



Inter-Agency Task Force on Israeli Arab Issues

GOVERNMENT RESOLUTION 1279 | 2022-2026

NIS 5.2 Billion for Socio-Economic Development of Negev Bedouin

March 2022

On March 14, 2022, the Government of Israel passed GR-1279¹, a NIS 5.2 billion, five-year socio-economic-development plan for Bedouin society in the Negev. The budget for this plan was initially approved in November under Takadum, the comprehensive development package for Arab society in Israel. The actual plan, however, was finalized and approved subsequently.

The second consecutive five-year government plan for Negev Bedouin, GR-1279 has larger budgets and broader scope than the previous NIS 3 billion plan (GR-2397), 70% of which was ultimately allocated between 2017-2021,² and benefits from lessons learned and advances made over its implementation. GR-1279 is better set up for oversight and monitoring of budget implementation. It also benefits from additional layers of governance now involved in implementation and coordination on the national, regional, and local levels.

That said, socio-economic gaps and implementation challenges for Negev Bedouin society are significantly wider than those for Arab society at large. Much of the work over the course of this plan is expected to focus on strengthening capacities and coordination between government bodies and local leaders to advance programs on the ground.

BACKGROUND

Bedouin citizens of Israel comprise 20% of the Negev population and 14% of the overall Arab population.³ Negev Bedouin are by far the most socio-economically disadvantaged population in Israel. In addition, socio-economic conditions for Negev Bedouin are

¹ Government resolution 1279, "Plan for Socio-Economic Development for the Bedouin Population in the Negev 2022-2026." March 14, 2021 (Hebrew)

² IATF, "GOVERNMENT RESOLUTION 2397 Socio-Economic Development Plan for Negev Bedouin: 2017-2021" March 3, 2017.

³ Almasi, Oriana; Weissblei, Eti. "The Bedouin Population in the Negev: Assorted Statistics." Knesset Research and Information Center, November 16, 2020. (Hebrew)

exacerbated by ongoing land disputes with the state. Approximately 30% of the estimated 300,000-person Bedouin population live in unrecognized villages—makeshift communities on land that is not connected to public services or utilities such as water or electricity, and where construction is considered illegal and thus subject to demolition.⁴

In 2018, more than 55% of Negev Bedouin were living in poverty, with per capita income half that of other Arab communities in Israel and 22% of the national average.⁵ Negev Bedouin are also the youngest population in Israel—52% are 17 or under—with significant implications for poverty, education, housing, and employment efforts. In addition, generation gaps also accelerate the social and cultural changes related to urbanization and modernization that this historically rural population has been undergoing.⁶

Percentage of Population by Age Group (2020)⁷

Population	0-17	18-64	65 and above
Negev Bedouins	52%	46%	2%
All citizens	33%	55%	12%
All Arab citizens	38%	57%	5%

Source: Knesset Research and Information Center

BUDGET ALLOCATION

GR-1279 seeks to narrow gaps and encourage prosperity in Israeli society by “improving integration into Israeli employment and economy, strengthening local Bedouin authorities in the Negev, and developing a thriving civil society that produces complementary responses to the actions of government and local government.”⁸

The table below summarizes the budget distribution and allocations committed to by the plan. Some changes are anticipated as updated census data becomes available in 2023, due to changes in budget sources, and redirection over the course of implementation.

⁴ IATF, “Issue Summary: Negev Bedouin.” January 2018.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Almasi, Oriana; Weissblei, Eti. “The Bedouin Population in the Negev: Assorted Statistics.” *Knesset Research and Information Center*, November 16, 2020. (Hebrew)

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Government resolution 1279, “Plan for Socio-Economic Development for the Bedouin Population in the Negev 2022-2026.” March 14, 2021

