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A Result without a Cause: The Unique Fertility Pattern of the Israeli-Druze

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Abstract

The academic and non-academic literature on the Druze emphasize their uniqueness. This rests on many components, the main one being the fact that they continue to live in closed communities; they maintain the confidentiality of their religion; the religion is closed to outsiders; and marriage outside the community is almost non-existent. None of the research on the Israeli-Druze, however, deals with their fertility patterns. The aim of this research is two-fold: first, to sketch the major trends of fertility patterns of the Israeli-Druze since the establishment of the state of Israel. The second aim is to explore the causes for the uniqueness of the Israeli-Druze fertility decline which occurred despite the absence of the major pre-conditions for sub replacement-level fertility rate in line with the Second Demographic Transition theory.

Keywords

Israeli-Druze, total fertility rate, age-specific fertility rate, age structure, natalist policy, labor force participation rate

Acknowledgment

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Introduction

The Druze are the smallest religious minority in Israel. According to the 1922 mandatory census, their number totaled 7,208 (McCarthy, 1990: 65), increased to 9,148 according to the 1931 mandatory census (Farag, 2000: 69), 14,500 according to the first Israeli September 1948 census (CBS, 2012b; Firro, 1990: 41, Table 4.1), and reached 148,600 in 2021 (see Table 1), representing 1.5% of Israel's total citizenry population. At the end of 2020, 98% of the Israeli-Druze¹ lived in nineteen localities, eight of which are populated entirely by Druze. In five localities the Druze constitute at least 90% of the total population, while in the remaining six, the population consists of Druze, Muslims and Arab-Christians (CBS, 2022c: 2, Table A).²

The entire body of academic literature on the Druze, almost without exception, emphasize their uniqueness. This uniqueness rests on many components, the main ones being the fact that they continue, even today, to live in closed communities; they maintain the confidentiality of their religion; the Druze religion is closed to outsiders and marriage outside the community barely exists. However, none of the vast number of studies that were published on the Druze deals with their fertility patterns.

While the non-existence of research on the fertility patterns of the Druze outside Israel is understandable due to the absence of data, this is not the case regarding Israel -- Syria and Lebanon do not publish any demographic data according to religion,³ while the Jordanian authority classifies the Druze as Muslim and consequently they do not publish any specific data on the Druze.⁴ The Israeli CBS (Central Bureau of Statistics) published since the mid-1950s all the demographic data by religion. Hleihel⁵ specifically referred to this lacuna. In an article published in 2005, he noted that "the change in the fertility rates of the Israeli-Druze was not described at all (Hleihel, 2005: 161)." Although Hleihel pointed out this lacuna almost two decades ago, it still has not yet been filled. The few studies which did refer to the Druze fertility patterns described it in general outline only (Weinreb, Chernichovsky and Brill, 2018), or combined them together with the Muslims (Friedlander, 2002). Since fertility patterns are a key focal point for understanding the socioeconomic-cultural situation of any given society, examining those of the Israeli-Druze is crucial.

The aim of this research is two-fold: first, to sketch the major trends of fertility patterns of the Druze since the establishments of the state of Israel in 1948. Attention will be given to finding differences in fertility patterns, where they exist, between the various Druze communities, particularly between the localities that are populated entirely or almost entirely by Druze and those in which the Druze cohabit with Muslims and Christians. This is important not only because the issue has thus far not received any academic attention, but also because it will lead to a better understanding of the mutual influence of fertility patterns between communities of different religions. The second aim is to explore the causes behind the decline of the TFR (total fertility rate) of the Druze to sub-replacement level rate,⁶ despite the almost total absence of the paramount pre-conditions for very low fertility rate together with the fact that the Druze fertility decline occurred when the Israeli pro-natalist financial measures were at their peak.

The Data

The paper is based on three datasets. The first contains data on the total Israeli-Druze population, their NIR (natural increase rate), the ASFR (age-specific fertility rate), and age at first marriage and birth at the national level since the mid-1950s. These data are open and appear in various CBS (Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics) publications (Tables 1 and 2). The second dataset is on Druze women

born during 1955-1975 according to their number of children at the age of 45 (Tables 3 and 5). The third dataset is the ASFR according to the 19 localities with Druze population (Tables 4 and 6). The second and the third datasets were drawn from a special CBS processing that have been implemented specifically for this research. All of the data presented in this paper include the earliest available data and all of the relevant women at both the national and the locality levels.

The Unique Pattern of the Druze Fertility Decline

Until the late 1980s, the fertility patterns of the Druze were “normal,” namely they followed the Demographic Transition Theory (DTT), the basic assumption being that the patterns of births in any given society in any given period is based on the socioeconomic situation; that is, an improved socioeconomic situation is manifested first and foremost in the decline of infant and child mortality rates. Hence, the number of desired children is achieved by much lower number of births (Casterline, 2003: 210-206; Pressat, 1985: 52-55). In other words, the “demographic market” behaved similar to Adam Smith’s “invisible hand principle;” namely, that fertility rates adjust themselves to death rates.

Table 1: Total Population and Natural Increase Rate (NIR) of the Israeli-Druze, 1955-2021

Year	Average population (thousands)	CBR (per 1,000)	CDR (per 1,000)	NI (per 1,000)	NI (%)
1955	19.0	44.5	9.3	35.2	3.52
1960	23.3	50.0	8.7	41.3	4.13
1965	29.8	47.1	4.4	42.6	4.26
1970	35.9	43.0	5.5	37.5	3.75
1974	42.2	42.0	5.0	37.0	3.70
1980	50.7	39.2	4.4	34.8	3.48
1985	72.0	31.6	3.4	28.2	2.82
1990	82.6	31.0	3.4	27.6	2.76
1995	92.2	28.8	3.0	25.8	2.58
2000	103.8	26.4	2.9	23.5	2.35
2005	115.2	22.2	3.2	19.0	1.90
2010	127.6	20.0	3.0	17.0	1.70
2011	129.8	19.2	2.9	16.3	1.63
2012	131.5	18.2	3.2	15.0	1.50
2013	133.4	17.7	2.9	14.8	1.48
2014	135.4	17.6	3.2	14.4	1.44
2015	137.3	17.4	3.2	14.2	1.42
2016	139.3	17.7	3.0	14.7	1.47
2017	141.2	16.8	3.3	13.5	1.35
2018	142.2	17.1	3.1	14.0	1.40
2019	144.2	15.9	3.1	12.8	1.28
2020	146.0	15.3	3.7	11.6	1.16
2021	148.6	15.8	3.9	11.9	1.19

