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Press Release

Upon the opening of the new academic year The Israel Democracy Institute and the Aharon Institute for Economic Policy conducted a special national survey of students:

- **22% of Arab students are considering quitting or taking a break from their studies, compared to 10% of Jewish students.**
- **74% of the households of Arab students were took a financial hit by the corona crisis, compared with 43% of the households of Jewish students**
- **35% of Arab students reported that the Internet infrastructure in their place of residence does not allow them to maintain a normal study routine, compared to 12% of Jewish students**
- **48% of Arabs reported that they cannot understand the contents transmitted through distance learning compared to 30% of Jews; Only 31.1% of Arab students connect to Zoom lessons via a personal computer, compared with 83.1% of their Jewish counterparts**

The survey was conducted during the month of June 2020 by Dr. Nasreen Hadad Haj- Yahya of the Israel Democracy Institute and Dr. Marian Tahacho and Hanin Matar of the Aharon Institute for Economic Policy at the Interdisciplinary Center in Herzliya. The survey examined the impact of the Corona crisis on Arab & Jewish students in Israel, and was conducted via social media platforms among a sample of 675 students in higher education frameworks--colleges and universities.

The sample included 418 Jewish students and 257 Arab students; 405 women and 270 men; 445 undergraduate students, 81 graduate students, 37 studying towards a teaching certificate and 112 towards an engineering degrees; 288 first-year students and the rest in more advanced years.

55% of them study at universities, 34% at academic colleges and the rest – about 12% – at academic colleges of education. These percentages are not significantly different from data on the overall student population data. However, in order to avoid selection biases, the sample was weighted to reflect the weight of each observation in the general student population.

The study was conducted in consultation with Ashraf Jabour, director of the National Program for Higher Education Accessibility in Arab Society, Rowadad".

Highlights of the Findings

22% of Arab students are considering quitting or taking a break from their studies, compared with 10% of Jewish students.

The researchers noted that dropout rates among Arab students were already higher before the corona crisis due to the myriad challenges they face throughout their studies in the higher education system. These include: the Hebrew language barrier, poor English skills, the low quality of the Arab educational system the lack of soft skills, often—low socio-economic background as well as—for the most part—being the first generation in their families to acquire a higher education. After the outbreak of the pandemic, all students in Israel faced additional difficulties and challenges, but these were more severe among the Arab students.

The economic crisis affecting all students and their families was more severe among Arab

Israelis. Even before the crisis, there was a significant gap in the families' economic situation, with 30% of the Arab students reporting that the economic situation of their families was "bad" to "very bad" in the years before the crisis compared to only 8% of Jewish students.

74% of Arab students reported that their family's financial situation had deteriorated compared to 43% of the Jewish students.

Figure 1: Has there been any change in your family's financial situation following the corona crisis?

(%) * Other refers to students who are neither Jews nor Arabs

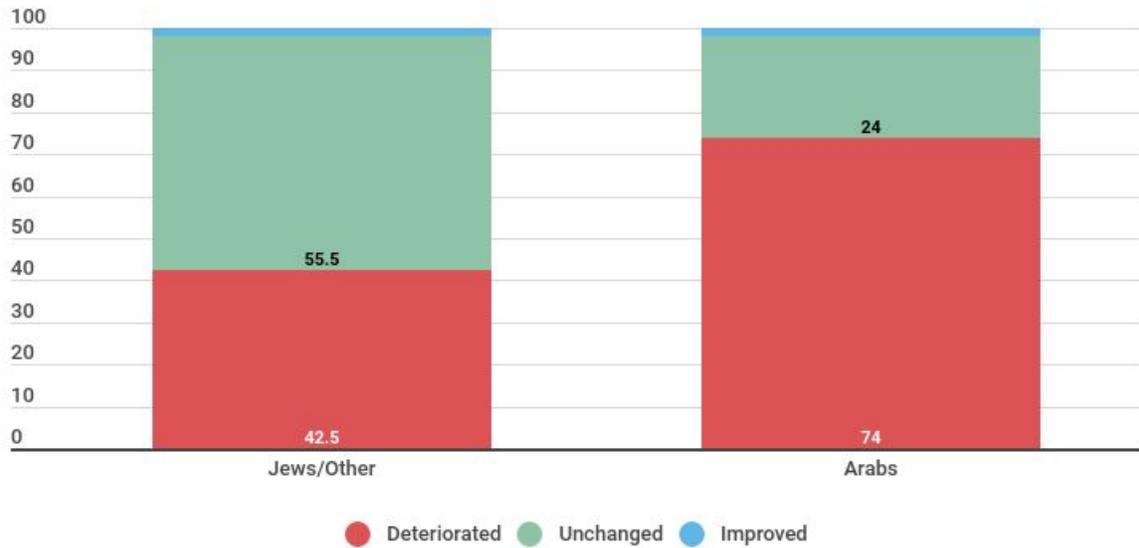
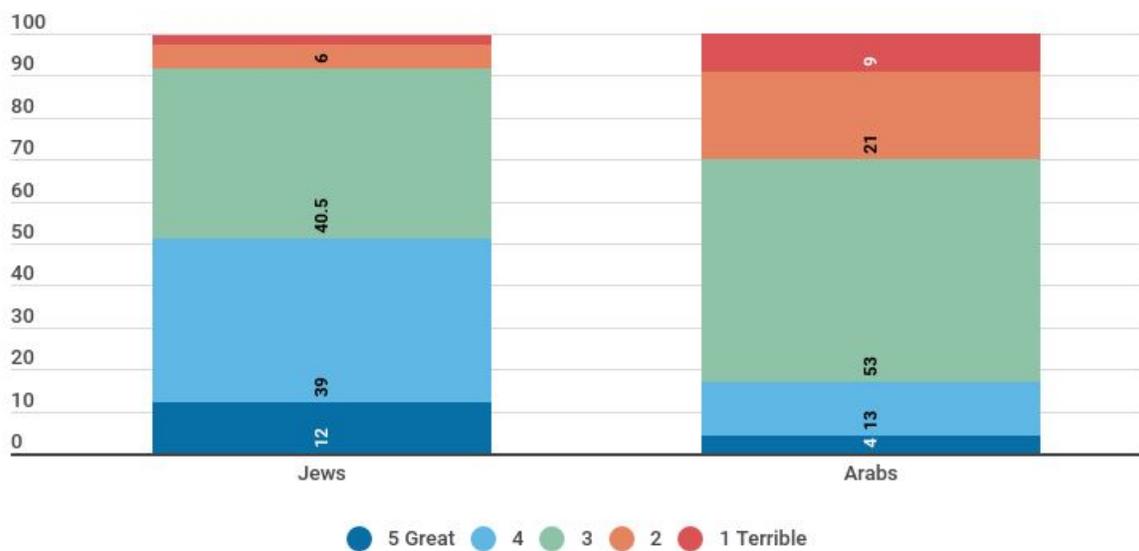


