

Topic: **Bedouin in the Negev**

Updated: **June 2014**

Demographics, Socio-Economic Status and Politics

- At the end of 2011, 204,700 Bedouin lived in the Negev, accounting for approximately one third of the population in the region.² In addition, 60,000 Bedouin live in the Galilee and close to 10,000 in central Israel.³
- The term “Bedouin” defines various groups of traditionally pastoral nomadic, desert-dwelling Arabs (exclusively Muslims). Since the 1950s, the Bedouin in Israel have undergone a process of sedentarization with an emphasis on agricultural production
- The Negev Bedouin have one of the highest natural growth rates in the world, 3.6% in 2011.
- This means that the population doubles once every 19 years.⁴ The Israel Land Administration projects that the Negev Bedouin population will reach 300,000 by 2020.⁵

Demographic Features (2011)⁶

	Negev Bedouins	Muslims – General	Jews
Natural growth rate	3.6%	2.4%	1.5%
Fertility rate	5.55	3.51	2.98
Ages 0-19	60.9%	49.2%	33.3%
Median age	15.1	20.4	31.5
Infant mortality (per 1000)	11.6	6.6	2.6

- The Bedouin who live in the Negev are by far Israel's most disadvantaged community in terms of per capita income, unemployment, poverty rate, education and public infrastructure.

¹ Compiled by Prof. Elie Rekhess, Associate Director, Crown Center for Jewish and Israel Studies, Northwestern University

² CBS, *Statistical Abstract of Israel*, 2012, table 2.6.

³ Yosef Ben David, *The Bedouin in Israel: Social and Land Aspects* (Jerusalem: Jerusalem Institute for Israel Studies, 2004).

⁴ Figures based on: CBS, *Statistical Abstract of Israel*, 2012, table 2.4.

⁵ Israel Land Administration, *The Bedouin of the Negev* (December 2007). See:

<http://www.mmi.gov.il/Osh/Aspx/DownloadTofes.aspx?Maarechet=71&TofesId=74&UserId=323&RO=True>.

⁶ CBS, *Statistical Abstract of Israel*, 2012, tables 2.4, 2.10, 3.11.

- According to the Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics' socio-economic ranking of 400 localities in Israel, the three lowest-ranking local councils are Bedouin townships (Lakiya, Tel-Sheva and al-Batuf Regional Council). Six out of ten localities at the lowest socio-economic cluster are Bedouin townships.⁷
- Bedouin settlements in the Negev are traditionally characterized by the highest poverty rates in Israel. In 2007, 71.5% of Bedouin households were under the poverty line, compared to 54.5% and 16.2% in the Arab and Jewish sectors, respectively.⁸
- In October 2012, the average unemployment rate in all six Bedouin townships was 27.8% (ranging from a high of 38.9% in Lakiya to 18.5% in Hura).⁹
- In January 2013, the top five townships with the highest rate of government- financed "income support" were Bedouin townships (Lakiya – 7.4%, Umm Batin – 6.6%, Tel-Sheva – 5.9%, Ar'ara in the Negev – 5.5% and Segev Shalom – 5.5%).¹⁰
- Education has been one of the major agents of modernization for the Bedouin community in Israel. Within a single generation, since the Compulsory Education Law came into effect in 1949, illiteracy was reduced from 95% to 25%.¹¹ The average illiteracy rate in the Bedouin community has dropped to less than 15%. Illiteracy is widespread among Bedouin women while in the age group of 50-59 the rate is 70.4% and 87% of those aged 60 and over (2010 figures).¹²
- Schools in the Bedouin community are frequently housed in ill-equipped buildings, often not connected to electricity and water grids. Surveys in 2008 conducted by the Israeli Ministry of Health in Bedouin townships and unrecognized Bedouin villages pointed to the deteriorated level of sanitation, in terms of cleaning lack of restrooms and lack of sewage disposal systems..¹³ A large proportion of the teaching staff is uncertified and there are few school counselors, librarians, and laboratory technicians.
- Dropout rates are particularly high. (e.g. In 2010, the dropout rate was 6.8% in Rahat, 5.3% in Segev Shalom, compared to 3.6% and 1.7% in the general Arab and Jewish educational

⁷ The Union of Local Authorities in Israel, *Socio-economic bunch 2013*. See: <http://www.masham.org.il/Updates/Hakika/Documents/%D7%9E%D7%93%D7%93%D7%97%D7%91%D7%A8%D7%AA%D7%99-%D7%9B%D7%9C%D7%9B%D7%9C%D7%99%202013.xls>.