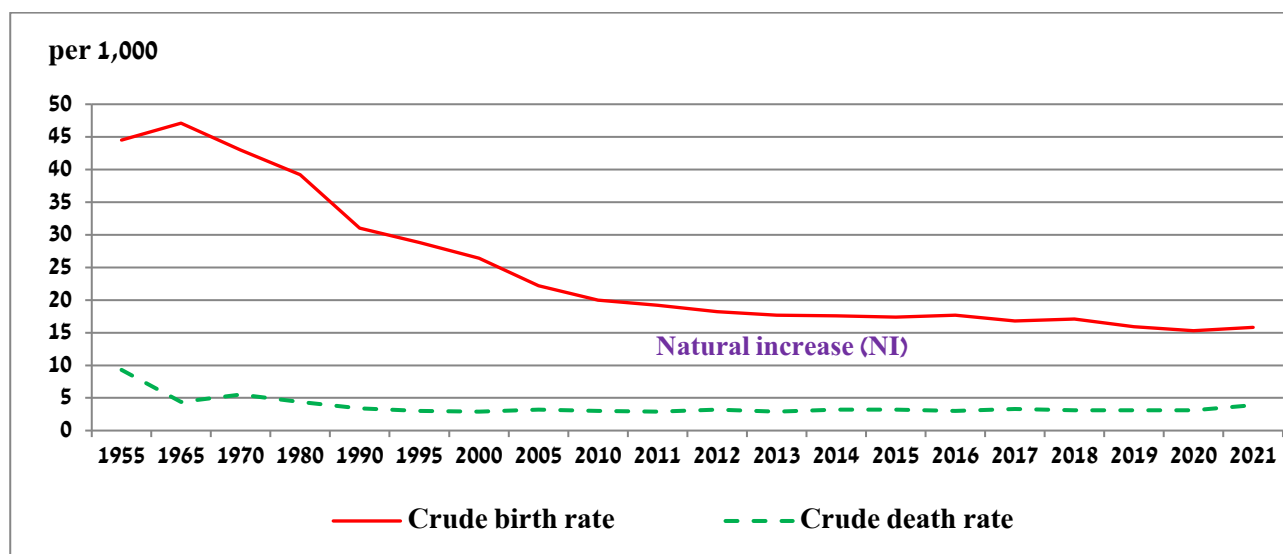
CBR=crude birth rate

CDR=crude death rate

NI=natural increase

Source: CBS, *Statistical Abstract of Israel*, various years (Jerusalem).

Figure 1: The NIR of the Israeli-Druze, 1955-2021



Indeed, following the peak of the Druze’s TFR in 1964 at the rate of 7.9 (CBS, 2016: 1), it gradually declined, similar to the process that also occurred among Muslims and Christians,⁷ amounting to 4.2 on average during the second half of the 1980s (see Table 2). The Druze fertility decline since the late 1960s is only one example of the worldwide trend of gradual and steady fertility decline in developing societies worldwide as a reaction to the improvement of the socioeconomic situation, first and foremost the sharp decline of infant and child mortality rate.⁸

But during the 1970s, and more so in the 1980s, a new demographic phenomenon emerged increasingly in developed societies worldwide – fertility rates dropping dramatically to be much below replacement-level permanently. A low fertility rate by itself, it should be noted, was not a new phenomenon -- it had already occurred in European and North American countries during the 1930s and the first half of the 1940s. This decline, however, was temporary only and fertility rates surged again to much above replacement-level rate during the two decades following the end of World War II. Overall, during the 1950s and the early 1960s, the TFR in all of the European countries, both West and East, was substantially above 2 (UN, Population Division, 2019). In contrast, the fertility decline of the 1970s and the 1980s occurred not only in a period of socioeconomic prosperity and political-security stability, but also despite a steady increase in the CDR (crude death rate) due to the aging population. By 1990, the CDR in almost all European countries was higher than in the 1960s and the 1970s (WBa).

In 1985, the TFR was 1.4 in Italy and West Germany and 1.7 in Spain, Singapore and South Korea. Since then, the trend of sub-replacement fertility rate spread to all of the developed economies worldwide (with the sole exception of Israel, WBb), despite the tremendous pro-natalist financial measures implemented by the vast majority of these countries. By 2019, the TFR of the EU countries averaged 1.53 (UNECE, 2021). The end result of sub-replacement fertility on the one hand and ongoing aging population on the other led to a steady decline in the NIR (natural increase rate). By 2020, the NIR was negative in Germany, Greece, Spain, Italy, Hungary, Rumania, Poland, the Czech Republic and many other countries (EUROSTAT, 2021a).

The disruption of the balance between the birth and death rates due to much below replacement-level fertility on a prolonged basis, led to the development of the Second Demographic Transition (SDT) theory. A major theme of the SDT theory is Abraham Maslow’s theory of changing needs.

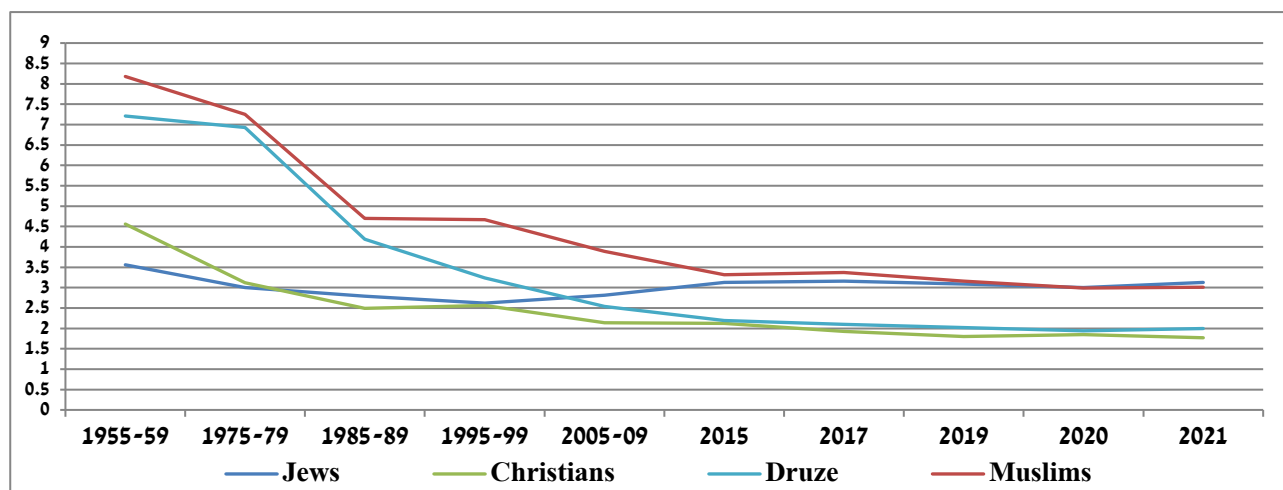
While the first four of Maslow's needs hierarchy, namely, physiological, safety, social belonging and esteem, are supported by marriage and childbearing, the final need -- self-fulfillment -- not only discourage marriage and childbearing, it actually works against them. Hence, the results were the sharp increase in women's educational level and consequently a surge in their labor force participation rates; an increased rate of non-married women in the main reproductive age group (20-39); an increased divorce rate; and lastly the decrease of remarriage of divorced and widowed women. These are the most prominent characteristics which led to the weakening of the family institution in industrialized societies (Van de Kaa, 2002; Lesthaeghe, 2010; Zaidi and Morgan, 2017). The end result is a sharp decline in the percentage of women of reproductive age living within a marriage system or any other form of stable relationship (Bystrov, 2012: 262).