Figure 2: On a scale of 1-5, rate your family's financial situation before the corona crisis

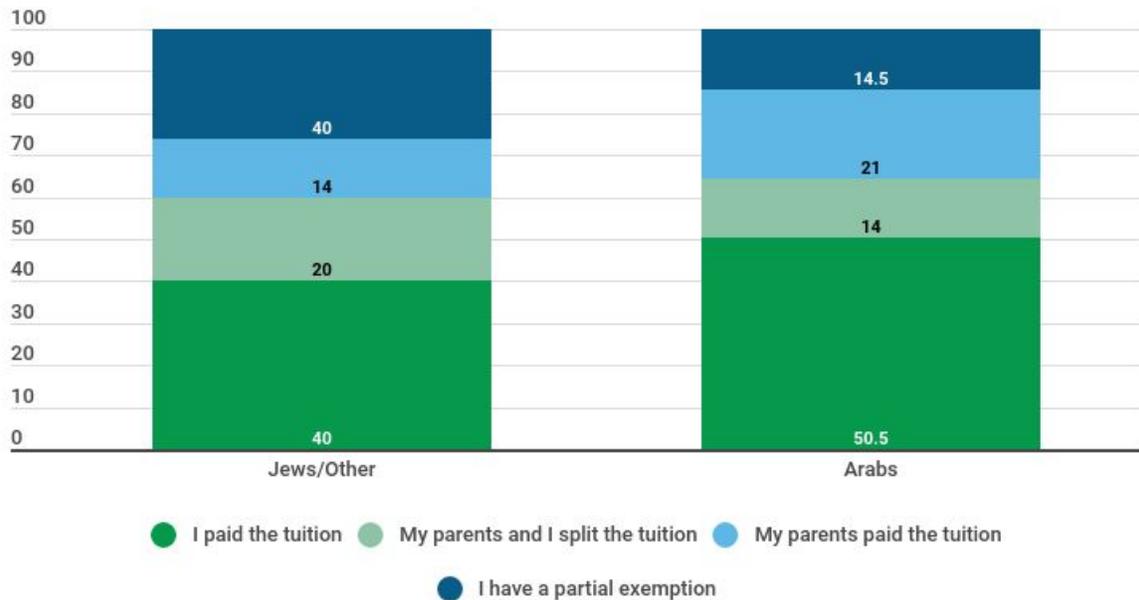
(%)



The gaps in families' pre-crisis financial situation may explain why a larger percentage of Arab students had to finance their own tuition without the family's assistance, even before the crisis.