⁸ Suleiman Abu-Bader and Daniel Gottlieb, *Poverty, Education and Employment in the Arab-Bedouin Society: A Comparative View* (Jerusalem: National Insurance Institute, Research and Planning Administration, June 2009). See: http://www.btl.gov.il/Publications/research/Documents/mechkar_98.pdf.

⁹ October 2012 figures, provided by the Israeli Employment Service. See: <http://www.taasuka.gov.il/NR/rdonlyres/D8D08620-24CE-45D4-8541-E1D53C4637B1/0/selecteddata1012.xls> (in Hebrew).

¹⁰ The National Insurance Institute of Israel, Branches and Service Stations. See: <http://www.btl.gov.il/Mediniyut/Situation/statistics/BtlStatistics.aspx?type=2&id=8>.

¹¹ Yosef Ben-David, *The Bedouin in Israel* (Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, July 1, 1999). See: http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/MFArchive/1990_1999/1999/7/The+Bedouin+in+Israel.htm.

¹² *The Palestinians in Israel: Socio-Economic Survey, 2010 – Main Findings* (Shefar'am: The Galilee Society – The Arab National Society for Health Research and Services, May 2011), p. 213. [Henceforth: The Galilee Society Survey, 2007]

¹³ The Ministry of Health Israel, *Health Situation Within Bedouin Infants and Children Until the Age of 6 years in Permanent Settlements and the Villages in the Negev*, December 2008. See: http://www.old.health.gov.il/Download/pages/beduwin_251109.pdf (in Hebrew).

systems, respectively)¹⁴

- In 2010, eight of the top ten townships with the highest dropout rates were Bedouin townships. (al-Aasam tribe with 10.6%, Rahat with 6.8% and in the tenth place Ar'ara in the Negev with 4.9%).¹⁵
- Bedouin schools report the lowest level of achievements in matriculation exams amongst all Arab sector schools in Israel (28.2% in 2010, compared to 38.9% and 54.4% in the Arab and Jewish educational systems, respectively)
- In 2011, there was an increase of 4.6% in the percentage of students who passed their high school matriculation exams among the Bedouin population.¹⁶
- According to a report issued by the Israel National Council for the Child in 2010 . 9.1% of Bedouin children, compared to 8.3% of general Arab children and 7.6% of Jewish children, have been defined as children with special needs.¹⁷
- Of the 120 Knesset members, Taleb Abu Arar, of RA'AM (UAL, United Arab List) (2013), is the only Bedouin.
- In recent years, the Islamic Movement in Israel has increased its presence among the Negev Bedouin, filling the gap in social needs and providing responses to government neglect of the community.¹⁸ In the November 2008 municipal elections, four out of six heads of Bedouin localities in the Negev were elected as candidates of the Islamic Movement. In the 2013 local elections, only one member of the Islamic Movement was elected to be head of the community, which weakened the municipal electoral strength of the Islamic Movement in southern Bedouin communities.
- Similarly, in the January 2013 Knesset elections, almost 62% of the Bedouin vote went to the RA'AM (UAL, United Arab List), in which the Islamic Movement is a major component.¹⁹
- In April 2010, Sheikh Hammad Abu Da'abas, a prominent Bedouin figure of the Islamic Movement in the Negev, was elected as the new head of the movement, replacing Sheikh Ibrahim Sarsur of Kafr Qasim, who served as the movement's head since 1998.

¹⁴ Yuval Vurgan, Students Dropout Rates in the Education System (Knesset Research and Information Center, November 2011), p.2, 5. See: <http://www.knesset.gov.il/mmm/data/pdf/m02962.pdf> (in Hebrew)

¹⁵ For further details, see: Yuval Vorgan, *School Dropout Rates* (Knesset Information and Research Center, November 22, 2011). See: <http://www.knesset.gov.il/mmm/data/pdf/m02962.pdf.2>.

¹⁶ Etti Konor-Atias and Ludmila Gramsh, *Level of achievements in matriculation exams 2009-2010* (Tel-Aviv, Adva Center, August 2012). See: [http://www.adva.org/uploaded/Bagrut2010%20\(2\)_1.pdf](http://www.adva.org/uploaded/Bagrut2010%20(2)_1.pdf).

Talila Neshet and Yanir Yanga *Entitled to Certificates among Matriculation, by township*. *Ha'aretz*, August 23, 2012.