Table 2: Age-Specific Fertility Rate (per 1,000 women) in Israel, According to Religion, 1955-2021

Year/period Age Group	1955-59	1975-79	1985-89	1995-99	2005-09	2015	2017	2019	2020	2021
Muslims										
15-19	119.6	91.8	53.9	58.8	43.1	25.5	23.9	19.7	17.7	16.6
20-24	357.8	334.0	236.9	254.8	221.3	175.3	169.3	155.6	141.9	132.5
25-29	392.0	368.1	260.5	265.7	231.3	211.2	216.5	205.6	192.9	197.3
30-34	359.5	320.5	204.8	199.8	166.0	150.6	158.5	149.3	146.9	152.1
35-39	237.9	225.8	130.4	116.9	91.0	79.3	82.7	79.0	77.6	82.7
40-44	107.8	90.0	47.4	35.8	24.4	20.1	21.1	21.7	18.8	20.0
45-49	41.4	20.6	5.8	3.0	1.8	1.3	1.5	1.5	1.5	1.1
Total	8.17	7.25	4.70	4.67	3.89	3.32	3.37	3.16	2.99	3.01
Christians										
15-19	58.7	30.3	18.0	15.3	5.8	2.8	2.8	1.6	2.0	1.7
20-24	227.9	189.5	154.4	140.6	87.3	57.6	45.6	32.9	36.4	27.4
25-29	255.9	188.1	168.1	177.1	162.2	152.7	133.7	130.9	129.3	121.4
30-34	221.1	130.9	104.4	115.8	110.7	137.2	125.3	115.8	128.4	127.4
35-39	112.9	69.0	45.3	50.2	49.5	59.4	61.6	63.3	58.2	62.5
40-44	29.8	15.8	7.6	11.4	10.4	13.7	14.5	15.0	13.3	13.3
45-49	5.5	1.3	0.6	1.4	1.6	1.3	2.5	0.9	2.2	1.1
Total	4.56	3.12	2.49	2.56	2.14	2.12	1.93	1.80	1.85	1.77
Druze										
15-19	97.1	63.7	38.0	24.3	13.0	5.5	3.5	3.1	2.8	2.7
20-24	372.1	314.7	224.1	174.8	136.8	90.0	77.0	61.3	56.5	48.9
25-29	346.6	371.0	236.3	199.3	165.4	159.2	157.8	146.2	141.9	151.9
30-34	327.6	311.0	186.4	146.3	118.9	119.5	117.6	117.5	113.8	124.5
35-39	208.3	230.4	114.6	80.0	59.5	50.4	54.4	61.9	62.6	55.8
40-44	73.1	85.0	35.1	22.3	12.9	11.6	9.6	12.3	10.1	15.0
45-49	16.8	10.6	3.3	1.3	1.0	--	--	1.5	--	--
Total	7.21	6.93	4.19	3.24	2.54	2.19	2.10	2.02	1.94	2.00
Jews										
15-19	53.9	31.2	14.0	8.1	6.0	4.3	4.2	3.5	3.5	3.5
20-24	216.7	175.0	132.3	89.1	82.6	88.9	89.0	84.8	82.4	82.9
25-29	206.4	187.5	191.5	176.4	163.5	175.0	174.4	169.7	165.5	169.2
30-34	136.7	129.0	137.6	152.2	176.4	197.3	200.8	195.4	190.7	203.2
35-39	74.2	62.8	68.5	78.8	103.7	121.5	122.5	123.9	118.7	126.8
40-44	19.8	12.6	13.5	18.0	26.2	34.8	35.8	35.9	34.3	35.8
45-49	4.5	1.0	0.9	1.5	2.8	4.0	4.3	4.6	4.1	3.8
Total	3.56	3.00	2.79	2.62	2.81	3.13	3.16	3.09	3.00	3.13

Source: CBS, *Statistical Abstract of Israel*, various years (Jerusalem).

Figure 2: Total Fertility Rate in Israel, according to Religion, 1955-2021



However, as will be examined below, among the Druze, the TFR shrank to sub-replacement rate in recent years without the existence of any of the paramount pre-condition factors for fertility decline to sub-replacement rate:

1. Low women's labor force participation rate. The overall Druze women labor force participation rate, although it has increased substantially during the recent decade, is still considerably lower compared to both Christian and Jewish women. By 2019, the labor force participation rates of Druze women was 40.2% as compared to 48.8% among Christian women and 63.6% among Jewish women (CBS, 2020a: 9; CBS, 2020d: 15).⁹

2. Low status of women. The status of Druze women, although improved, remains low compared to that of secular Jewish and Christian women. Thus, for example, only in the April 2019 election for the Knesset (the Israeli parliament), was a Druze female, Gadeer Kamal Mreeh (from the *Yesh Atid* party), elected for the first time. Until today, not one Druze woman has been the head of a Druze municipality; manager of large private sector company, or has held a high academic position, and so on.

3. Low age at first marriage of women. Naturally, the higher the age of women at first marriage, the lower the fertility rate. By 2019, the median age of first marriage of women in all of the Western European countries was above 30 (UNECE, 2020). The academic literature on the correlation between the delay of first marriage of women and the fertility decline is immense (Billari, 2008; Jones, 2007). Also in Israel one can find a high correlation between age at first marriage of women and the fertility rate in that the localities with the highest fertility rate had the lowest rate of unmarried women in the age group of 25-29, while those with the lowest fertility rate had the highest rate of unmarried women in this age group. Thus, for example, by the end of 2019, in Kyriat Tiv'on, the percentage of the unmarried women in the 25-29 age group was 84.0% while the TFR was 1.84. In Giv'atayim, the rates were 85.6% and 1.87, respectively. In the ultra-orthodox localities one can find the opposite trend. In Modi'in Illit and Beitar Illit (two cities which are populated exclusively by ultra-orthodox families),¹⁰ the percentage of the unmarried women in the 25-29 age group was 4.7% and 8.1%, while the TFR was 7.2 and 6.8, respectively (CBS, 2021d, Table 1; CBS, 2022b).

Among the Druze, however, this was not the case. Although since the early 2000s the median age of first marriage of the Druze women had increased -- from 20.0 in 1995 to 24.4 in 2020 -- it is still young as compared to that of Christian women (26.1) and similar to the Israeli-Jewish women (24.2),

despite the fact that the TFR of the latter was higher by 1.2 children than among the Druze (CBS, 2022f, Table 2.34).

