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# Insights document

Zionist enterprise department global mini-session, July 29, 2025

## Introduction

The Department of Zionist Enterprise at the World Zionist Organization, in partnership with Atchalta, continues its effort to explore the evolving opportunities and challenges facing Jewish communities worldwide following October 7. Building on the gatherings in New York and Jerusalem, this session, held in July 2025, brought together senior representatives from the Jewish communities of South Africa, Belgium, and Italy.

Building on the insights from previous gatherings, the discussion reaffirmed the importance of cultivating a vibrant and meaningful Jewish cultural identity as a central pillar for strengthening Jewish resilience in the face of current challenges. Looking ahead, additional gatherings and a dedicated working group will focus on developing new language and frameworks to address the conceptual gaps identified in all sessions. This ongoing process aims to both strengthen Jewish identity and the connection to Israel, and respond to the psychological and emotional needs of Jewish communities and leaders.

## Trends experienced by participants

### Shift in Aliyah patterns

Some participants from the South African community, echoing a similar trend observed in Australia, noted a shift in Aliyah patterns, with a surge of young, single individuals making the move. These individuals are motivated by a desire to build their future in Israel and contribute their talents and energy to Israeli society, while simultaneously experiencing feelings of alienation and facing growing antisemitism in their home countries.

For Israel, this shift presents an opportunity to welcome a new wave of motivated and skilled people into the public sphere. **However, for the local communities of origin, often aging and/or small communities, this trend also poses challenges, as younger, more engaged leaders are leaving.**

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## **New challenges of the prolonged war**

The current meeting took place four months after the New York session and nine months after the one in Israel. In the intervening time, public discourse has shifted once again both against Israel and against the war, introducing new critics and new levels of criticism. This shift presents fresh challenges for Jews, both internally within their communities and externally in their broader environments.

While participants echoed observations from previous meetings about the post–October 7 awakening of Jewish identity, both personally and within their communities, and the renewed sense of connection to Israel, the passage of time has shifted the dynamic. In some communities, these opportunities have, in certain respects, evolved into new challenges.

Israel has returned to being a divisive issue in some communities, where debates over its policies in Gaza have caused deep rifts. We are reminded that before October 7, certain communities were hesitant to engage with Israel for fear of exacerbating internal divisions. In the immediate aftermath of October 7, Israel briefly became a unifying pillar, but that sense of unity has since eroded.

Another emerging challenge is the growing criticism of Israel from local governments and political parties. This creates a new sense of identity-based and political isolation, leaving many Jews feeling unwelcome in what was once their political home. It generates a profound tension, placing their Jewish identity in collision with their local civic and national identity.

Another challenge is deeply personal, unfolding within each individual. While their Jewish and Zionist identity remains solid, the images emerging from Gaza prompt many to question their alignment with human rights and their very understanding of what it means to be human. As one participant expressed: *“Our community is torn between the values of what it means to be human and, at the same time, the values of what it means to be Jewish, and by Jewish, I also mean Zionist.”*

This reflects a profound identity challenge: how to remain a proud Jewish Zionist while being constructively critical of Israel, maintaining community integrity, and sustaining meaningful internal conversations about Israel, while simultaneously feeling estranged from certain political affiliations due to their over-criticism of Israel.

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### **“Jewish Fatigue”**

The prolonged war combined with rising antisemitism, heightened security concerns, and a shrinking space to openly celebrate Jewish identity, including its Zionist dimension, has placed significant strain on communities. When asked to describe their current state of Jewish identity during the opening circle, some participants chose words like “confused” or “conflicted,” given that these are among the more engaged members of their communities and often hold leadership positions, **highlighting how even core leaders are struggling with the emotional and moral complexity of this moment.**

These new challenges which we have named “**Jewish fatigue**” layered atop the “old challenges” and exacerbated by deepening internal divisions over Israel, are creating new obstacles to communal resilience and to sustaining a confident, vibrant Jewish life. As one participant shared: *“I went to a conference and said, ‘I’m a Zionist.’ And to be honest, I was scared, because today, saying you’re a Zionist puts a target on your back.”*

**We observed that this sentiment was far more pronounced in the current meeting than in the New York and Jerusalem gatherings.** It reflects both the impact of the prolonged war and the heightened vulnerability of smaller Jewish communities. Some of these communities, with their limited size and reduced influence, are perhaps more exposed and less equipped to withstand the pressures they face.