Table 1. GR-1279 Budget Allocations Summary

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, EMPLOYMENT, YOUNG ADULTS		
Government Agencies: Ministry of Social Equality, Ministry of Labor, Innovation Authority, Israeli Employment Service, Ministry of Tourism, Ministry of Agriculture		
Funding Area	NIS	Description
Growth Engines and Industrial Areas	50 m	Emphasis on industry and industrial zones
	10	Business and technological innovation: Increasing productivity and encouraging growth
	57.5	Industrial areas: Planning and development, expansion, upgrading, preparation of programming surveys and strategic plans, marketing and promotion
	7	Tourism: Expansion and promotion of domestic tourism in Negev Bedouin communities on the basis of local initiatives
	24	Small and Medium-sized Business: Development of small and medium-sized businesses adapted to Negev Bedouin culture along with promotion of local employment initiatives
Income, Employment, & Young Adults	180.3 m	Employment integration centers and programs, increasing household income through financial literacy and rights realization
	10.5	Inclusion of Bedouin jobseekers in "Circles of Employment" and "Remote Work Grant" initiatives in addition to a dedicated training program
	30	NEETs and Gap Year programs: Programs for Bedouin youth (15-25) as a unique and culturally adapted track among "transition programs" for appropriate training and/or employment upon graduation from high school or college)
	37.5	STEM & High Tech: Educational programs to reduce gaps in science and technology and strengthen applied research in Bedouin society in the Negev. Development of human capital, integration into high-tech, and partnering with entrepreneurs to encourage the start-ups, R&D initiatives, and tech innovation
Agriculture	75 m	Health and Safety: Promote a plan to combat brucellosis bacterium, minimize disease in animals and humans, prevent the spread of the disease to livestock, dairy farms and humans across the country. Establishment of pens for livestock in accordance with legal land use to provide a solution for the herd breeders and improve living and sanitary conditions. Support sheep husbandry and foster veterinary infrastructure for the promotion of human, animal, and public health.
	10	Employment: Support joint ventures with civil society organizations promoting employment in agriculture
	8.75	Reduction of seasonal flood damage

LOCAL AUTHORITIES AND INFRASTRUCTURE		
Partner Agencies: Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Environmental Protection, the Bedouin Authority, Planning Administration, Ministry of Housing, Ministry of Transportation, Ministry of Energy, Water Authority		
Funding Area	NIS	Description
Budgets and Revenue	223.5 m	Organizational, economic, and infrastructure development aimed at generating revenue and improving governance in local Bedouin authorities
	192.5	Improving budget management and implementation in local Bedouin authorities
	55	Removal of legal, bureaucratic, and statutory barriers for implementation of economic development plans; evaluation, follow up on implementation, measurement of efficacy; hiring additional professional staff in local authorities
	5.5	Flexible budget for local authorities
Environment	96.25	Inclusion of Bedouin municipalities within Ministry of Environment planning
Clusters	15	Encourage promotion of regional collaborations facilitated by Negev clusters
New Settlements	15	Establishment, regulation and recognition of three new settlements: Rahme, 'Abda and Khashem-Zane including public services and urban planning
Accessibility	8.75	Accessibility of public institutions to population with disabilities

SOCIETY, COMMUNITY, AND PERSONAL SECURITY		
Government Agencies: Ministry of Sports and Culture, Ministry of Welfare, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Internal Security		
Funding Area	NIS	Description
Informal Education, Sports, and Culture	64 m	Promotion of programming in local authorities to strengthen society and expand informal education
	80	Establishment of public institutions such as community, culture and sports centers
	170	Promotion of competitive sports in Bedouin localities
Transportation	282.5	A masterplan for the development of transportation infrastructure and improved access to public transportation for Negev Bedouin
	35	Infrastructure development: improving access to service centers and transportation for students who live outside the jurisdiction of local authorities of Bedouin communities in the Negev (i.e., unrecognized villages)

Public Services and Utilities	250	Subsidizing residential development expenses: water lines, electricity, sewage, etc. Financing the costs of connecting new structures to water and sewage systems
	20	Development of infrastructure that supports settlement regulation such as service centers
	16.5	Assist localities in the development and restoration of infrastructure in older neighborhoods. Promote a regional master plan for cemeteries
Public Health	114	Reduce health disparities among Negev Bedouin
	40	Map needs of at-risk children from "birth to three" in Bedouin localities and tailor appropriate responses
Violence Prevention and Personal Security	71.75	Violence prevention, emergency preparedness, strengthening human capital, promoting shared society in the Negev and upgrading welfare service organizational structures
	100	Boost personal security, expand community policing centers, and strengthen the "Youth for a Secure Future" preparatory program via integration of Bedouins into internal security forces (in coordination with components of Resolution 549)
Strengthening Civil Sector	80	Improving social responses through civil society organizations in various fields
	16.1	Continue the operation of the Resilience Center for Bedouin Society in the Negev and the establishment of a community mediation center
	0.9	Promotion of equal rights of people with disabilities in Bedouin society
Financial Inclusion - Debt	10.75	Accessing debt management and debt settlement services in the Bedouin society
Welfare Rights and Accessibility	5.5	Promotion of rehabilitation procedures and care for dependent Bedouin populations. Dissemination of information about rights, entitlements, and rights-actualization for vulnerable Negev Bedouin