4. Low rate of non-married women in the major reproductive age group. According to the SDT theory, a prominent factor for fertility decline to sub-replacement level is a high divorce rate. This, however, is not the case among the Druze. In 2021, 78% of the Druze families were living in a traditional family pattern which includes a couple with their children. Among Jews and Christians, this rate was much lower – 58% and 64%, respectively (CBS, 2022c, Table 5). The low divorce rate among the Druze is manifested first and foremost through the small percentage of women of “non-married” status in the major reproductive age group (20-39). By 2009, the percentage of non-married Jewish women in the 30-34 age group was 28.0% while among the Druze this rate was 15.9%. In the 35-39 age group, the gap was also high -- 16.6% among Druze as compared to 24.3% among Jews and 18.8% among Christians. A decade later, in 2019, despite the substantial decline of the TFR, the percentage of Druze women in the status of “non-married” in the major reproductive age group still remained low in comparison to both Christian and Jewish women: in the 25-29 age group, the percentage of Druze women in this category was 26.9% as compared to 46.1% among Christians and 49.7% among Jews. In the 30-34 age group, the percentage of “non-married” among the Druze was half that of the Jews and 34% less than among Christians (CBS, 2012a, Table 2.20; CBS, 2021a, Table 2.4; CBS, 2021f; CBS 2022g, Table 5).

5. Young age at first birth. In all of the developed societies worldwide, without exception, a major factor for the fertility decline is the considerable and steady increase in the mean age of women at the birth of first child, thus leaving a shorter period for having more children. By 2019, in Western European countries with TFR similar to that of Druze women, the average age of mother at the birth of first child was 28.8 in France, 29.5 in Sweden and 30.7 in Ireland (EUROSTAT, 2021b). Among the Christians, the average age of mother at the birth of first child was 29.0 – similar to that of the Western European countries with similar TFR. However, this is not the case among the Druze. By 2020, the average age of Druze women at birth of first child was 27.0. Thus, although the TFR of Druze and Christians was similar, the average age at first birth of the former was younger by two years. Among Jewish women, despite the fact that their TFR was much higher than that of the Druze, the average age at first birth was 28.5 (CBS, 2021f).

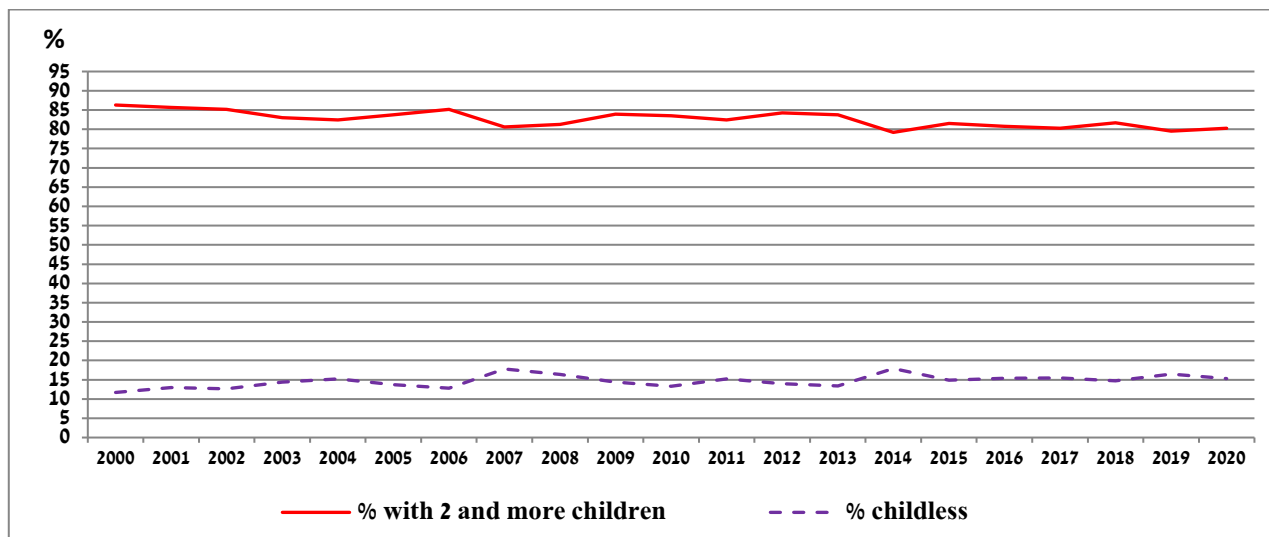
6. Low percentage of childlessness. Since the 1980s, in all of the developed societies worldwide, the phenomenon of childlessness is steadily expanding. In recent years, this phenomenon has gone from 13% to 22% in the Western European countries (Kreyenfeld, 2016; Miettinen et al., 2015) and to as high as 30% in the developed East Asia countries (Sobotka, 2021: 2). Naturally, the higher the percentage of childlessness, the lower the average TFR. Among the Druze women, however, despite the fact that the TFR declined from more than four children in the second half the 1980s to two in recent years, the percentage of childlessness and one-child phenomenon, has remained stable. By the end of 2020, the percentage of childless women born in 1960 was 13.7% and slightly increased to 14.9% for women born in 1970 and 15.3% for women born in 1975, while the phenomenon of mothers with one child remained quite rare at the rate of 2.3%, 3.6% and 4.4%, respectively (see Table 3).

Table 3: Druze Women in the Age of 45-65, According to their Number of Children (end of 2020)

Year of Birth	Number of women	% with 2 and more children	% with 1 child	% of childless
1975	992	80.3	4.4	15.3
1974	989	79.5	4.0	16.5
1973	983	81.7	3.6	14.7
1972	910	80.3	4.2	15.5
1971	895	80.8	3.7	15.4
1970	954	81.5	3.6	14.9
1969	821	79.2	2.9	17.9
1968	789	83.8	2.9	13.4
1967	693	84.3	1.7	14.0
1966	739	82.4	2.4	15.2
1965	699	83.5	3.1	13.3
1964	721	83.9	1.7	14.4
1963	689	81.3	2.3	16.4
1962	612	80.6	1.6	17.8
1961	608	85.2	1.8	12.8
1960	641	83.8	2.4	13.7
1959	540	82.4	2.4	15.2
1958	543	83.0	2.6	14.4
1957	446	85.2	2.2	12.6
1956	446	85.7	1.1	13.0
1955	400	86.3	2.0	11.7

Source: Author’s calculation, based on CBS, 2022e.

Figure 3: Druze Women in the Age of 45-65, According to their Number of Children (end of 2020)



7. Low urbanization rate. Since the cost of living in the major urban centers is much higher than in the countryside, the rapid urbanization process that took place in all developed societies worldwide since the industrial revolution was a prominent factor in lowering fertility rates. In the case of the Druze, however, there has not been any trend to change dwelling place from the traditional villages in favor of major cities. The overall percentage of Druze permanently living in major cities remains negligible even today (CBS, 2022c).