### **“I don’t want to be an ambassador for Israel. I just want to be a Jew.”**

This striking sentiment, voiced by one participant, is impossible to ignore. We cannot know how widely it resonates across the Jewish world, but its honesty captures the weight of Jewish life today: **the yearning to simply live as a Jew, free from the constant political shadow that Israel casts.**

October 7 was a moment of profound particularism for the Jewish world, forcing many, even those who had never reflected deeply on it, to confront their Jewish identity and their connection to Israel, partly because of how their surrounding environment responded to the events. This was felt at the community level, where many communities became politically active in support of Israel and the hostages. **After almost two years, however, it seems that for some, this initial passion has eroded.**

### **Ideas to Overcome the Challenges**

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Unlike previous gatherings, in this shorter format we did not engage participants in a structured process of generating new ideas to address these challenges. However, drawing on Atchalta's unique AI tool, "The Calibrator," along with the organizers' experience and insights, we have crafted several new potential approaches.

### Dual community members

The challenge posed by the new pattern of Aliyah lies in confronting the "brain drain" created by young, single Olim leaving their home communities. Their departure leaves a leadership void and accelerates the aging of these communities—a challenge felt most acutely in smaller and more vulnerable Jewish communities.

**Communities can adopt a "dual community" model, where physical departure does not mean disconnection from diaspora leadership.** This can include shared celebrations, structured return visits, Hebrew teaching, Israel engagement, and other initiatives. Such a model leverages the new olim's sense of attachment and responsibility toward their home community, while also creating opportunities to import and export new ideas and practices.

### Rich Jewish Cultural Identity to counter "Jewish Fatigue"

The prolonged war, rising antisemitism, and heightened political polarization have left many Jewish communities experiencing what we describe as "**Jewish fatigue**." This fatigue manifests in emotional exhaustion, hesitancy to engage publicly, and a shrinking space to celebrate Jewish identity openly, especially its Zionist dimension. Over time, this strain erodes confidence, weakens participation, and threatens the vibrancy of Jewish communal life.

Insights from the previous gatherings in New York and Jerusalem highlighted the need to create a richer Jewish cultural identity, to serve both engaged and unengaged liberal Jewish. Creating more enjoyable and enriching Jewish programs that remind communities that Jewish life is not only about survival, it is also about celebrating culture, community, and heritage.

Jewish resilience through a meaningful Jewish cultural identity offers a constructive response. **Rather than allowing the identity experience to be defined solely by defense and survival, resilience through meaningful cultural Jewish identity reframes Jewish life as a source of strength, continuity, and pride.**

This includes creating programs that celebrate Judaism through food, music, arts, and shared rituals, while still grounding these experiences in meaningful Jewish content and connection to

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Israel. It requires communities to invest in cultural and spiritual nourishment alongside political and security needs.

### **Recalibrating the ‘Big Tent’**

Israel has once again become a divisive issue in some communities, where debates over its policies in Gaza have created deep rifts. This sentiment was also evident in the two previous gatherings, reflecting the ongoing question of what language, discourse, and conflicts should enter the community space, and what should remain outside.

In earlier gatherings, we recommended moving away from the “Big Tent” approach, which often dilutes core Jewish values, and instead advised establishing clearer political and moral boundaries, while maintaining inclusivity where possible.

We continue to hold that Jewish communities benefit from creating defined boundaries. However, we also acknowledge that in certain smaller communities, the “tent” is already too small to shrink further. **This suggests that different communities may need “different-sized tents,” tailored to their unique circumstances and capacities.**