FORMAL EDUCATION AND HIGHER EDUCATION		
Government Agencies: Ministry of Education, Council for Higher Education, Ministry of Negev and Galil, Local Authorities		
Funding Area	NIS	Description
Classrooms and Schools	311 m	Construction of new classrooms and kindergartens, renovation of buildings, construction of PISGA centers
		Construction of a new supra-regional school for high-tech and STEM professions
		Establish a post-tribal youth village for Bedouin youth
Student achievements and well-being. Teacher quality.	190	Reducing dropout rates among students and promoting health and nutrition among students
		Promoting student skills and achievements with an emphasis on academic excellence and STEM professions
		Improving Arabic and Hebrew literacy
		Fostering student success through improved financial literacy to reduce likelihood of dropout
		Raising the quality and professionalism of human capital in educational institutions with an emphasis on improving management quality and nurturing middle management
Higher Education	80	Improving access to higher education

Rahat as Metropolitan Center

One key goal of GR-1279 is to position Rahat as a metropolitan center so that it can complement and replace Be'er Sheva as an accessible regional service provider and urban center for Negev Bedouin. Planned services include a magistrate court and a traditional Shari'a court, sports and culture centers, urban parks and recreational areas, a Bedouin theater, a Jewish-Arab theater, and significant housing development.

Part of this plan includes the second-ever Umbrella Agreement between government bodies and an Arab municipality for the construction of several thousand housing units, including the introduction of 6-8 story buildings for families and young adults.⁹ This agreement is expected to increase and diversify municipal revenues, improve services, and increase the city's socio-economic ranking, which currently fluctuates between 1-3

⁹ An "umbrella agreement" is an agreement reached between the State of Israel, the Israel Land Authority, the Ministry of Finance, and the Ministry of Construction and Housing, and local authorities to increase the supply of apartments in a relatively short period. In it, the state provides the local authority pre-financing to construct public buildings, educational institutions, and infrastructure, even before the project is marketed. The local authority grants developers a building permit within 90 days, and a set schedule is set for promoting the project. Usually, such agreements are concluded between two main actors, Israel's Land Authority and the local municipality, with the approval of all relevant state authorities. In the case of Rahat, a third party, the *Authority for Regulation of Bedouin Settlement in the Negev*, serves a developer due to unique local considerations. An umbrella agreement in Arab society is nearly unprecedented. In September 2021, the first one ever was signed with the municipality of Um El Fahem.

on a scale of 10. Rahat municipality and its economic corporation expressed hopes that these revenue streams would make the city economically sustainable, and not dependent on separate economic development budgets for growth in the future.

Unrecognized Villages

GR-1279 includes funding and expansion public services in unrecognized villages. The plan includes budgets for service centers in unrecognized villages and facilitates access to local services such as education, informal education, health, welfare, religious institutions, internal security (police service stations), and public transportation. A recent addition to a previous planning regulation (14/40) enables various state authorities to provide such services in unrecognized villages. This removes a legal barrier which, along with budgets, improves residents to realize rights despite land disputes.

OVERSIGHT AND IMPLEMENTATION

Challenges during the first five-year plan underscored gaps in local implementation capacities, as well as in coordination and oversight among national, regional, and local bodies. Today, GR-1279 benefits from changes in government administration of Bedouin affairs, creation of a national steering committee for the plan, and the development of professional councils and committees on the local level.

