

The Inter-Agency Task Force on Israeli Arab Issues is a coalition of 100 North American Jewish organizations. It was formed in 2006 by key Jewish American leaders from federations, foundations, religious movements, service and advocacy organizations to promote greater awareness in the North American Jewish community on issues related to Arab citizens and Jewish-Arab relations in Israel. For more information, visit us here:

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General Demographics (2019 data)¹

- **Population:** The Arab population in Israel is 1,958,000, comprising nearly 21% of Israeli society. This number, from the Israel Central Bureau of Statistics, includes roughly 1,542,000 Arab citizens, 350,000 East Jerusalem residents and 24,000 Druze Golan Heights residents.
- **Youth:** 31.3% of Arabs are under 14 (versus 27.1% of Jews), 5% are above 65 (versus 13% of Jews).
- **Religion:** 83.5% Muslim (including Bedouin), 9% Christian, and 7.4% Druze.
- **Geography:** More than 70% of the Arab population live in Arab cities, towns and villages, in Israel's northern and southern peripheries. 11% live in "mixed cities"², 18% live in Jerusalem³, and 1% in Jewish localities.

Socio-Economic Status

- **GDP:** According to government estimates, Arab citizens contribute approximately 8-10% of the national GDP despite comprising one-fifth of the population.
- **Local economy:** 95% of Arab towns fall into one of the Ministry of Economy's 4 lowest rankings for Israeli municipalities, based on a socio-economic scale of 1-10.
- **Poverty:**⁴ In 2018, 43.5% of Arab families lived in poverty (vs. 18% national average) down from 47.1% in 2017.
- **Economic Development:** In 2015, the Government launched Resolution 922, the largest ever economic development plan for Arab society, which allocated budgets of NIS 12-15 billion (\$3.7-4.2 billion) over five years. In parallel, economic development plans were approved for Arab populations (Negev Bedouins, Northern Bedouins, Druze, and East Jerusalem).

Education and Higher Education

Israel has four education streams: private religious, public religious, and Hebrew secular, and Arabic. Most Arab citizens attend the Arabic public stream, studying in Arabic with incorporated Hebrew lessons.

- **Elementary and High School:** In 2018, there were 245,795 Arab elementary school students and 192,766 in middle and high schools.
- **Achievement Gaps:** In 2017, 62% of Arab 12th graders achieved a complete matriculation certificate⁵ (72% of Arab girls and 51% of boys) compared to 70.5% of Jewish girls and 61.4% of boys.
- Private Christian schools, attended by many Muslim students, achieve some of Israel's top matriculation scores.
- **Higher Education:** Of the 278,500 students who studied in universities and academic colleges in 2019-2020, 17.9% were Arabs. However, Arab citizens comprise approximately 30% of Israel's university-aged population.
- Between 2009 and 2019, the percentage of higher education students who are Arab increased in all degrees: BA - from 13.1% to 19.2%; MA - from 7.4% to 14.6%; PhD - from 5.2% to 7.2%
- **Higher Education Gender Gap:** Non-Bedouin Muslim women are 2.4 times more likely to get a bachelor's degree than men. Druze women are 2.1 times more likely and Bedouin women 3.3 times more likely.
- **Academia:** Arabs comprise about 3.5% of all academic faculty.

¹ 2019 figures. All figures are based on the most recent Government of Israel statistics.

² According to the Israeli Bureau of Statistics, a "Mixed city" is where more than 10% of registered inhabitants are Arabs.

³ The majority of Arab residents of Jerusalem do not hold Israeli citizenship

⁴ Since 2016, data presented includes the Negev Bedouin – after four years in which they were not included in the annual Poverty Report. These numbers refer only to Bedouins in recognized villages. Estimates are that poverty rates of Bedouins in the unrecognized villages are higher.

⁵ Matriculation exams are a series of final exams taken by Israeli high school students towards their graduation (usually in 11th and 12th grades). A complete matriculation certificate is achieved by passing exams in seven mandatory subjects.

Employment

Barriers to employment and career advancement persist for many Arabs. Arab communities are often far from employment epicenters while limited networks and skills gaps make attaining high-earning jobs challenging.

- **Workforce Participation:** 76.3% of Arab men and 38.2% of women are currently employed or actively seeking employment, compared to 87.4% of Jewish men and 82.9% of women. Among those with higher education, the numbers are much higher: 90% of Arab men and 70% of women are in the workforce.⁶
- **Salaries:** The average monthly salary for Arab men is NIS 8,190, compared to NIS 13,588 for Jewish men.⁷ For Arab women, the average monthly salary is around NIS 5,722, compared with NIS 8,923 for Jewish women.
- **Public Service:** 11.7% of government employees are Arab, exceeding the government goal of 10%. However, this representation is primarily in the Ministries of Health and Interior and representation falls well below 10% in most other ministries. Arab employees hold lower-level positions: 1% of Arab civil servants are in the highest managerial level, compared with 3.2% of the general population.
- **Medicine:** 17% of Israel's doctors, 24% of nurses, and 47% of pharmacists are Arab.
- **High-Tech:** In 2019, Arab professionals made up approximately 4% of Israel's high-tech workforce was Arab, up from less than 1% in 2009, with 5,600 students studying in high-tech related fields. Numerous civil society programs have been developed to increase high-tech integration.

The Bedouin Community

- Negev Bedouin, at roughly 250,000 people, comprise one-third of the Negev population. A historically nomadic agricultural community, the Bedouin population has undergone a rapid process of sedentarization, retaining many unique cultural traditions and facing significant socio-economic challenges. As a whole, Bedouin are by far the poorest of Israel's populations.
- Most Negev Bedouin today live in seven communities Israel built in the Negev to encourage urbanization. Rahat, the largest, with a population of approximately 65,000, is the poorest city in Israel. Roughly 100,000 Bedouin live in unrecognized villages (disconnected from public infrastructure and services) which are subject to a longstanding dispute with the state over land claims.

The Druze Community

- Druze are a culturally and ethnically distinct Arabic-speaking population, practitioners of the Druze faith. There are about 143,000 Druze in Israel, almost all of whom live in the North and Golan Heights.
- In contrast to most of the Arab minority, most Druze serve in the IDF, including in key leadership positions, due to an agreement known as the "Blood Covenant" signed with the state in 1956.
- The Druze community also has high poverty rates relative to Israeli society, and lower participation rates in higher education than the broader Arab population.

Political Representation

Four political parties in Israel represent the bulk of Arab society: Ra'am, Hadash, Balad and Ta'al. Between 2015-2021, these parties formed an alliance called the Joint List, the third largest party in the Knesset over this time. Ahead of the 2021 elections, Ra'am (Islamic Movement) left the Joint List to run on its own, promoting pragmatic collaboration over ideological red lines. Winning four seats (the Joint List won six), Ra'am gained unprecedented leverage in a close election and made history by becoming the first Arab party to join a governing coalition. As part of the coalition agreement, Ra'am secured roughly \$16.3 billion for economic development and reduction of violent crime in Arab society, and secured control of the influential Interior Committee, and the Special Committee on Arab Affairs.

⁶ These statistics are from prior to the COVID-19 pandemic

⁷ 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.