50.4% of Arabs reported that they themselves fully financed their tuition, compared to 40.3% of the Jews. A lower percentage of Arab students received a full or partial exemption from tuition, 14.4% of Arabs compared to 25.6% of Jews:

Figure 3: How did you pay your tuition, and did you receive financial assistance? (Before the corona crisis) (%)



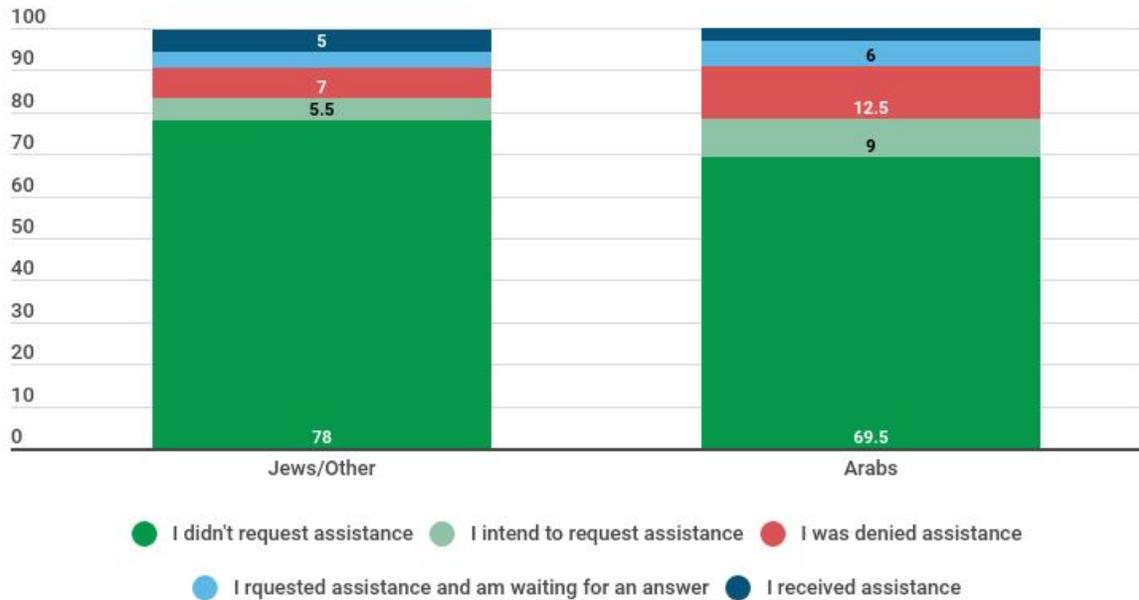
Arab students were more affected by the unemployment crisis: 23% of Arab students who worked before the crisis were let go or put on unpaid leave and are not entitled to unemployment benefits, compared to 16% of Jewish students. 38% of the Jewish students continued to work in the same job as prior to the crisis, compared to 20% of the Arab students.

Figure 4: Has there been a change in your employment situation in the wake of the corona crisis? (%)



In addition, the Arab students received the least financial aid due to the crisis from the educational institutions in which they were studying: only 3.2% of the Arab students received such aid compared to 5.3% of the Jews, despite the fact that a higher percentage of Arab students applied for aid.

Figure 5: Did you apply to the educational institution where you are studying to receive benefits / financial assistance due to the Corona crisis? (%)



In the wake of the crisis, 39.5% of Jewish students and 69.6% of Arab students continued to live, in their family home, compared with 38.8% of the Jews and 10.6% of the Arabs who lived in dormitories or rented apartments. 15.5% of Jewish students and 17.2% of Arabs left the dormitories or apartments they rented and returned to live with the family following the crisis.

Figure 6: Have I changed or not changed my place of residence following the Corona crisis? (%)

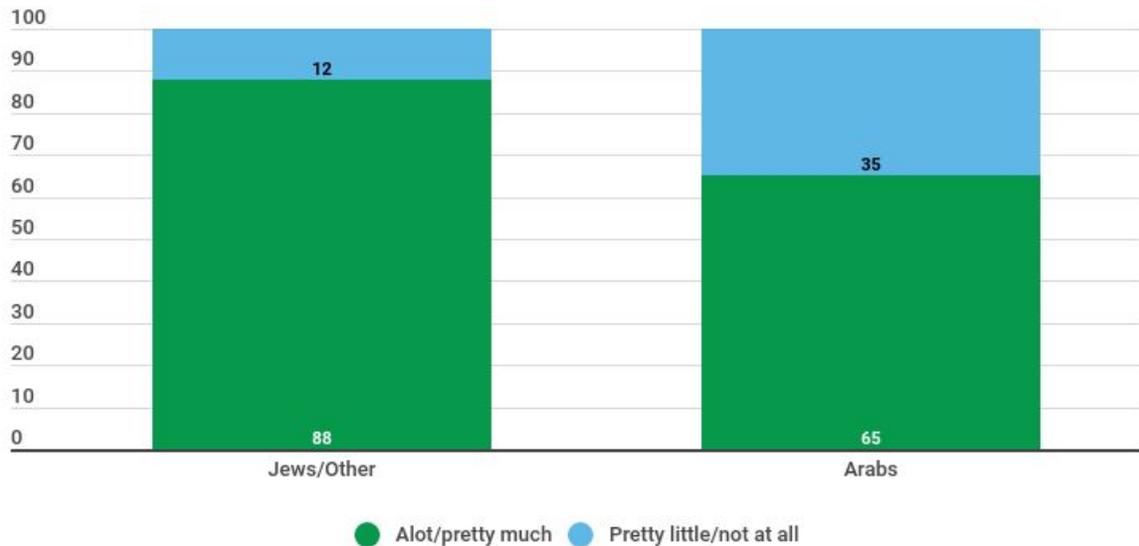


The transition to distance learning has created many difficulties, with a greater impact on the capacity to study among Arab students due to significant gaps in infrastructure and digital capabilities:

