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# Main Barriers in Arab Women's Employment in Israel

Public Transportation and Childcare

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Adv. Shirin Batshon

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# **Main Barriers in Arab Women's Employment in Israel**

## **Public Transportation and Childcare**

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## Executive Summary\*

This report reviews the barriers that Arab women face in integrating into Israel's employment market. It focuses on two major barriers, about which academic and professional literature are of one mind with regard to their impact: the lack of adequate public transportation and the lack of facilities for children under the age of three (toddler childcare centers). This report offers concrete legislative proposals to improve both.

In the last two decades, the incorporation and inclusion of Arab women into the employment market became a key issue on the agenda of numerous stakeholders, such as civil society organizations (hereinafter: CSOs), academia, ministries, the State Comptroller, and philanthropies. Many studies and reports by various entities looked into the issue and proposed policy changes to improve the current situation. During the same time, Israeli governments changed their policy and set goals for increasing Arab women's participation in the employment market. Driving this change was the resultant loss to the Israeli economy, as well as the desire to approximate the level of participation in the countries of the OECD, which Israel sought to join in the early 2000s. This is a critical point, as it illustrates how a political-social-gender issue turns into a matter of public interest as soon as the state realizes the harm it inflicts on its economic and public interests.

The introductory chapter reviews the current situation, presents the latest data, and shows that the real problem lies in long-standing **structural and political barriers** and the poor **opportunity structure** faced by Arab women. These barriers, along with proposals for policy changes, have been debated at length in a variety of studies, whose conclusions are summarized in this report.

The chapter dealing with government programs briefly reviews the implementation of some of them, such as the creation of placement and recruitment hubs (known as Rayan Centers) and the encouragement of small business entrepreneurship. These programs, coupled with the allocation of budgets to Arab society, helped raise the employment rate of Arab women but still proved insufficient. For example, some of the goals they set were never achieved

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I would like to thank the steering team of this study: Prof. Nihaya Daoud and Dr. Raghda Alnabilsy. Special thanks to Adv. Eitay Mack, who drafted the legislative proposals attached as appendices herein. My deepest gratitude to Prof. Amalia Sa'ar and to Dr. Zohar Kohavi for their academic guidance.

and some promised budgets were never fully allocated. The following two chapters discuss the aforementioned two major barriers and suggest possible solutions, including concrete legislative proposals.

Reality has proved that the state's overarching duty to social equality, as stipulated in Supreme Court rulings, has not conferred substantive equality on Israel's Arab citizens. To this day, efforts to reduce the gaps between Arab and Jewish society and to preserve the rights of the entire population are seen as an economic and foreign policy interests and not necessarily as a continuous obligation. Moreover, these efforts have in recent years taken the form of five-year plans, which do not manifestly change the perception about inequality and discrimination towards Arab society. Five-year plans, however good they may be, are an uncommon way to correct distortions and reduce inequalities. Given the huge disparities between the Arab and Jewish population, they do not ensure the equal fulfillment of rights or allocation of resources. Five-year plans are inherently subject to modification and approval of specific allocations, some of which end up not being wholly utilized. As the report shows, even if the government's goals were to be realized in full, Arab women would still be at the bottom of the employment scale and the gaps between them and Jewish women would persist.

To improve the fulfillment of the civil rights of Arab citizens, Zulat proposes a series of amendments to laws and regulations that would strengthen the obligation to factor equality into decisions pertaining to the approval, creation, budgeting, and subsidization of childcare centers and transportation infrastructure. These proposals could enhance oversight by CSOs and public authorities (especially the legislature and the judiciary) over the implementation of equality and the reduction/expansion of inequalities.

## Introduction

In the last two decades, the integration of Arab women into the labor market became a key issue on the agenda of numerous bodies, such as CSOs, academia, ministries, the State Comptroller, and philanthropies. Academic and professional literature abounds with research and reports on the issue and with proposals for policy changes to improve the existing situation.

