

# MINISTRY OF LABOR AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS

## Perpetuating social and economic hardship for generations to come

Only 2 percent of daycare centers in Israel cater to Arab children.

There are huge gaps in early childhood education facilities in the Arab sector:

As of 2003, the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs oversaw some 1,700 daycare facilities, of which only 36 are in Arab communities.<sup>1</sup>

Daycare facilities supervised by the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs are the prevailing educational/caregiving facility for young children (ages 0-3) in Israel. The centers operate on a “long school day” format (roughly, 7:30 AM to 4:00 or 5:00 PM) and are intended to serve the children of working mothers and children referred by local social services departments.

The daycare center staff is responsible for providing babies and toddlers with a secure, safe environment for playing and sleeping, plus drinks, snacks, and a hot lunch. As an educational facility, although not under the purview of the Compulsory Education Law, the center is supposed to make a direct contribution to the healthy development of the child prior to his or her entry into kindergarten. In the center, each child acquires and develops skills in all the relevant areas: play, language, social interaction, sensory-motor, etc.

**Table 4:** Development of the daycare center system, 1990-2001\*

Year	Total number of daycare centers	Of these, number in Arab sector	Number of centers added during the year	Of these, number added in Arab sector
1990	1,170	1	-	-
1991	1,264	2	94	1
1992	1,300	3	36	2
1993	1,350	5	50	2
1994	1,606	8	256	3
1995	1,603	9	-3	1
1996	1,645	12	42	3
1997	1,720	13	75	1
1998	1,750	17	38	4
1999	1,865	19	115	2
2000	1,618	22	-247**	3
2001	1,650	23	38	1

\*Including kibbutzim and moshavim.

\*\* The reduced number resulted from the merger of smaller units and the transition to new buildings.

**Source:** 1. Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs Web site, [www.molsa.gov.il](http://www.molsa.gov.il)

2. Ministry of Education Budget Proposal 2003, [www.mof.gov.il](http://www.mof.gov.il)

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<sup>1</sup> Data from the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs.

A review of the data in Table 4, p.17, shows that, in the last decade, an average of about 40 new daycare centers were added annually - of which only one, on average, was added in the Arab sector. Between 1990 and 2001, 480 centers were added to the list of those overseen by the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, including only 23 in Arab localities - or 4.8 percent of all newly added centers.

In 2003, approximately 82,500 children are attending daycare centers supervised by the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, of whom only 1,750 are Arab children - 2.1 percent of all children in daycare centers.

The lack of early childhood educational frameworks has a negative impact on children's readiness for kindergarten and school and prevents the participation of more women in the workforce. But the dearth of educational facilities for younger children also has long-term detrimental effects. Studies have shown a link between quality education in the first few years of life and the prospects for escaping the cycle of poverty. Hence, the lack of daycare facilities today translates into continued social and economic hardship for the Arab population in Israel in the future as well, by perpetuating the gap between Arab and Jewish children.

The hypothesis linking quality early childhood education and improved prospects for breaking out of the cycle of poverty has been significantly validated by Head Start programs for preschoolers in the United States, an effort dating back to 1965 under President Lyndon Johnson's "Great Society" program. Such programs give preschoolers two years or more of intensive enrichment and school readiness preparation. Evaluation studies in the USA and elsewhere have found that, 30 years later, a high proportion of these former Head Start youngsters, all from disadvantaged family backgrounds, have attained university educations and better jobs, as compared with control groups from similar background who did not participate in such a preschool program. Furthermore, former Head Start children in the follow-up study were neither on welfare nor involved in criminal activity. Overall, their socio-economic status as adults was much more positive than that of their peers who had not participated in the program.<sup>2</sup>

Daycare centers have two principal target populations: children of working mothers, and children from disadvantaged backgrounds.