87.9% of Jewish students in the survey indicated that the Internet infrastructure in their place of residence allows them to continue with the study routine (i.e. online studies and access to electronic resources), compared to only 64.8% of the Arabs.

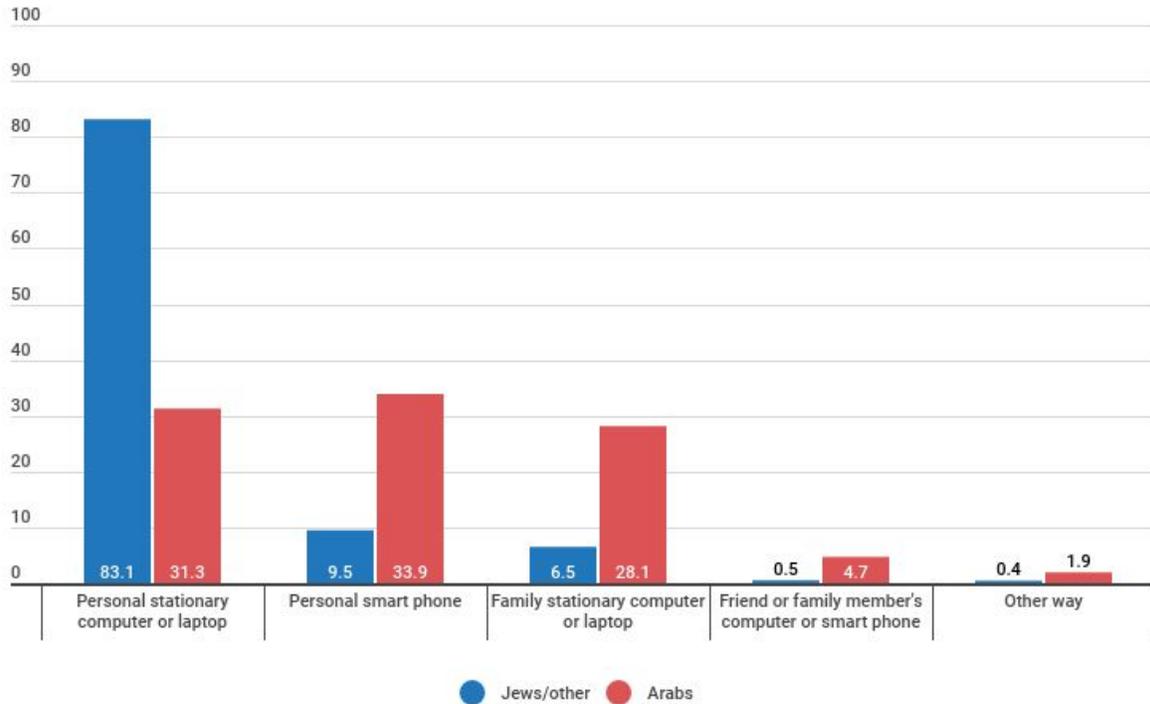
By contrast, about 35.2% of Arab students reported that the Internet infrastructure in their place of residence does not allow them to maintain a normal study routine, compared with 12% of Jewish students.

Figure 7: To what extent does the Internet infrastructure in your current place of residence allow you to maintain your study routine? (online Studies, access to electronic resources) (%)



In addition to gaps in the functioning of the Internet, there are huge gaps in ownership of a personal computer to connect up with the Zoom classes and enjoy the conditions needed for effective study. While 83.1% of Jewish students in the survey connect to the Zoom classes via a personal- stationary or mobile- computer, this is the case for only 31.3% of Arab students; the rest have to connect to classes on their mobile phone or share the family computer.

Figure 8: How do you connect to Zoom classes? (%)



In addition to infrastructure gaps, there are also significant gaps in students' digital capabilities who, when having to deal with technical difficulties, must enlist the help of family and friends to connect to the Zoom classes. 48.8% of the Arab students reported that they encountered technical difficulties in the distance learning system, compared with 33.8% of Jews. In addition, 40% of Arab students indicated that they needed some degree of assistance in operating the distance learning system, compared with only 16% of Jews.