¹⁷ The Israeli National Council for the Child, *Children in Israel – Statistical Abstract, 2010*. See: <http://www.children.org.il/Files/File/leket%20netunim%202010.doc> [in Hebrew].

¹⁸ Asher Ben Aryeh, Yaffa Zionit and Tzipi Berman (editors), *Statistical Yearbook of Children in Israel, 2009 – Main Findings* (The Israel National Council for the Child, 2009), p. 13 [in Hebrew].

¹⁹ For further details, see: Arik Rudnitzky (editor), *Arab Politics in Israel and the 19th Knesset Elections*, no. 3 (Tel Aviv University, The Konrad Adenauer Program for Jewish-Arab Cooperation, February 12, 2013).

Land Dispute

- The land disputes between the State and the Negev Bedouins center on the lack of written deeds of sale and ownership in the Bedouin community, where land possession and land ownership are traditionally determined by custom.
- Israel does not accept the legal validity of oral agreements between Bedouin tribes, and has rejected Bedouins' claims for land ownership in large parts of the Negev.²⁰
- Thus, the ownership of some 160,000 acres occupied by Negev Bedouins is under dispute. Of these, 87,000 acres are currently occupied by Bedouin encampments (also known as "unrecognized villages" – see below) and 73,000 acres are used for grazing.²¹
- Government agencies are deeply concerned with the uncontrolled expansion of Bedouin encampments which is considered an attempt to take over what is left of Israel's largest repository of unsettled land. Some academics described the situation in the Negev as "the beginning of a strategic threat to Israel."²²
- The government is trying to settle the disputes and stop illegal construction in encampments (which as of January 2011, according to some reports, numbered 70,000 houses)²³ by reaching compensation agreements, allocating alternative land in legal Bedouin townships (see below), and demolishing illegal constructions.²⁴
- In November 2008, the Committee for Regulation of Bedouin Settlements in the Negev, headed by retired Justice Eliezer Goldberg, concluded that "Israel must change the legal status of at least 46 villages so as to prevent perpetuation of the community's unbearable state."²⁵ The report's conclusions were rejected by the Regional Council for Bedouin Unrecognized Villages in the Negev (RCUV), which stated that the Goldberg Committee's Recommendations "did not recognize Arab ownership of their land in the Naqab [Negev] and did not suggest any just solution."²⁶ Some circles described the report's solutions as unrealistic and "no more than another link on the chain of failed past solutions."
- The bill for the **Prawer-Begin Plan** to settle the Bedouin land dispute in the Negev was approved upon its first reading in the Knesset in June 2013.²⁷ (However, due to growing criticism of both Jewish and the Bedouin political circles, the Israeli government decided in December 2013 to halt

²⁰ Havatzelet Yahel, "Land Disputes Between the Negev Bedouin and Israel." *Israel Studies* 11.2 (2006), pp. 1-22.

²¹ Inbal Green and Gila Orkin (editors), *The State of Human Rights in Israel and the Occupied Territories: 2008 Report* (Jerusalem: The Association for Civil Rights in Israel, December 2008), pp. 55-56 ("Living Conditions in the Unrecognized Bedouin Villages: 60 Years of Disgrace").

²² Arnon Soffer, *Following the Goldberg Report – Has Israel lost the Northern part of the Negev?* (University of Haifa: The Reuven Chaikin Chair in Geostrategy, March 2009), p. 3 [in Hebrew].

²³ Liran Sahar, *33 illegal construction were destroyed in the negev* Bizportal.co.il, November 6, 2011. See: <http://www1.bizportal.co.il/article/291292>.

²⁴ Yanir Yagna, "Israel to triple demolition rate for illegal Bedouin construction." *Ha'aretz*, February 18, 2010. See: <http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/1150664.html>.

Report on house demolition published by Human Rights Watch: Lucy Mair, "Equal Citizens?" (Human Rights Watch, March 30, 2008). See: <http://www.hrw.org/en/news/2008/03/30/equal-citizens>.

²⁵ Aviad Glickman, "Report: State should recognize Bedouin villages", YNetnews.com, November 12, 2008, See: <http://www.ynet.co.il/english/articles/0,7340,L-3637006,00.html>.

²⁶ Press Release by the Regional Council for the Unrecognized Villages (RCUV), December 11, 2008, in: Adalah – The Legal Center for Arab Minority Rights in Israel, *Newsletter*, no. 55 (December 2008). See: http://www.adalah.org/newsletter/eng/dec08/Press_Release_Goldberg_Committee_RCUV.doc.