To the absence of the above-mentioned pre-condition factors for sub-replacement fertility rate, another unique pattern among the Druze should be added: The lack of response to the Israeli pro-natalist financial benefits despite the fact that the vast majority of the Druze localities belong to the lower middle class.¹¹ The lack of response of the Druze to the pro-natalist financial measures during the 1990s and the early 2000s was in contrast to the response of both the Muslims in the periphery (mainly in the Negev, the Arab/East Jerusalem and the remote villages in the Upper Galilee) and among ultra-orthodox Jews. By the year 2000, the TFR of the Bedouins of the Negev peaked at 9.77 (State of Israel, 2009: 2) – one of the highest rates measured ever in any given society worldwide. This rate was higher by two children as compared to the TFR of this sector a decade earlier (CBS, 2000, Table 3). The TFR of the ultra-orthodox Jews also skyrocketed from the late 1980s, and peaked at 7.3 during the late 1990s and the early 2000s (CBS, 2020b, Table 3). In 2001, in Beitar Illit and Modi'in Illit, the TFR was 8.9 and 9.0, respectively (Gurovich and Cohen-Kastro, 2004: 39). Only after the cut in the child allowances, which started in 2002 and greatly sharpened in 2003,¹² did the TFR of the Bedouins of the Negev, the Muslims in the peripheral localities and the ultra-orthodox Jews start to decline (Zatcovetsky, 2013: 8, Table 1; 13).

Not only did the fertility of the Druze decline to sub-replacement rate despite the nonexistence of the prominent pre-condition factors, but their fertility decline pattern was unique in two major ways:

1. The onset of the fertility decline in the peripheral communities. In all industrialized societies worldwide, the fertility rate started to decline first in the major urban centers and only later in the countryside and the peripheral areas. Among the Druze, the process of fertility decline started first in the remote villages of the Golan Heights and later spread to the other Druze localities (see Tables 4 and 5). Hence, as one can see in Table 4, in three out of the four Druze localities of the Golan Heights (Majdal Shams, Mas'ade and Buq'ata) the TFR since the 1980s was lower than the average of all the Israeli-Druze. In the fourth village, Ein Qiniyye, the high fluctuation in the TFR is caused by the small number of births due to its small population.¹³

2. The uniformity of the Israeli-Druze fertility patterns. As one can see in Table 4, the fertility pattern of the Druze since the mid-1980s¹⁴ has been similar across all localities with only minor differences between them. This similarity, it should be noted, was also in the localities in which the Druze cohabit with Muslims and Christians. Thus, for example, the TFR of the Druze in Shefar'am¹⁵ and Abu Sinan¹⁶ was similar to that of the localities in which the Druze are the majority of the population and lower by about 0.5 child than the average of their locality.¹⁷ Among both Jews and Muslims, in contrast to the Druze and the Christians, the differences in the fertility patterns between localities was, and still is, immense, amounting to hundreds of percents. However, while the uniformity of the fertility pattern among Christians is understandable as almost all of them live very close to the major employment areas, this is not the case among the Druze, particularly regarding those living in the Golan Heights' localities.

Table 4: Total Fertility Rate in Localities with Druze, 1984-2020

Year Locality	1984	1988	1990	1993	1995	1998	2000	2002	2005	2010	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Druze Localities with at least 95% Druze																
Daliat al-Karmel	3.64	3.12	3.07	2.65	2.61	2.40	2.22	2.26	2.09	1.98	2.08	2.07	2.02	1.98	2.07	1.81
Yarka	4.71	3.92	4.16	4.38	4.03	3.69	3.95	3.38	3.01	2.65	2.06	2.20	1.92	2.07	1.85	1.79
Beit Jann	4.93	4.38	5.02	3.87	3.89	3.30	3.28	2.99	2.78	2.47	2.15	2.09	2.17	1.85	1.69	2.12
Kisra-Sumei	7.78	6.59	4.55	4.24	3.48	3.01	3.11	2.98	3.05	2.93	2.46	2.69	2.65	2.44	2.45	2.59
Yanuh-Jat	4.41	4.69	4.39	4.20	3.53	3.24	3.38	3.23	3.17	2.71	1.94	2.39	2.30	2.44	1.96	1.95
Julis	4.21	5.03	4.12	3.54	3.46	2.81	3.16	2.95	2.40	2.50	2.21	1.92	1.89	1.83	1.97	1.85
Hurfeish	4.63	5.40	4.31	4.34	3.44	3.28	3.40	3.14	2.39	2.37	2.88	2.33	2.05	2.47	2.07	2.17
Sajur	7.06	5.69	6.31	5.16	4.18	3.27	3.64	2.76	2.74	2.58	1.68	1.86	1.74	2.02	2.15	2.03
Ein al-Asad*	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	2.68	3.02	1.83	1.61	2.06	1.87	1.51	1.48
Druze localities in the Golan Heights																
Majdal Shams	3.57	2.44	3.51	3.07	2.84	2.59	2.62	2.22	2.73	2.48	2.25	2.01	2.34	2.14	2.16	1.72
Mas'ade	4.89	3.90	2.83	2.46	2.46	2.63	2.77	2.02	2.57	2.73	3.16	2.62	2.18	2.84	2.64	1.90
Buq'ata	3.72	3.92	3.73	2.74	2.60	2.96	2.72	2.19	2.86	2.70	2.21	2.21	1.60	1.81	2.21	1.78
Ein Qiniyye	4.12	4.09	2.64	2.50	3.63	2.57	2.57	2.61	2.03	2.48	2.65	2.42	2.23	2.53	2.61	2.72
Druze Localities with 51%-94% Druze																
Mughar	7.69	5.95	6.35	5.15	4.72	4.13	3.63	3.37	2.67	2.44	2.02	2.26	2.09	2.29	1.92	1.71
Isfiya**	3.69	2.88	2.75	2.78	2.60	2.23	2.49	2.33	--	2.43	1.98	2.11	1.70	2.44	1.96	1.82
Peki'in (Buqei'a)	4.42	4.15	3.56	4.07	3.86	2.97	3.18	2.85	2.13	2.46	2.17	2.80	2.48	1.93	1.71	1.61
Localities with Druze minority																
Shefar'am	2.84	2.76	3.09	3.40	3.58	3.02	2.83	3.02	2.96	2.10	1.95	2.01	1.94	1.85	1.48	1.81
Abu Sinan	4.89	5.00	4.73	4.06	3.48	3.66	3.50	2.68	2.63	2.20	2.19	2.14	2.51	2.28	1.97	1.75
Rame	2.98	2.94	3.18	3.83	4.19	2.63	2.94	2.63	1.69	2.06	2.26	1.74	2.10	1.98	1.94	2.08
Total TFR	4.65	4.08	4.05	3.75	3.50	3.18	3.00	2.77	2.59	2.47	2.19	2.21	2.10	2.16	2.02	1.94

* Due to the very small number of cases, the data was not available until 2005.