Figure 9: I encountered technical difficulties in the distance learning system (%)

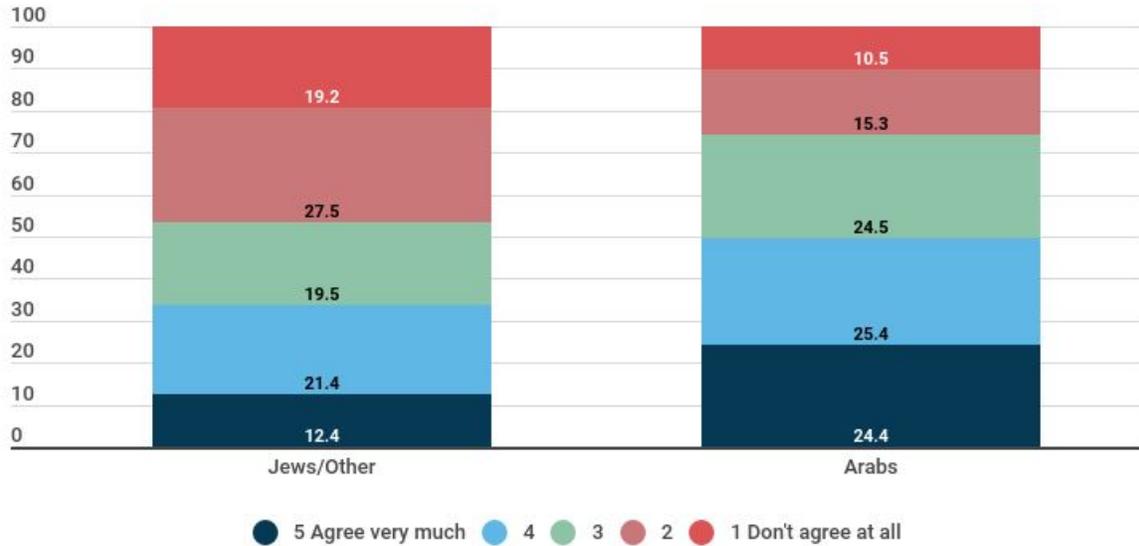
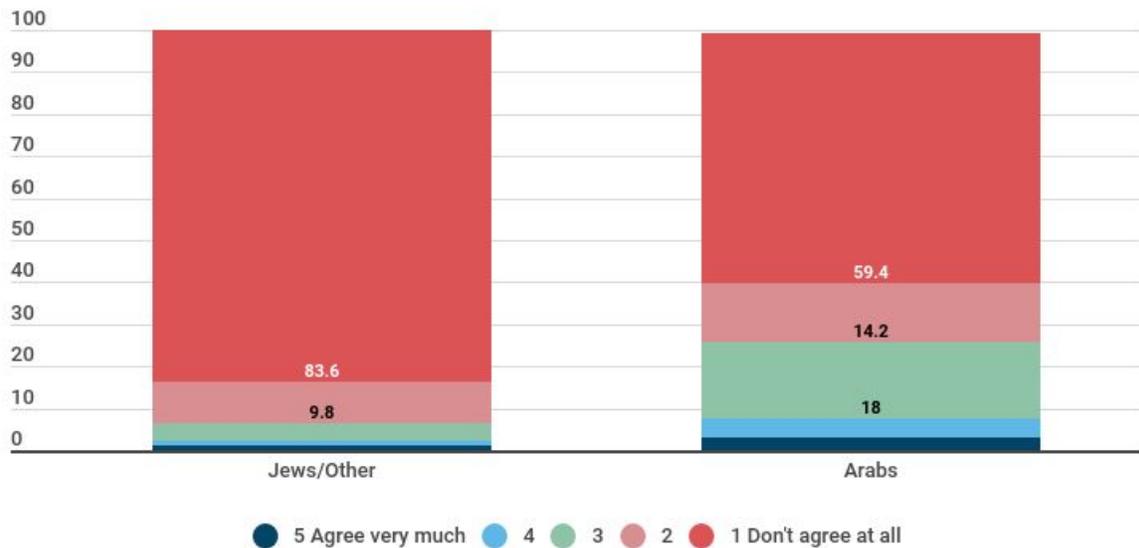
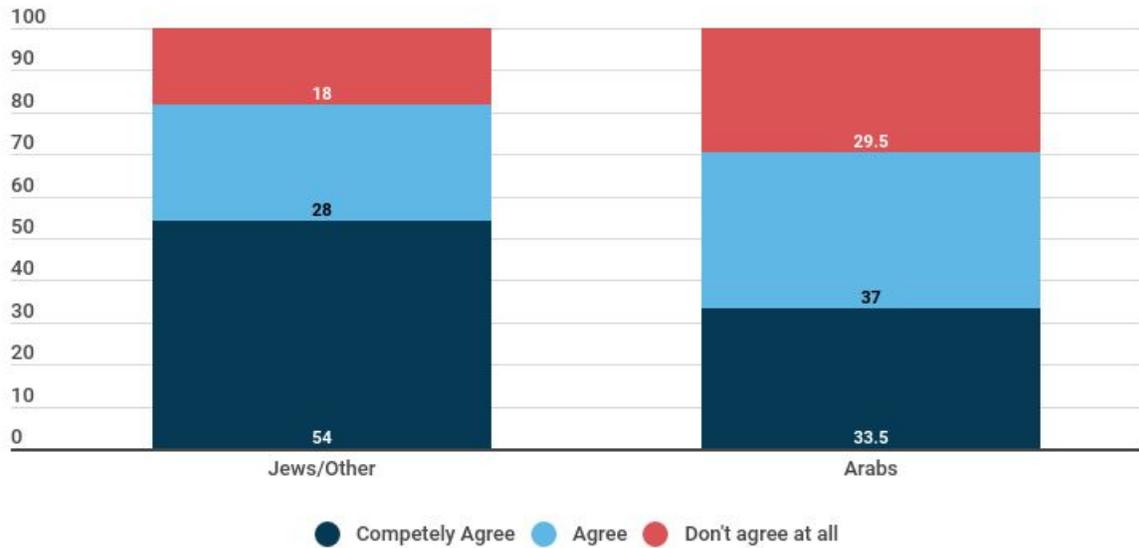