**Children of working mothers:** The proportion of Arab women in the labor force is relatively low. In 2001, it was 27.7 percent, as opposed to 53.7 percent of Jewish women.<sup>3</sup> Despite this low participation, there has been a 5.7 percent increase in Arab women's participation in the labor force since 1997, when the figure was only 22 percent. These relatively low levels are an outcome of social and cultural inhibitions along with the low demand for labor.<sup>4</sup>

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2 P. Toynbee, p.125.

3 Central Bureau of Statistics, "Statistical Abstract of Israel, 2002."

4 R. Wertzberg, "Background Information for Discussion of Women's Unemployment in the Arab Sector," Knesset Research & Information Center, 13 May 2001.

The existence of facilities serving children aged 0-3 provides a solution for potential working mothers and a source of encouragement for those who are undecided to look for work outside the home. Furthermore, developing the early childhood daycare services in Arab towns is likely to create a modest number of new jobs for Arab women.

The increased share of Arab women in the labor force in the last five years emphasizes the tremendous need for daycare facilities. The statistics on poverty, which are the second component of entitlement to daycare, highlight this need even further.

**Children from disadvantaged families:** According to National Insurance Institute data, as of 2001, 41.3 percent of all non-Jewish households were living under the poverty line even after taking into account income supplements, child allowances, etc.<sup>5</sup>

**In Arab localities, 50 percent of all young children referred to daycare centers and home-based daycare come from disadvantaged families<sup>6</sup>,** compared to a countrywide average in the last decade of only 20 percent.<sup>7</sup>

An educational, caregiving facility in early childhood provides a small window of opportunity for the children of disadvantaged families to acquire, early in their development, the skills and capacities that can help them succeed at later stages of the educational process. This improves their prospects for social mobility, higher education and an escape from the cycle of poverty.

**Daycare facilities in Jewish vs. Arab towns - highly unequal:**

In 2001, there was not a single daycare center under Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs supervision in five of the ten Arab cities in Israel (Rahat, Shfaram, Taibe, Baka el-Gharbiyye, and Sakhnin). Nazareth had four centers; and Umm al-Fahm, Tamra, Kalansua, and Tira each had one center under Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs supervision (see Table 5, below).

**Table 5:** Arab towns with daycare centers in 2001

Nazareth	4	Abu Snan	1	Tamra (village)	1	Beit Jann	1
Tira (Triangle)	1	Tarshiha	1	Kufr Yassif	1	Kufr Kama	1
Umm al-Fahm	1	Ma'ilia	1	Daburiyye	1	Kufr Kana	1
Kalansua	1	Acco	1	Rihania	1	Dir Hana	1
Tamra (city)	1	Fassuta	1	Beit Safafa	1	Arara	1

**Source:** 1. Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs Web site, [www.molsa.gov.il](http://www.molsa.gov.il)

In (Jewish) development towns, there is one daycare center for every 2,500 residents. In Nazareth, there is one daycare center for every 15,000 residents.

Table 6 (p.22) shows Jewish towns and Arab towns with similar-sized populations and/or similar socio-cultural profiles. In development towns, and in towns where there is a sizeable population or a majority of ultra-Orthodox residents (who tend, like the Arab population, to

<sup>5</sup> National Insurance Institute, "Indices of Poverty and Inequality in the Division of Income in the National Economy for 2001," November 2002.

<sup>6</sup> Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs Budget Proposal 2003.

<sup>7</sup> Abas, 2001.

have high birth rates and low socio-cultural profiles), the ratio of daycare facilities to residents is about 1:2,500. Meanwhile, in the city of Nazareth, the largest Arab city in Israel, the ratio is approximately 1:15,000.

Daycare centers in Rahat, 2001: None. Daycare centers in Beitar Elite, 2001: Seven.

At the end of 2001, there was not a single daycare center in the Bedouin city of Rahat in the Negev, which had a population of 32,400, and the lowest socio-economic ranking (Cluster 1) for localities nationwide. In the same year, there were seven daycare centers in the ultra-Orthodox town of Beitar Elite, for its 17,300 residents.