** During the 2003-2009 period Isfiya and Daliat al-Karmel were combined to one city, named 'Eir HaCarmel (*Madinat al-Karmel*). Thus, the data on the Druze women of Isfiya and their births were combined with those of Daliat al-Karmel.

Source: Author's calculation based on CBS, 2022d.

Table 5: Druze Women in the Ages 45-65 According to their Number of Children and Locality (end of 2020)

Number of Children Locality	Number of women in the 45-65 age group	% with 2 and more children	% with 1 child	% of childless
Daliat al-Karmel	2,058	82.0	4.1	13.9
Yarka	1,495	86.2	2.1	11.7
Beit Jann	1,303	80.4	2.4	17.2
Kisra-Sumei	656	81.4	2.7	15.9
Yanuh-Jat	646	81.3	3.1	15.6
Julis	736	81.4	2.0	16.6
Hurfeish	592	86.3	2.2	11.5
Sajur	395	87.6	1.8	10.6
Buq'ata	726	79.3	2.0	18.7
Mughar	1,327	86.5	2.0	11.5
Isfiya	1,091	82.0	3.8	14.2
Peki'in (Buqei'a)	488	86.3	3.1	10.6
Shefar'am	697	80.2	2.7	17.1
Abu Sinan	380	86.1	1.8	12.1
Rame	283	82.0	3.2	14.8
Mas'ade	390	74.9	2.3	22.8
Majdal Shams	1,267	77.6	3.9	18.5
Ein Qiniyye	225	73.3	4.0	22.7
Ein al-Asad	97	77.5	4.1	18.4
Total	14,853	82.2	2.9	14.9

Source: Author's calculation, based on CBS, 2022e.

The Factors for the Unique Fertility Decline Pattern of the Druze

As the fertility decline to sub-replacement rate of the Druze is not in line with the SDT theory, what can explain it? The common answers -- mixing with non-orthodox Jews in the security forces and the improvement of their socioeconomic conditions -- appear to be unsatisfactory, mainly with regards to the Golan Heights' Druze who neither serve in the Israeli army nor mix with the non-religious Jews in the workplaces. It appears that another six factors should be added:

1. The absence of a pro-natalist attitude among the Druze Clerics. While the basic traditional attitude of both the Jewish and Muslim clerics is pro-natalist, this is not the case among the Druze clerics. Thus far, I did not find even a single pro-natalist declaration of any prominent Israeli-Druze cleric. The absence of the pro-natalist approach among the Druze clerics is based on the belief of reincarnation; thus, the conviction that the number of the Druze in the world is permanent.

2. The absence of a pro-natalism attitude of the Druze political leaders. It should be taken into consideration that the pro-natalist approach among both the Muslims and the Jews first in Palestine and later in Israel rested not only on the basic pro-natalist approach of the two religions, but more so on the national struggle between the Palestinian national movement on the one hand and the Zionist movement on the other. Thus, each side tried to increase its population through both immigration to Palestine and a higher fertility rate (Yuval-Davis, 1989). Since the Druze in Palestine, as in Lebanon and Syria, do not have any national ambitions, they did not take part in the Zionist-Palestinian "demographic race." In light of the absence of national ambitions, the natalist issue was, and still is, out of the political discourse of the Israeli-Druze political leaders.

3. The extremely low fertility among women aged 40 and above. A prominent factor for the rapid fertility decline among the Druze is the extremely low fertility of women above the age of 40 since the early 2000s. The age-specific fertility rate (ASFR) of the Druze women in the 40-44 age group steadily declined from 85 (per 1,000 women) during the second half of the 1970s to little more than 20 during the second half of the 1990s and to about 10 in recent years -- the lowest rate among all of the Israeli religious sects (see Table 2). This decline, it should be emphasized, has occurred almost simultaneously throughout all the Druze localities, including those of the Golan Heights. By 2020, the ASFR of the 40-44 age group in Majdal Shams and Mas'ade -- the two largest Druze villages in the Golan Heights -- was 9.0 and 11.6, respectively, similar to that of the other Druze localities (see Table 6).

In the other sectors of Israeli society, without exception, despite the fact that the overall TFR declined, the ASFR in the age group of 40 and above markedly increased during the past decade. In the case of secular Jewish women, the ASFR in the 40-44 age group averaged 7.3 during the 1979-1981 period, increased to 13.1 in 2000-2002 and reached 31.4 on average in 2017-2019. The increase in the fertility rate in the age group of 40 and above in this sector is mainly due to the sharp rise of births among single-mothers and the spread of the phenomenon of a third and even fourth child among the upper middle class secular families. Among Jewish traditional women, the increase was even sharper: From 17.5 in 1979-1981 years to 33.3 in 2017-2019 years. The highest rise was among ultra-orthodox women: from 39.0 in 1979-1981 years to 105.4 in 2000-2002 years and has remained at that level since then (CBS 2020b, Tables 3, 5, 7).

This phenomenon of an increase in the ASFR in the age group of above 40, it should be noted, is not unique to Israel and during the past generation prevails in all of the industrialized societies worldwide despite the overall TFR decline. Thus, for example, in the case of Germany, the ASFR in

the 40-44 age group increased from 3.1 in 1985-1990 years to 13.2 in the 2015-2020 years. In UK the increase was from 4.8 to 14.1 during the corresponding years (UN, Population Division, 2019).

Table 6: Age-Specific Fertility Rate (per 1,000 women) in some Druze Localities in Israel, 1984-2020