Figure 10: I get help from a friend / family member to operate the remote learning system (%)



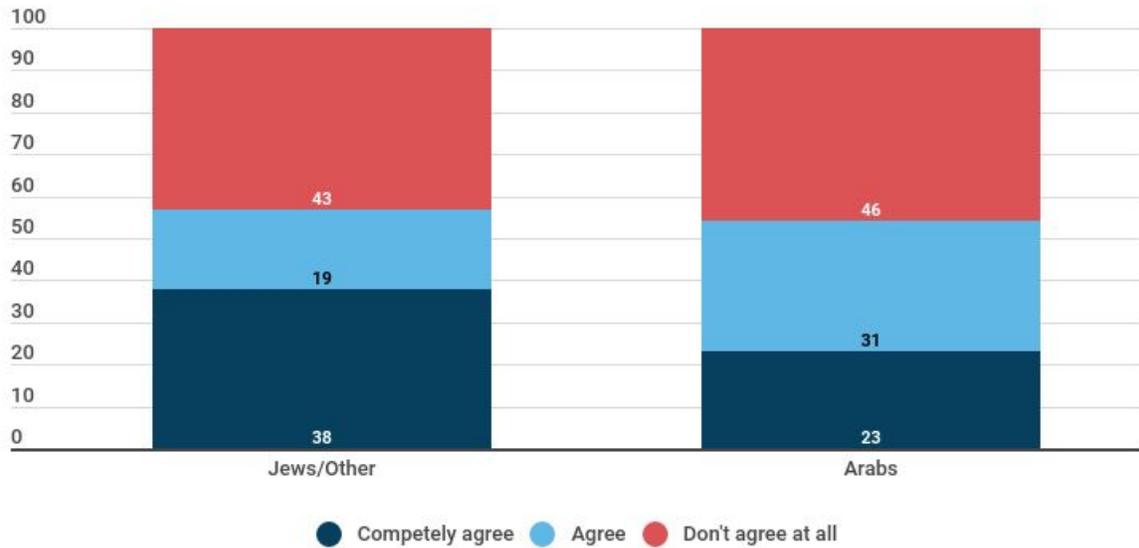
The curriculum may also be an obstacle for all students and even more so for Arab students, who also have to deal with difficulties in Hebrew: 48% of the Arabs reported not understanding the content transmitted through Zoom, compared to 30% of Jewish students.

Figure 11: I understand the contents of the classes on Zoom (%)



The difficulties and challenges mentioned above have a direct impact on the effectiveness of Zoom classes as a substitute for frontal classes. Only 23% of Arab students compared to 38.3% of Jewish students believe that learning via Zoom is indeed an adequate substitute for frontal classes.

Figure 12: For me, learning via Zoom is an adequate substitute for frontal learning in the classroom (%)



There has been a sharper decline among Arab students in the frequency of participation in Zoom classes compared to the frequency of participation in pre-crisis frontal classes. Only 48.2% of Arab students participate in most Zoom classes compared to 74.8% who reported attending most of the pre-crisis frontal classes. Among Jewish students, too, there is a decline in participation rates from 69.5% before the crisis to 52% after the transition to distance learning.

