase in the involvement of girls from the Caucasus in at-risk behaviors, such as the consumption of alcoholic beverages and violence.

Therefore, the provision of special responses for girls, especially for girls in distress, which will help them cope with the difficulties they confront during this process of cultural transition, and which will enable them to realize their aspirations and capabilities, must be examined. It is very important to present the girls with alternatives to military service, such as national service, preparation for higher education, completion of matriculation exams and vocational training, to prevent them from being placed in the lower ranks of the labor force in the future. Along with this work with girls, work should be done the community and parents.

## 2.4 Non-normative Behavior

The findings from 2002, like those from 1997, refute the negative stigma that youth from the Caucasus are more involved than other youth in non-normative behavior. The rate of non-normative behavior that was reported by youth from the Caucasus was not higher than that among the general youth population in Israel. Although phenomena such as violence, drug and alcohol use, and smoking raise concern because they are widespread among the general youth population in Israel and require considerable attention, with regard to certain phenomena, such as violence and drug abuse, the rate of involvement of youth from the Caucasus was lower than that of other youth, relative to 1997.

In conclusion, this study's findings, like the findings of the study conducted in 1997, provide a broad basis for decision-making and designing policy for youth from the Caucasus. The findings are being presented at many forums, leading to comprehensive discussions, which facilitate the gaining

of insight into the changes that have taken place among youth from the Caucasus and the formulation of directions for action in the future.

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