²⁷ Zafir Rinat & Jonathan Lis, "A guide for the perplexed: Israel's Bedouin resettlement bill", *Ha'aretz*, June 25, 2013. See: <http://www.haaretz.com/news/features/a-primer-on-the-proposed-bedouin-resettlement-in-the-negev.premium-1.519738>.

progress on the bill and drop the original draft).²⁸

- The plan is based on a proposal by a team that was headed by Ehud Praver, then head of policy planning in the Prime Minister's Office, to provide for the status and economic development of Bedouin communities in the Negev; resolve claims over land ownership; and establish a mechanism and timetables for binding implementation and enforcement.
- Specifically, the Praver-Begin outline proposes to relocate nearly 30,000 Bedouin to recognized communities in the Negev.²⁹
- It called to grant "compensation to Bedouin who have been resettled and claim ownership of their land, either in money or in land (up to half the extent of the area). It also proposes requiring that compensation be granted, for up to one quarter of the claim, to those who no longer own land because they were evicted from it by the state."³⁰
- "As for recognizing villages, the outline says recognition of unrecognized villages should be enabled, but with limits: Recognition should occur only within designated areas and in accordance with planning rules, which are designed to support future infrastructure."³¹
- "The outline applies the recommendations of a committee headed by former Supreme Court Justice Eliezer Goldberg. The committee was appointed to look at the issue of the Bedouin settlements and suggest solutions."³²
- "Human rights organizations and some representatives of the Bedouin community in the Negev argue that the new arrangement will make recognition of certain villages impossible, and will also lead to the eviction of tens of thousands of Bedouin from their homes."³³
- "The Bedouin also argue that the lands arrangement gives only partial compensation (in money or land) to the landowners, which is significantly less than Jewish petitioners have received in similar compensation agreements."³⁴
- According to Benny Begin, only a small part of the Bedouin population will be moved a very short distance from where they currently live. He says "the Bedouin will gain a significant improvement in their living conditions, and will at last have electricity and water infrastructure, as well as the use of public institutions."³⁵
- For a detailed survey of the most recent developments pertaining to the 2013 land settlement initiative by the government, see The Bill on the Arrangement of Bedouin Settlement in the Negev ("Praver-Begin Plan"): Background; Bill Rationale; Legislative Process; Main Principles of the Bill; Summary of the Bill; Compensation Formula Details; Criticism by human rights and planning organizations and by Bedouin representative; Criticism from right wing Jewish groups

²⁸ *Ha'aretz*, December 12, 2013.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Ibid.*

and writers.³⁶

Unrecognized Villages

- Definition: Bedouin settlements in the Negev and elsewhere in the Galilee, which the Israeli government does not recognize as legal settlements.
- As of 2012, 70,000-90,000 Bedouin lived in 35 unrecognized villages.³⁷
- Ten formerly “unrecognized villages” have been legalized by the government in recent years (see Abu Basma, below).
- Many of the tent-filled encampments have become more permanent sites over time: Orchards have been planted, huts have been replaced by buildings, and generators have been installed to enable the use of most household appliances.
- Nonetheless, most unrecognized villages lack basic utilities such as municipal administration, running water, sewage, electricity, health care services, schools, and paved roads. According to the Galilee Society survey, as of 2007 approximately one quarter of the inhabitants of these villages lack restrooms, showers, and kitchens. Less than 0.5% and 18% of the houses are connected to the nationwide sewage and water systems, respectively, and more than 90% are not connected to the nationwide electricity system and use private generators for electricity.³⁸
- The Regional Council of the Unrecognized Villages in the Negev (RCUV) was established in 1997. Its present chairman is Ibrahim Al-Wakili. The Council is active in participatory alternative planning and campaigning against the demolition of houses.³⁹

Government Development

- Between 1968 and 1990, the government of Israel resettled Bedouins in the Negev in seven newly-built towns: Tel-Sheva, Rahat, Kuseife, Ar'ara in the Negev, Segev Shalom, Hura and Lakiya, from areas vacated for military use, particularly after the signing of the peace agreement with Egypt in 1979.
- Approximately 67% of the entire Bedouin population of the Negev (according to 2011 figures)

³⁶ Inter-Agency Task Force, Legal Update, July 2013.

See: <http://www.iataskforce.org/news/bill-arrangement-bedouin-settlement-negev-prawer-begin-plan>

³⁷ Bill regulating Bedouin settlement in the negev No 761. May 27, 2013. See:

<http://knesset.gov.il/Laws/Data/BillGovernment/761/761.pdf>.

