

The Inter-Agency Task Force on Israeli Arab Issues raises awareness and ensures North American Jewish communities have access to trusted learning opportunities about Arab citizens of Israel and Jewish-Arab relations. Today, the Task Force convenes more than 100 North American Jewish organizations and foundations committed to learning and educating about what is often described by Israeli government officials as the most important domestic issue in Israel today.

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General Demographics¹

- At the beginning of 2019, Arab citizens comprise approximately 21% of the Israeli population, approximately 1,878,000 citizens².
- Of that population, 85% are Muslim (including Bedouins), 7% are Christian, and 8% are Druze.
- The growth rate of the Arab population in Israel in 2017 was 2.3% annually, compared with 1.9% for the Jewish population. Israel's Central Bureau of Statistics estimates that in 2035 Arab citizens will comprise approximately 25% of Israeli society, but will return to 20% of the population in approximately 2060. In 2017, the fertility rate of Arab and Jewish women in Israel was equal, with an average of 3.1 children.
- In 2017, 44% of Arabs were below the age of 19, compared to 34% of Jews.

Economy

- While Arab citizens of Israel make up 21% of the total population, the Israeli government estimates that they contribute only 8% of national GDP.
- The government estimates that the Israeli economy loses NIS 31 billion every year as a result of under-utilizing the full workforce potential of Arab women and men.
- The vast majority (95%) of Arab towns and villages fall into the Ministry of Economy's four lowest socio-economic rankings of Israeli municipalities (on a scale of 1-10).
- In 2007 the Israeli government established a special Authority for the Economic Development of the Arab, Druze and Circassian Sectors in the Prime Minister's Office. The Authority aims to realize the full potential of these sectors and integrate them into the general Israeli economy. Following the 2015 elections, the Authority was moved to the Ministry of Social Equality.
- Following a number of initial government development plans, in December 2015, a major government program was launched (Government Resolution 922) to enhance economic development and integration of Arab society, with an estimated investment of NIS 12-15 billion (\$3.7-4.2 billion) over five years. Additional subsequent government resolutions allocate significant sums for developing sub-segments of Arab society such as Negev Bedouins, Northern Bedouins and Druze.

¹ All figures relate to Arab citizens of Israel and are based on the most recent Government of Israel statistics.

² These numbers include around 300,000 Arab residents of East Jerusalem and 24,000 Druze residents of the Golan Heights – with member of both groups holding residence rather than full citizenship status.

Poverty³

- In 2017, 50.3% of Arab citizens in Israel were poor (down from 52% in 2016) compared with 13.9% of Jewish citizens (down from 14.3% in 2016). Likewise, in 2017, 47.1% of Arab families lived below the poverty line (down from 49.2% in 2016), compared to 13.4% of Jewish Israeli families. Arab families constitute 37.4% of all poor families in Israel, approximately 2.5 times their percentage of the general population (15%).
- The percentage of poor Arab children (including Bedouins) also dropped from 61.7% in 2016 to 60.7% in 2017, compared to 19.6% of Jewish children in 2017 (down from 21.1% in 2016).
- Approximately 65% of Negev Bedouin are considered poor, a sharp rise from 58% in 2016.

Education

- In 2016, 78% of Arab youngsters reached the 12th grade (up from 76% in 2012), compared with 94% of their Jewish (non-Haredi) peers.
- In 2016, the percentage of Arab youngsters who achieved a complete matriculation certificate⁴, was 46% (up from 27% in 2012), compared with 71% of their Jewish peers.
- Of all students pursuing their undergraduate degree in Israel today, approximately 17% are Arabs, up from 12% in 2012 (an 80% increase in number of Arab students).
- In graduate programs, Arab students comprise 14% and 6.7% in the MA and Ph.D. studies respectively, (up from 9% and 4% in 2012) and comprise only 3.5% of all academic staff.

Employment

- The work participation rate (those currently employed and those actively seeking employment) for Arab citizens is 73.8% for men and 40% for women (up from 69% and 27% in 2012, respectively), compared to 81% for Jewish men and 79.1% for Jewish women.
- While Arab and Jewish men are employed at relatively similar rates, Arab men are overrepresented in unskilled labor, and in the construction and service industries, and are underrepresented in fields such as high tech, finance and the public sector. "Blue collar" employment of Arab men leads to a steep drop in employment participation after 40-44 years of age.
- For Arab citizens with higher education degrees, work participation rates rise to 90% for Arab men with one degree and 97% for men with a Ph.D., and to 72% and 82% for Arab women, respectively.
- Arab citizens comprise 11.3% of government employees, mostly concentrated in the Ministries of Interior and Health. This is above the government goal of 10% Arab representation among government employees (set in 2007 for 2012 and achieved in 2016), though most are in lower level positions, with only 3.2% of senior positions held by Arab civil servants.
- As of 2017, Arab citizens make up 3 to 4% of the high tech professional workforce (approximately 5,000 people. This is up from 2008 when Arab citizens constituted less than 0.5% of employees in high tech (350 people).

Geography

³ Since 2016, data presented includes the Negev Bedouin citizens – after four years in which they were not included in the Poverty Report. These numbers refer only to Bedouins living in recognized villages. Estimates are that poverty rates of Bedouins living in the unrecognized villages are higher.

⁴ Matriculation exams are a series of final exams taken by Israeli high school students towards their graduation (usually in 11th and 12th grades) covering major subjects studied during these years. A complete matriculation certificate is received by achieving passing exam grades in seven core subjects defined as mandatory by the Israeli Ministry of Education.

- The vast majority of Arab citizens live in Israel's periphery regions. Geographic distribution is as follows:
 - Haifa, Galilee and the northern region - 57%
 - Jerusalem - 19% - most hold permanent residency status and not full citizenship.
 - The Negev - 13.3%
 - Tel Aviv and the center of the country - 10.7%
- Jews and Arabs largely live in separate municipalities, with 70% of the Arab population living in Arab cities, towns and villages, 29% living in "mixed cities"⁵ and Jerusalem, and 1% living in Jewish localities.
- Israel has five cities traditionally referred to as mixed cities and at least four newer mixed cities resulting from internal Arab migration. Jerusalem has an Arab population of 37.5%. The following are Arab population percentages for each of Israel's mixed cities:

Mixed Cities

Acre -31%
 Jaffa – 31%
 Lod - 30%
 Ramle – 23%
 Haifa – 11%

Newer Mixed Cities

Upper Nazareth - 25%
 Ma'alot-Tarshiha – 20%
 Karmiel 10-15 %
 Beer Sheva – 10-15%

The Bedouin Community

- Negev Bedouins, approximately 250,000 people, are the poorest population in Israeli and rank significantly lower on every measure, including education, employment and socio-economic status.
- Rahat, the only Bedouin city, with a population of more than 65,000, is the poorest city in Israel. It also has one of the youngest populations, with approximately 60% of residents below age 19.

⁵ According to the Israeli Bureau of Statistics, a "Mixed city" is where more than 10% of registered inhabitants are Arabs.