National Level

- **Ministry of Welfare, Senior Division of Socio-Economic Development for Bedouin Society in the Negev.** In 2021, the Ministry of Welfare became the administrative home for Bedouin Affairs and is now responsible for overall implementation of GR-1279. The office was moved to the Ministry of Welfare after migrating between several authorities in recent years (Ministry of Agriculture, Negev Galil office, Ministry of Economics). Due to high rate of poverty within the Negev Bedouin population, the move is seen as a significant step that optimizes government support for the demographic.
- **GR-1279 Steering Committee.** GR-1279 establishes a permanent steering committee to oversee plan implementation. The committee is comprised of senior stakeholders from multiple governmental ministries (Ministry of Welfare, Ministry of Finance, the Prime Minister's Office, and others) as well as the Negev Council for Arab Mayors. The committee's authority and responsibilities include:
 - Overseeing the implementing offices and authorities' work plans in all budgeted areas.
 - Advisory role to state authorities on the removal of legal, bureaucratic, and statutory barriers for implementation
 - Follow up and evaluation of ongoing implementation

- In cases of sub-use or unsuccessful use of GR 1279 budgets, the committee has the power to reallocate budgets within specific fields or between different programming areas
- Accompany all authorities involved in developing evaluation capacities
- In collaboration with the Central Bureau of Statistics, retrieve and map November 2022 census data and support adapting GR-1279 accordingly.

Local and Regional

The National Council for Arab Mayors (NCAM)¹⁰, has extended its professional support to the seven Bedouin municipalities and two regional councils in the Negev,¹¹ creating intermediary layers of governance, collaboration, and capacity-building toward GR-1279 implementation. Today, the following platforms exist:

- **Negev Council of Bedouin Mayors:** The forum is an official, representative body created over the course of the first five-year plan.¹² Towards GR-1279 it has an accompanying consultant assigned by NCAM and a permanent seat on the plan's national steering committee.
- **Forum of Negev Bedouin municipal treasurers:** A hands on, official body that works in collaboration with Shatil on managing municipal and regional budgets. It will be involved in distributing GR-1279 budgets and following up on their implementation. The platform, hosts nine treasurers, representing 7 Bedouin towns and two Bedouin regional council in the Negev.
- **Regional Council of Unrecognized Villages:** A representational and advocative body promoting issues of recognition and equality for residents of the unrecognized villages. The council is not recognized as an official regional council but has been working in collaboration with professionals from Shatil and Sikkuy for several years.
- **Negev Committee within NCAM:** a professional committee (not representational) within NCAM, focusing solely on Negev Bedouin municipal matters. The committee serves as the backbone of the three forums/councils listed above whose activities it ultimately seeks to incorporate into NCAM.

Clusters

The Eastern and Western Negev clusters, which cover the entire area of the unrecognized villages, are today an effective force for regional collaboration and are responsible for specific areas of plan implementation. Within GR 1279, Eastern and Western Negev clusters will combine forces to establish a new regional school for hi-

¹⁰ This National Council for Arab Mayors is a representative forum of all Arab local authorities and became a key professional and coordinating organization over the implementation of GR-922, the first major multiyear economic development plan for Arab society spanning 2016-2021.

¹¹ Rahat, Tel-Sheva, Hura, Lakiya, Segev-Shalom, Kseife, Arara Ba-Negev, El-Kassum and Neve-Midbar.

¹² The forum is currently directed by Salame El Atrash, Director of El Kassum regional council.

tech and STEM professions in Bedouin society. Along with budget and program management, regional oversight facilitates and enables collaboration between local authorities.

NATIONAL DEVELOPMENTS

Over the last several years, issues related to Bedouin society have gained several major platforms in the Knesset, increasing their prominence:

- **Interior Committee:** MK Mansour Abbas (Ra'am) Chairs the Knesset Interior Committee, an influential body that deals with issues relevant to GR-1279 such as housing, planning, local authorities, etc. Abbas is personally committed to the Bedouin community and is expected to continue ensuring that these issues receive attention on the national stage.
- **Knesset Committee for Arab Affairs:** MK Walid Taha, also of Ra'am, currently chairs the Knesset Committee for Arab Affairs. This committee has a central role in promoting all matters regarding Arab society, particularly issues regarding the Negev Bedouin including recognizing villages and resolving land disputes.

Looking Forward

GR-1279 is a larger and broader plan than its predecessor and stands to benefit from lessons learned and improvements made in oversight and implementation capacities. That said, with more public attention on the plan given the inclusion of Ra'am in the governing coalition, there are also risks of greater tensions and disappointment on the ground. The scale of socio-economic disparities affecting Negev Bedouin are such that that even exceptional implementation would nonetheless take time to significantly impact much of the population. Second, ongoing tensions surrounding unrecognized villages may increase with any effort to revive regularization efforts, potentially creating additional challenges to socio-economic development efforts and related political will.