The Regional Council of Unrecognized Villages of Negev, *Master Plan for the Unrecognized Bedouin Villages in the Negev*, 2012. See: <http://www.geog.bgu.ac.il/members/yiftachel/reports/mekutzeret.pdf>.

See: <http://www.geog.bgu.ac.il/members/yiftachel/reports/mekutzeret.pdf>.

³⁸ *The Galilee Society Survey*, 2007, pp. 117-118.

³⁹ For details, see: http://www.rcuv.net/en/sub1.asp?sub_id=5.

live in these towns.⁴⁰

- The new towns were only partially successful. They were over-crowded, badly serviced, and deprived the inhabitants of their traditional lifestyle, nor were the Bedouins consulted in how to build these towns.
- According to a report published by the Negev Co-existence Forum (NCF), the population density of Bedouin towns and villages is 2.5 times greater than those of their Jewish counterparts.⁴¹
- The Abu Basma Regional Council was established in 2005, incorporating 11 Bedouin unrecognized and new villages: Abu Qrenat, Bir Hadaj, Qasr al-Sir, Mar'it, Drijat, Umm Batin, Mulada, al-Sayyid, al-Atrash, Makhul, Tirabin al-Sana.⁴²
- The government allocated NIS 470 million for Council development projects. Some 25,000 Bedouins live in these newly recognized settlements. Altogether, the government invested NIS 1.2 b. (2011) in the development of existing Bedouin townships in the Negev.
- During the course of 2012, about 56 million shekels was invested for the purpose of improving public transportation to the Negev Bedouin townships/villages, this is part of a five year program that consists of investing a total of 215 million shekels to promote the economic growth and development of the Bedouin of the Negev.⁴³
- In May 2005, the government approved the construction of 4,500 new housing units, out of a total 10,000 units, in the town of Rahat.
- On the eve of the 2009/10 schooling year, the government announced that seven new schools will be built in Bedouin settlements, such as Abu Basma, Hura and Kuseife, as part of a comprehensive development plan for advancing educational achievements in the Bedouin sector. According to a five year plan adopted by the government in 2007, 70 new classrooms will be constructed each year in the Abu Basma settlements.⁴⁴

Military Service

- Bedouin have volunteered to the Israeli Army since the early days of statehood. The IDF maintains an all-Bedouin combat battalion and a reconnaissance regiment with several hundred Bedouin soldiers and officers.

⁴⁰ CBS, Local Authorities in Israel – 2011. See: <http://www.cbs.gov.il/ishuvim/ishuv2011/bycode.xls>.

⁴¹ Ismael Abu Sa'ad, "Bedouin Towns in Israel at the Start of the 21st Century: The Negev Bedouin and the Failure of the Urban Resettlement Program." In: Shalom (Shuli) Dichter and As'ad Ghanem (editors), *The Sikkuy Report 2002-2003* (Jerusalem: Sikkuy – The Association of the advancement of Civic Equality in Israel, July 2003). See: <http://www.sikkuy.org.il/2003/english03/pdf/bedouinEn03.pdf>.

⁴² See: http://www.mmi.gov.il/static/HanhalaPirsumim/Beduin_information.pdf.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

Zman Hanegev Kol-Bi, *public transportation to the Negev Bedouin townships*, February 15, 2013.

⁴⁴ Yediot Ha-Negev, August 29, 2009.

- According to IDF official figures, 110 Bedouin soldiers have been killed in military service since 1948.⁴⁵
- Following the October 2000 events and the rift in Jewish-Arab relations in Israel, fewer Bedouin (from the Negev and the Galilee) have joined the IDF. In 2004, 400 Bedouin volunteered to military service, while in 2007, this figure dropped to only 222.⁴⁶ However, a sharp increase took place in 2008, with more than 400 Bedouin recruits for the IDF, due to intensive steps taken by leading government and IDF officials to encourage Bedouin youth to volunteer.⁴⁷
- In 2012, approximately 450 Bedouin volunteered to military service.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ See: <http://www.israelemb.org/education/publications/Religious%20Diversity.pdf>.

⁴⁶ *Yediot Acharonot*, January 1, 2008.

Ha'aretz, April 18, 2008.

⁴⁷ *Sheva*, March 19, 2009.

⁴⁸ Rotem Faso, *one in ten Bedouin soldier became an officer or sub-officer*, April 11, 2012. Israel Defense Forces (IDF) site. See: <http://www.idf.il/1133-15605-he/Dover.aspx>.