

(rural) council. These officials are elected on the basis of party lists, similar to the system used for election to the Knesset.

Population and Principal Cities

Israel's estimated population (1987) is 4 495 000, of which roughly 83 per cent are Jewish, the remainder being mainly Arab and Druse. Almost 60 per cent of the Jewish population is under 30 years of age, with half of this number under 16 years of age.

Because of the desert to the southeast, the major urban centres are found in the northern and central regions of Israel. The Tel Aviv/Jaffa metropolitan area, with a population of more than one million, is the main centre for business and light industry. Jerusalem, the location of Israeli government offices, has a population of 500 000. The district of Haifa, a large port and the centre of heavy industry, has a population of some 600 000. Ashdod in the south is the largest port. Other large cities include Holon, Petah Tikva, Ramat Gan and Beersheba. Israel is a highly urbanized country, with approximately 89 per cent of its population living in these and other cities.

Religion and Language

The Israeli Declaration of Independence guarantees complete freedom of worship to every citizen. Eighty-three per cent of Israelis practise Judaism, 13 per cent Islam, 4 per cent Christianity and other religions.

The official languages of Israel are Hebrew and Arabic. Hebrew is the predominant language of the business community, while English is the predominant foreign language. The vast majority of Israeli business people involved in international trade and business speak fluent English. As the population comprises people from many different countries, it is not difficult to find an interpreter for almost any language.

Education

The State Education Law vests responsibility for education in the government and provides a unified, state-controlled elementary school system. The law provides special education for emotionally or physically handicapped children. Secondary education is free and lasts for six years, four of which are compulsory. Secondary schools are state-controlled but there are also many private schools.