**Table 6:** Daycare centers in Jewish and Arab communities (Data for 2001)

Daycare centers in Arab communities				Daycare centers in Jewish communities			
Locality	Pop. (000)	Cluster*	Daycare Centers	Locality	Pop. (000)	Cluster*	Daycare Centers
Rahat	32.4	1	0	Beitar Elite	17.3	1	7
Umm al-Fahm	36.8	2	1	Tiberias	39.9	4	14
Tamra	23.3	2	1	Netivot	21.1	2	6
Tira	18.8	4	1	Kiryat Malachi	19.1	3	8
Kalansua	15	2	1	Or Akiva	15.3	3	5
Nazareth	60.6	3	4	Kiryat Gat	48.2	4	23
Shfaram	29.5	3	0	Safed	25.9	4	12
Taibe	29.6	3	0	Migdal Ha'emek	24.1	4	11
Baka el-Gharbiyye	19.2	3	0	Sderot	19.2	3	7
Sakhnin	22.4	2	0	Ofakim	23.1	2	6
Kufr Kana	15.6	2	1	Beit She'an	15.7	4	6
Abu Snen	10.6	3	1	Yeruham	8.7	3	4
Fassuta	2.8	5	1	Emanuel	3.0	2	1
Kufr Yassif	7.7	4	1	Shlomi	4.2	4	4
Daburiyye	7.5	4	1	El'ad	8.9	4	4
Beit Jann	9.3	3	1	Hatzor Haglilit	8.5	4	4

**Source:** Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs Web site, [www.molsa.gov.il](http://www.molsa.gov.il)

### Daycare centers vs. home-based daycare

In 2000, some 79,500 children in Israel were enrolled in daycare centers under the supervision of the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, including 1,520 (1.9 percent) Arab children. In the same year, 4,350 Arab children were being cared for in 870 home-based daycare environments, about half of all children in home-based daycare in Israel. This year, most Arab preschoolers (4,350 of a total of 5,870) were in home-based daycare, compared with the majority of Jewish children, who were in daycare centers. This phenomenon was discussed by Swirsky et al. (Adva Center, 2001)<sup>8</sup>, which emphasized the clear educational advantage of a formal facility over home-based daycare.

<sup>8</sup> Swirsky et al., "Looking at the Budget of the State of Israel, 2002."

**Table 7:** Home-based daycare establishments in the Arab sector in 2000

<b>Region</b>	<b>No. home-based daycare facilities</b>
Haifa and Northern Israel	611
Tel Aviv and Central Israel	116
Jerusalem and Southern Israel	143
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>870</b>

**Source:** Abas, Gideon, Survey of Activities of the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs in the Arab and Druze Sector in 2000

Home-based daycare does have two advantages over formal daycare facilities: First, the home-based arrangement is personal and intimate - a care-giving and educational environment for about five toddlers, compared with twenty or more children in a daycare facility. Secondly, a home-based arrangement can be set up in a fairly short time and with relatively little investment. The only training required is 220 hours for the caregiver and some basic equipment for the home in which the children will be served.

A formal daycare facility, on the other hand, requires a dedicated building, and 700 hours of training per staffer. Herein also lies the advantage of the formal facility, since we may expect the level of care and education provided to be higher than that in a home-based establishment. The principle reason there are so few formal facilities in Arab communities is the difficulty locally in marshalling the resources required to establish centers consonant with the standards and requirements of the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, in order to enjoy ministry certification, funding, and support. Swirsky et al. (2001) also notes that when the Ministry of Housing and Construction builds a Jewish neighborhood of at least 1,000 housing units, it also allocates funding for the construction of a daycare facility. Since the Ministry of Housing does not budget construction projects of this scope (1,000+ residential units) for the Arab population, this source of funding is closed to Arab communities.