Figure 13: To what extent do you attend Zoom classes? (%)

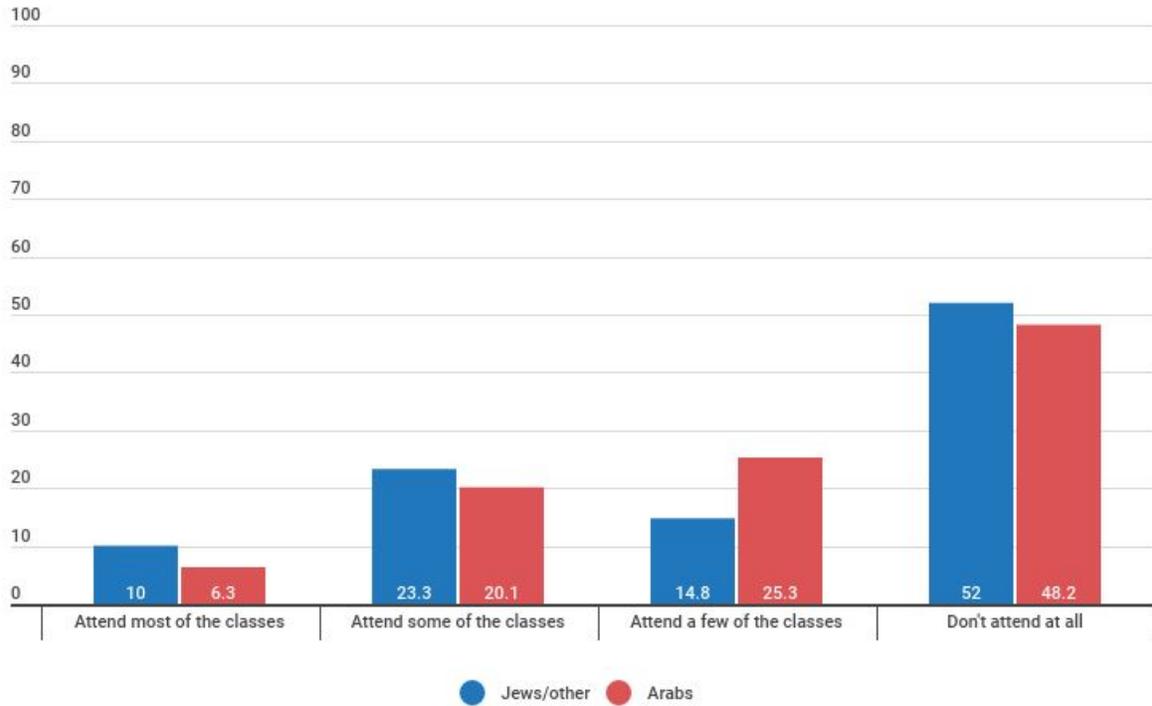
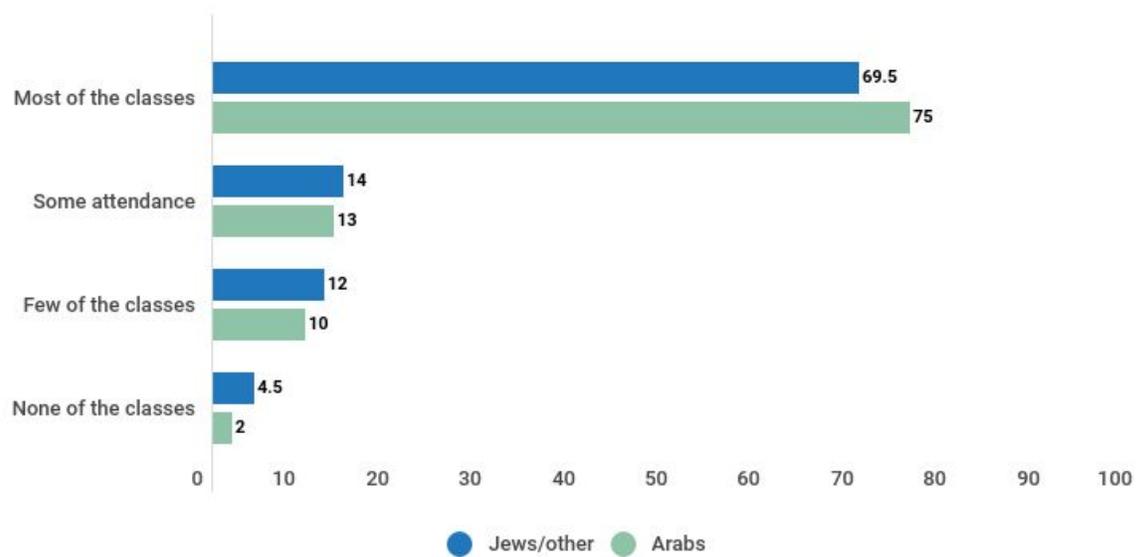