1984								
Age group Locality	15-19	20-24	25-29	30-34	35-39	40-44	45-49	TFR
Daliat al-Karmel	47.8	218.0	166.7	174.3	107.8	13.6	0.0	3.64
Yarka	43.0	250.7	351.9	175.3	106.1	15.4	0.0	4.71
Julis	30.5	245.6	198.5	226.2	83.3	58.8	0.0	4.21
Majdal Shams	72.6	217.1	190.5	127.3	48.6	57.5	0.0	3.57
Mas'ade	107.8	252.7	184.6	265.3	106.4	60.4	0.0	4.89
Sajur	9.7	500.0	403.5	282.6	142.9	74.1	0.0	7.06
Mughar	5.7	45.9	358.5	352.6	415.3	201.9	157.9	7.69
Isfiya	46.8	220.8	213.2	132.9	104.5	9.7	0.0	3.69
1990								
Daliat al-Karmel	20.9	189.2	171.1	147.5	86.3	0.0	0.0	3.07
Yarka	28.0	233.3	268.9	184.8	95.5	21.9	0.0	4.16
Julis	13.6	237.1	237.8	195.5	139.8	0.0	0.0	4.12
Majdal Shams	36.1	150.2	169.8	227.3	100.0	19.4	0.0	3.51
Mas'ade	16.4	150.4	150.0	58.8	85.1	21.7	0.0	2.41
Sajur	39.2	241.1	347.8	305.1	240.0	88.2	0.0	6.31
Mughar	0.0	30.1	279.7	331.9	313.3	245.9	68.6	6.35
Isfiya	33.5	191.2	173.0	154.2	95.0	14.2	0.0	3.31
2000								
Daliat al-Karmel	17.9	121.3	147.3	109.1	36.5	12.5	0.0	2.22
Yarka	69.6	253.4	183.2	167.9	84.5	26.6	5.1	3.95
Julis	17.8	150.2	239.0	136.6	64.5	23.3	0.0	3.16
Majdal Shams	20.7	148.2	150.7	113.1	76.6	15.2	0.0	2.62
Mas'ade	35.2	166.7	113.8	127.3	97.6	14.1	0.0	2.77
Sajur	5.5	162.9	234.9	156.5	101.3	67.8	0.0	3.64
Mughar	0.0	18.3	197.5	237.4	160.4	100.8	12.3	3.63
Isfiya	5.5	154.8	158.7	164.7	91.3	5.0	0.0	2.90
2010								
Daliat al-Karmel	1.4	78.5	163.0	95.2	53.4	3.7	0.0	1.98
Yarka	18.8	179.5	184.6	93.9	46.8	6.4	0.0	2.65
Julis	0.0	96.6	256.3	96.0	33.9	16.8	0.0	2.50
Majdal Shams	4.5	99.2	150.3	153.1	60.4	28.2	0.0	2.48
Mas'ade	9.2	165.4	185.5	83.3	92.1	10.4	0.0	2.73
Sajur	22.2	96.6	163.6	156.4	68.5	9.0	0.0	2.58
Mughar	0.0	6.6	122.1	156.1	127.2	64.0	11.8	2.44
Isfiya	14.0	105.7	146.0	173.4	31.6	14.8	0.0	2.43
2015								
Daliat al-Karmel	2.9	57.5	153.3	147.7	47.3	5.2	0.0	2.08
Yarka	9.4	115.5	142.4	92.9	48.0	3.9	0.0	2.06
Julis	3.3	73.6	167.9	123.3	57.8	4.7	10.6	2.21
Majdal Shams	6.0	73.6	166.2	126.1	58.4	19.3	0.0	2.25
Mas'ade	12.3	171.4	225.8	125.0	83.3	13.6	0.0	3.16
Sajur	4.7	67.2	141.0	80.5	36.1	7.1	0.0	1.68
Mughar	0.0	0.0	70.1	170.0	116.3	42.1	5.6	2.02
Isfiya	0.0	43.0	152.9	96.7	82.3	20.2	0.0	1.98
2020								
Daliat al-Karmel	0.0	49.8	121.5	108.7	70.4	10.7	0.0	1.81
Yarka	4.7	52.4	145.0	95.0	45.6	12.7	2.0	1.79
Julis	3.5	49.8	129.6	127.3	45.9	8.8	4.8	1.85
Majdal Shams	3.7	27.4	97.9	135.1	71.0	9.0	0.0	1.72
Mas'ade	0.0	47.3	174.8	88.0	58.8	11.6	0.0	1.90
Sajur	0.0	58.0	183.0	106.3	46.5	11.8	0.0	2.03
Mughar	0.0	0.0	43.4	136.8	104.8	49.4	7.6	1.71
Isfiya	0.0	36.6	118.5	122.8	71.9	12.1	2.8	1.82

Source: Author's calculation based on CBS, 2022d.

4. The absence of “demographic margins”. Among the Druze, similar to the situation among the Christians, there are no “demographic margins” in the form of high fertility variance between the various localities (see Tables 4, 5 and 6). This characteristic is in total contrast to the situation among both Jews and Muslims with the extremely high fertility rates of the ultra-orthodox and the national religious¹⁸, among the former, and the Bedouins of the Negev and those living in East/Arab Jerusalem among the latter, which leads to the TFR at a level of about 3. Other than the Bedouins of the Negev and those living in East/Arab Jerusalem, the TFR in the vast majority of the Muslim localities is considerably less than 3. Thus, for example, in 2020, this rate was 2.54 in Umm Al-Fahm – the second largest Muslim city in Israel following Rahat; 2.37 in Tayibe; 2.25 in Judeide-Maker; 2.21 in Iksal and Tur’an; and 1.79 only in Deir Hanna (CBS, 2022a).

5. The sharp improvement of women’s educational level. During the first two decades of the 21st century, a rapid revolution occurred in Druze female education. By the 2017/18 school year, the share of those with a high school diploma (*bagrut*) was as high as 82.2% (Yanko, 2019), as compared to 42% in 1999/2000 (Fuchs, 2017: 264, Figure 1). Consequently, the share of young Druze women who pursued higher education jumped. By the academic year of 2020/21, the number Druze women studying for a bachelor’s degree was 2,679 as compared to 1,468 in the 2009/10 academic year, an increase of more than 80% within one decade (Vining, 2021: 1, Figure 1), while the targeted population, namely Druze women in the age of 20-29 increased by 20.2% only (CBS, 2021a, Table 2.5). At the master’s degree level, the increase was even higher: from 175 to 793 during the corresponding period -- an increase of more than four-fold (Vining, 2021: 2, Figure 2).

The rapid increase in the number of the Druze women who graduated higher education was translated into a steep increase in their labor force participation rate. From research conducted by the Research and Information Center of the Knesset (the Israeli Parliament), it appears that by 2015, the labor force participation rate of the Druze women with a bachelor’s degree was as high as 84.8%, the vast majority of whom were employed full-time (Mizrahi-Simon and Eliyahu, 2016: 6). Overall, by 2019, the last year prior to the onset of the Coronavirus pandemic, among the 21,400 Druze women which were in the labor force, 66.5% were employed full-time – slightly lower than among Christians (70.9%) and higher than among both the Jewish (52.6%) and Muslim (59.2%) women (CBS, 2021b, Table 1.6). Thus, although the overall labor force participation rate of Druze women (aged 20-64) is still low in comparison to both their Jewish and Christian counterparts, it is considerably high among those in the main reproductive age group.

In contrast to Jewish women, among Druze women, the sharp increase of the labor force participation rate was translated into a sharp decline of the fertility rate in the 20-24 age group -- from 224.1 in 1985-89 to 48.9 in 2021 (see Table 2). This trend of rapid decline of the ASFR in the 20-24 age group, it should be noted, occurred simultaneously in all of the Druze localities. In the case of women from Majdal Shams and Mas’ade the decline was from 217.1 and 252.7 in 1984 to 27.4 and 47.3, respectively, in 2020 – a lower rate than in Daliat al-Karmel and Isfiya (see Table 6). The sharp fertility decline in the 20-29 age group is the major factor of the overall sharp fertility decline of the Druze during the past generation. Among Jewish women, in contrast, the decline in the ASFR in the 20-29 age group was compensated by an increase in the ASFR of the 30-34 age group: from 152.2 on average during the 1995-99 years to 203.2 in 2021 (see Table 2).

