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**NEW SURVEY OF JEWS IN SOUTH AFRICA:
CLEAR SIGNS OF VITALITY AND RESILIENCE DESPITE DEMOGRAPHIC DECLINE**

A major new research study published this week estimates that South Africa's Jewish population now stands at 52,300, with four in five living in either Johannesburg or Cape Town.

The report, entitled *The Jews of South Africa in 2019* and published by the Isaac and Jessie Kaplan Centre for Jewish Studies at the University of Cape Town and the Institute for Jewish Policy Research (JPR) in the UK, is based on the 2019 Jewish Community Survey of South Africa, the largest and most extensive study of its kind ever undertaken. The fieldwork for the survey generated a final sample of 4,193 individuals (aged 18 and over) living in 2,402 unique households. Accounting for everyone living within those households, the study was able to draw on data on 5,287 individuals.

The study finds that the Jewish population of the country has declined over the past twenty years, mainly as a result of migration, but also due to the natural ageing of the population. The median age is 45 years, similar to the median age of Australia's Jewish population (44 years), but with significant variation between Cape Town, Johannesburg, and Durban. Jews have emigrated from South Africa in significant numbers since the 1960s; the study speculates that the South African Jewish diaspora may now be larger than the Jewish population living in South Africa.

Despite the numerical decline, the report finds that the South African Jewish community is remarkably vibrant and resilient. Overall, Jewish identity in South Africa appears to be stronger, and more religious, than in either Australia or the UK. The community remains very close-knit: over 70% of South African Jews say that more than half or all of their close friends are Jewish, compared to 68% in Australia and 56% in the UK, and the intermarriage rate for the period 2010-14 was 17%, compared to 21% in Australia, 26% in the UK and 58% in the US.

The study finds significant differences between the Jewish communities of Johannesburg and Cape Town, with 48% in Johannesburg self-identifying as either Orthodox or strictly Orthodox, compared with 22% in Cape Town. In Cape Town 40% self-describe as Progressive or Secular, compared with 18% in Johannesburg. These differences manifest in a variety of other indicators. 71% in Johannesburg, for example, completely agree with the statement 'I believe in God,' compared to 51% in Cape Town.

74% of Jews across South Africa say they have a very or quite strong sense of belonging to the country, and 61% are satisfied with their life there. Around 90% consider unemployment, government corruption and crime levels to be major problems in the country; 57% point to anti-Israel sentiment and 31% to antisemitism.

The report also contains new data on synagogue membership and Jewish school enrolment. Close to 13,000 households (57% of the total) are found to belong to a synagogue, and over 6,000 school-aged Jewish children attend Jewish schools (75% of the total).

Commenting on the findings, Dr Jonathan Boyd, Executive Director of the Institute for Jewish Policy Research says:

“The purpose of the study has always been to provide Jewish community leaders with a new set of empirical data to help them plan for the future. Whilst the report clearly documents and explains declining population numbers, it also contains a lot of positive news, and by covering such a wide range of issues, it offers valuable insights to organisations operating across the community – including those involved in social care, health and welfare, education, religious life and combating antisemitism. It is almost certainly the most comprehensive portrait of the South African Jewish population ever produced.”

Associate Professor Adam Mendelsohn, Director of the Kaplan Centre for Jewish Studies at the University of Cape Town comments:

“This report points to a striking paradox. Over the last two decades, the Jewish community has declined in size but appears to have remade and renewed itself in a variety of ways. Uncovering a wealth of information on a variety of themes, the report reveals a dynamic community very much at home in and engaged with South African society. This report, however, is an overview rather than the last word on the Jewish Community Survey of South Africa. The data we have is immensely rich and will allow for targeted analysis that will fill out our picture of Jewish life in South Africa even further.”

NOTES

Report publishers

The Institute for Jewish Policy Research (JPR) is a London-based independent research organisation, consultancy and think-tank. It aims to advance the prospects of Jewish communities in the United Kingdom and around the world by conducting research and informing policy development in dialogue with those best placed to positively influence Jewish life.

The Isaac and Jessie Kaplan Centre for Jewish Studies and Research was established in 1980 at the University of Cape Town by the Kaplan Kushlick Foundation and is named in honour of the parents of Mendel and Robert Kaplan. An autonomous centre, with its own governing body, the centre is the only one of its kind in South Africa. The centre stimulates and promotes the field of Jewish Studies, with a special research focus on Jewish life in South Africa. This is the fourth national study of the Jews of South Africa undertaken by the Kaplan Centre.

Report author

Dr David Graham is Senior Research Fellow at the Institute for Jewish Policy Research (JPR) in London and Honorary Associate at the Department of Hebrew, Biblical and Jewish Studies, University of Sydney. A geographer by training and expert in the study of Jews in Britain, Europe and Australia, his skills encompass statistical analysis, survey design, census analysis and GIS. Dr Graham has been at the forefront of multiple surveys of Jewish communities around the world and was most recently instrumental in the development and success of the Gen17 Jewish community study of Australia. He publishes widely for academic, professional and general interest audiences and holds a DPhil from the University of Oxford.

Access the report online

The full report will be made available on the websites of the publishers from 24 April 2020:

Kaplan Centre: www.kaplancentre.uct.ac.za

JPR: www.jpr.org.uk

For questions about the report, or to arrange an interview with one of the research team, please contact:

Kaplan Centre for Jewish Studies

Dr. Kerri Serman

Email: kerri.serman@uct.ac.za

Phone:

Institute for Jewish Policy Research

Richard Goldstein

Email: rgoldstein@jpr.org.uk

Phone: +44 (0)207 424 9265

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