## **Summary**

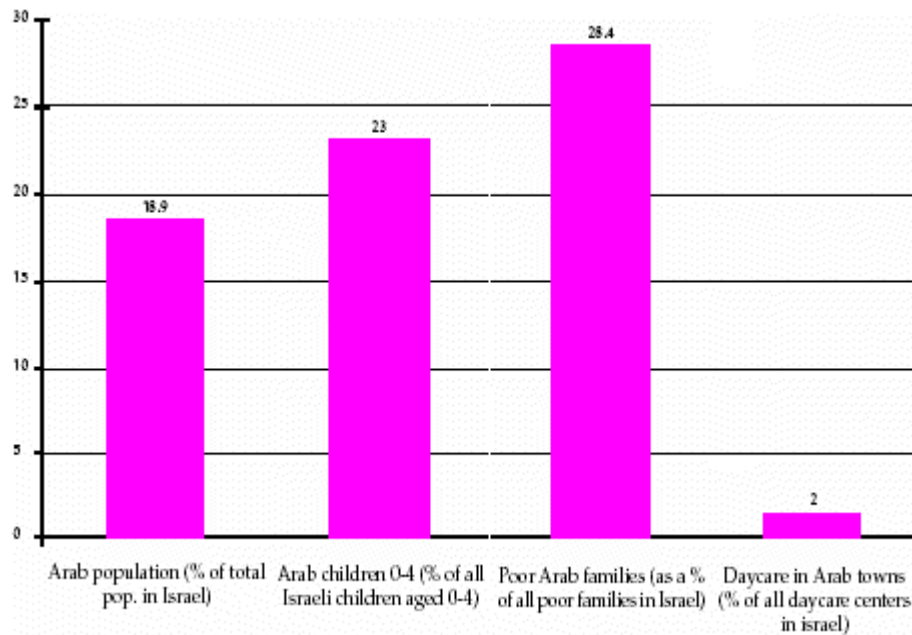
Far fewer daycare facilities supervised by the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs exist in the Arab sector than in the Jewish sector. The gap is particularly glaring if we compare Arab communities and Jewish communities with similar socio-economic profiles and birth rates. In many of the Arab cities, including the planned city of Rahat, there is not a single daycare facility under ministry supervision, whereas there is one ministry-supervised daycare facility for every 2,500 residents in (Jewish) development towns and mainly ultra-Orthodox Jewish communities.

The lack of high-quality, early childhood educational facilities is liable to have continuing negative consequences for the Arab community. This situation makes it very difficult for

mothers to be employed outside the home, which is a particular hardship during the current economic recession, when the additional income would be welcome. A great many Arab children are thus also denied the opportunity to acquire, early in life, the skills we know are crucial for successfully breaking out of the cycle of disadvantage and poverty. Their developmental education and skills are liable to suffer.

### Diagram 10

The Arab sector's share of all daycare centers in Israel today, compared with other relevant indices (%)



**Sources:** Central Bureau of Statistics; Statistical Yearbook of Israel 2002; National Insurance Institute, "Indices of Poverty and Inequality in the Division of Income in Israel, 2001 - Principal Findings," November 2002; Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs.



Regardless of how the calculation is made - Arab population as a percentage of the overall population (18.9 percent), Arab children as a percentage of the number of children in the country (23 percent), or Arab families living in poverty as a percentage of all Israeli families living in poverty (28.4 percent) - there should be at least a few hundred daycare centers today in Arab towns. In fact, however, of approximately 1,700 centers in the entire country, only 36 daycare centers are located in Arab towns. This certainly does not adequately address the situation.

Between 2001 and 2003, 13 new daycare centers were built in Arab towns, but these are 13 miniscule dots in an ocean of need. The state must do its part to break the cycle of poverty and redress the lack of equal educational opportunity, not only in the development towns and the ultra-Orthodox communities, but also in Arab towns. This implies more than simply improving the existing situation, but rather establishing an extensive infrastructure of daycare in Arab towns.

Proper redress will require a special effort, separately budgeted by the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs and the Ministry of Housing. Such a campaign would enable the accelerated establishment of daycare centers in Arab towns for entitled children. A substantial change in the daycare center situation should provide a significant boost both for women's employment outside the home and for the children's own development.

## Sources

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