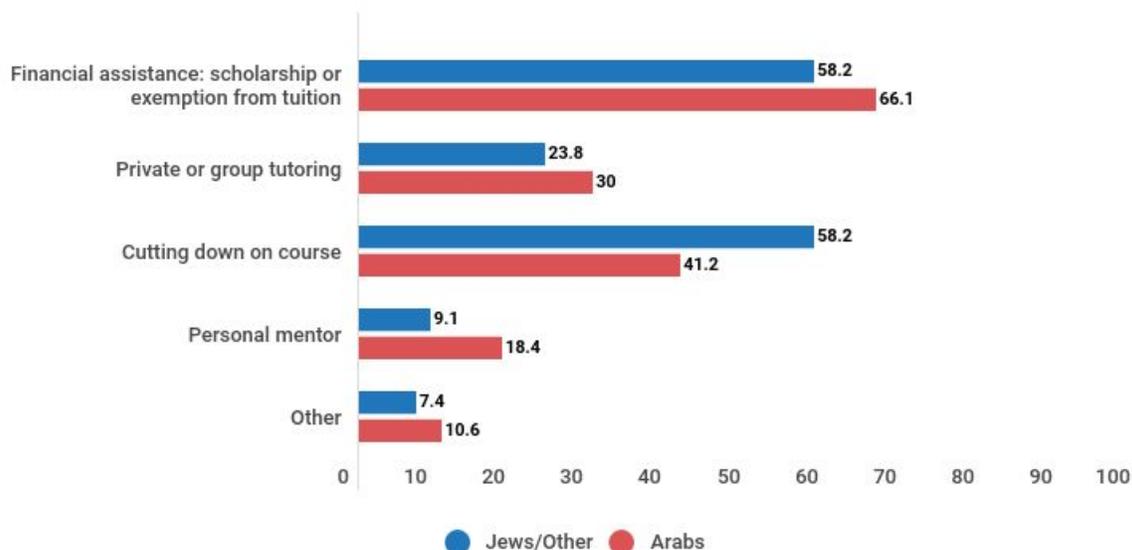
Figure 14: To what extent did you attend frontal classes before the corona crisis? (%)



The assistance required from educational institutions:

When students were asked about the type of assistance they thought could help cope with the crisis, the vast majority of Arab students (66.1%) opted for financial assistance, while among Jews a similar percentage opted for financial assistance and for the option of facilitating course assignments. Also, a higher percentage of Arabs opted for personal tutoring or private tutoring, indicating their distress and inability to cope with distance learning independently.

Figure 15: What kind of support would help you deal with the consequences of the corona crisis? (%)



The researchers present the following policy recommendations:

1. **Increasing the number of scholarships and other financial assistance** provided to students, through the "Artica" Scholarships of the Council for Higher Education for Arab Students, from 800 to at least 1000 scholarships, by including additional fields of study as high-priority for eligibility for the scholarships, to include medical and para-medical professions, whose significance have come to the fore in the current crisis, and especially in light of the difficulty in meeting manpower needs.
2. **Lending computers to students.** A portion of budgets allocated to universities and colleges to deal with the corona crisis should be used to distribute or lend computers to students, after mapping needs and granting priority to families with a large number of

children and from a low socioeconomic background, where the shortage is likely to be greater.

3. **Setting up designated study areas** with Internet infrastructure in Arab localities, to enable online learning. This can be done through government assistance with budgets for local authorities in establishing such spaces (municipality buildings, schools, community centers, etc.) which students can access in a capsule format.
4. With the outbreak of the crisis, the units for the advancement of Arab students / the Equal Opportunities Units were put on unpaid leave creating serious difficulties for the Arab students, precisely at a time when these units were most needed. At the present time, the units should focus on the most critical tasks, such as: monitoring struggling students and providing assistance through tutors or learning in small groups to provide, among other things, a support network.

In addition, information must be provided and ways found to encourage Arab students to contact and take advantage of the services provided by these units.

Dr. Marian Tahacho: "Arab students face many barriers to integration and success in Israeli academia and in the labor force after graduation. The economic consequences of the crisis did not skip over students, and the transition to remote learning among Arabs, who come from lower socio-economic backgrounds and suffer from significant gaps in terms of infrastructure and digital literacy, has been more challenging. The major concern is that we will see a massive dropout of Arab students in the coming year, in an era in which higher education is the most significant tool for social and economic mobility. Arab society was hit hardest by the crisis because it is characterized by high rates of low-skilled and unskilled workers, and these are the individuals suffering from the highest unemployment rates in the wake of corona."

Dr. Nasreen Hadad Haj Yahya: "Even in routine times, Arab students enter academia at a disadvantage as compared with their Jewish counterparts. This is due to several factors: an education system that discriminates against them at all stages of schooling; the fact that they are usually the first generation in their families to study in universities or colleges, and so--

have no role models to look up to; and in addition—enter the higher education system with poor language skills in English and Hebrew. They are required to conduct themselves in an environment that is culturally and mentally foreign to them. In many cases, their emotional maturity is inadequate, since most enter academia at the age of 20 unequipped to deal with the challenges of higher education in Israel. This new survey reveals that the corona crisis has deepened gaps in other areas as well, such as in the economic situation and digital infrastructure. The State must understand that in order to promote the economic integration of Arab citizens of Israel, it must help them get through the current crisis and cut back the number of dropouts that the corona threatens to escalate. Otherwise, the important steps taken in recent years to integrate the Arab society into higher education are likely to go down the drain. "