6. The increasing exposure of young Druze women to the lifestyle of the secular Jewish women. The sharp rise in the labor force participation rate of young, educated Druze women on the one hand, and the limited employment opportunities for educated women in the Druze localities

themselves (limited mainly to education, health, social work and small retail trade) on the other, has led, naturally, to a steady increase in the number of Druze women employed outside their place of residence. These young Druze women are employed together with non-religious Jewish and Christian women and are, naturally, exposed to their Western lifestyle. This exposure leads to the adoption of at least some of their socio-cultural behaviors, the most prominent in the area of style of dress, but probably in other areas, including in the desired number of children. Cultural adaptation in workplaces is a worldwide phenomenon that has received wide coverage in the academic literature (John and Roberts, 2017).

5. What Lies Ahead?

The entrance of many young, educated Druze women into the workforce during the past two decades has created a new young Druze middle class with two salaries and two children, namely a classically Western young middle class. This new middle class, however, is unique: First, they do not move to the major cities but continue to live in their traditional localities. Second, although the median age at first marriage of the Druze women is steadily rising, it is still very young as compared to those which prevail in developed economies. Third, in contrast to the modern Western young middle class, the divorce rate of the young Druze middle class remains low. This is important not only for future fertility rate, but also for the economic situation, as divorce in Israel, in most cases, leads to a drop of two to even four deciles in former couples. Fourth, the widespread Western phenomena during the past generation – childlessness – remains low percentage-wise among the Druze.

Hence, it could be summarized that many young Israeli-Druze adopted Western economic norms, but not many of the cultural norms, mainly childlessness, older age at marriage and birth of the first child and high rate of divorce. In light of the current rapid spread of both increase in the percentage of Druze women acquiring higher education and full-time employment in a wide variety of free professions, this new middle class will continue to expand rapidly in the foreseeable future.

If indeed this will be the case, can we expect that the Druze fertility rate to continue to decline to the Western European rate of about 1.5-1.6? The CBS projection (medium variant) from early 2019 was that the TFR of the Druze will remain at the level of 2.4 during the first half of the 2030s (CBS, 2019, Table 3). In light of the current socioeconomic trends of young Druze women, this projection is probably mistaken as it is not reasonable to suppose that the TFR of the Druze will substantially increase in the foreseeable future. My assumption is that the fertility rate of the Druze will remain stable around the replacement-level, based on four main factors: high rates of marriage; relatively low age of women at the time of the birth of their first child; a low divorce rate; and relatively low percentage of childlessness.

Additionally, if the Druze succeed in keeping their TFR around replacement-level rate for a considerable period, they will be one of a few societies worldwide that succeeds to do so. In most countries worldwide that are successfully keeping the TFR around the replacement-level rate or slightly below it for a considerable period, it is a result either of substantial internal gaps, mainly between the major cities and the countryside and remote poor areas, as is the case in Tunisia (Eltigani, 2009: 217, Table 1b) and Turkey (Hacettepe University, 2019: 60, Table 5.1), or countries that are constantly absorbing a large number of immigrants, mainly from the Middle Eastern and sub-Saharan African countries with much higher fertility rate than the national average, such as France and Sweden (Stonawski, Potančoková & Skirbekk, 2016: 563).

Despite the rapid decline of the Druze fertility rates, however, the Israeli-Druze population will continue to increase quite rapidly in the coming generation due to the current wide-based age pyramid. By 2021, only 4.3% of the Druze population were in the age group of 70 and above, as compared to 7.8% among the Christian-Arabs and 9.9% among the Jews (CBS, 2022f, Table 2.3). Thus, by 2021, the CDR of the Druze was 3.9 as compared to 5.6 among the Christians and 6.0 among the Jews (CBS, 2022f, Table 2.29). Hence, by mid-century, the Druze population in Israel will reach approximately 190,000 as compared to 14,500 a hundred years ago, at the time of the establishment of the state of Israel.

Notes

¹ Henceforth the term “Druze” will relate to the Israeli-Druze.

² Henceforth the term “Christians” will relate to Israeli-Arab-Christians.

³ The largest Druze community worldwide is located in Syria. Since the Syrian authorities stopped publishing any demographic data according to religion since the Ba’th party took power in 1963, only unofficial estimates are available, based on the 1960 census. Overall, it seems that the Druze in Syria prior to the onset of the civil war in 2011 numbered approximately 600,000 -- slightly above 3% of the total Syrian population (Winckler 2017: 51-52). The second largest Druze community worldwide is located in Lebanon where its first and thus far only demographic census was implemented in 1932. According to unofficial estimates, the number of Druze in Lebanon is 234,000, represented 5.2% of the total Lebanese population prior to the onset of the Syrian civil war (Minority Rights Group-Druze).

⁴ According to unofficial estimates, the Druze population in Jordan numbered about 20,000 in the early 2000s (US, Department of State, 2005). Outside the Middle East, there are Druze communities in North and South America, Australia and West Africa, representing some 8% of the Druze’s total population worldwide (Miles, 2019: 22).

⁵ The Director of the Demography Sector in the CBS.

⁶ The replacement-level fertility rate is a TFR of 2.1 children per women which represents the number of children needed (in developed societies) to reproduce a new generation without migration.

⁷ Among the 185,000 Israeli-Christians at the end of 2022, 75.8% were Arabs (CBS, 2022g: 1).

⁸ The infant mortality rate among the Druze declined from 54.3 per 1,000 live births on average during the 1955-1959 period to 16.0 on average during the 1985-1989 period (CBS, 2022f, Table 2.29).

⁹ I chose to use the 2019 data and not those of 2020 due to the massive distortions of labor and employment data following the onset of the Coronavirus pandemic.

¹⁰ By the beginning of 2022, the population of Beitar Illit numbered 63,000 while that of Modi’in Illit numbered 81,000 (CBS, 2022b).

¹¹ All of the Druze localities are situated in the third and the fourth deciles. Not a single Druze locality ranks higher than the fourth decile (CBS, 2020c).

¹² On the decline of child allowances since 2002 and the abolishment of “the law of assistance for families which have been blessed” which was legislated in November 2000, see: National Insurance Institute, 2009: 8-9.

¹³ By the end of 2020, Ein Qiniyye’s population totalled 2,139 while the number of women in the reproductive age group (15-49) amounted to only 580 (CBS, 2022d).

¹⁴ The data prior to 1984 is not available.

¹⁵ In 2020, the Druze constituted 14% of Shefar’am’s total population.

¹⁶ In 2020, the Druze constituted 30% of Abu Sinan’s total population.

¹⁷ The data for the localities’ TFR are drawn from CBS, 2022a. For the data on the Druze see Table 4.

¹⁸ Mainly those living in the settlements in the West Bank.

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