The participation rate of Arab women in the labor market has been rising steadily in the last two decades, but it is still low compared to Jewish women and Arab men. It stood at 19.8% in 2001, and almost doubled to 38.2% by 2018. Nevertheless, the gap between them and Jewish women persisted and even widened due to a greater increase in the participation of the latter.<sup>1</sup> Arab women's position remains vulnerable, among other things, because they are employed in low-income professions (social work, teaching, healthcare, housekeeping) and part-time jobs, and due to non-enforcement of their rights at work. This vulnerability was exacerbated during the Covid-19 crisis, when many of them were placed on unpaid leave and lost their jobs.<sup>2</sup> It should be emphasized that Arab women are not a monolithic group; some are more vulnerable than others, such as women without an academic education, manual and physical laborers, and Bedouin women whose employment rate is the lowest.<sup>3</sup>

**Arab women are not a monolithic group; some are more vulnerable than others, such as women without an academic education, manual and physical laborers, and Bedouin women whose employment rate is the lowest**

Several government resolutions passed in recent years set higher participation targets for Arab women's employment. These include Resolution No. 550: Economic Plan for Reducing the Gaps in Arab Society (hereinafter: "The Five-Year Plan"), which set an employment target of 46.3% for Arab women by 2026.<sup>4</sup>

In this report we will map the general situation based on the studies published to date. We will also discuss the barriers that Arab women face in joining Israel's employment market, focusing on the two major ones: the lack of adequate public transportation and the lack of

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<sup>1</sup> Dr. Nasreen Haddad Haj-Yahya, Dr. Muhammed Khalaily, Dr. Arik Rudnitzky, and Ben Fargeon, [Statistical Report on Arab Society in Israel: 2021](#), *Israel Democracy Institute*, 17 March 2022.

<sup>2</sup> Women's Team, [Position Paper #1: Impact of Corona Crisis on Employment of Arab and ultra-Orthodox Women](#), *Crisis Expert Teams*, May 2020 (Hebrew).

<sup>3</sup> Shelly Mizrahi-Simon and Orly Almagor-Lotan, [Employment of Arab Women](#), *Knesset Research and Information Center*, 31 July 2016 (Hebrew); Jerry Almo-Capital and Orly Almagor-Lotan, [Data on Employment of Arab Women, Particularly Negev Bedouin](#), *Knesset Research and Information Center*, 27 February 2022 (Hebrew).

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

facilities for children under the age of three (toddler childcare centers), and we will offer concrete legislative proposals to alleviate and improve both.

Before we begin the mapping, we would like to draw attention to three central points framing the discussion: structural and political barriers, a turning point in Israeli government policy, and academics in the employment market.

## Structural and Political Barriers

Countless governmental and non-governmental studies indicate that Arab society suffers from structural and institutional discrimination in the education system, as well as in geographical distance from employment centers, low level of employment-supporting infrastructure, and barriers in the pre-labor market stages and in the labor market itself.<sup>5</sup> One of the main elements of the long-standing institutionalized discrimination against Arab society consisted of blocking its integration into the Israeli economy, selectively training it for such an integration, and preserving it as an underdeveloped ethno-national enclave.<sup>6</sup> The 2016 State Comptroller Annual Report asserts that the Arab population has consequently suffered from continuous discrimination as the state failed to implement the principle of substantive equality between its Jewish and Arab citizens.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, despite a certain change in government policy in recent years (we will expand on this point later), the employment situation in Arab society remains bleak and worrisome, government actions are inadequate and ineffective, allocated budgets are not used, and program goals are not achieved.<sup>8</sup>

**One of the main elements of the long-standing institutionalized discrimination against Arab society consisted of blocking its integration into the Israeli economy, selectively training it for such an integration, and preserving it as an underdeveloped ethno-national enclave**

The structural and political barriers that gave rise to the huge economic and social disparities between Arab and Jewish society differ in their manifestation between women and men. In Arab women it is reflected in low employment rates as a result of intersecting and

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<sup>5</sup> Eran Yashiv and Nitsa Kasir, [Economy of Israel's Arab Society](#), in: Lights and Shades in Market Economy: The Israeli Economy 1995-2017, *Am Oved Publishing House and Maurice Falk Institute for Economic Research in Israel*, 2020 (Hebrew).

<sup>6</sup> Amalia Sa'ar, [Palestinian-Israeli Women's Employment: The Mystery of Their Absence and the Way to Their Integration Into the Formal Labor Force](#), *Haifa's University Sociology and Anthropology Department*, 2011 (Hebrew).

<sup>7</sup> [State's Actions To Encourage Integration of Arab Population in Labor Force](#), *State Comptroller's Annual Report*, 24 May 2016 (Hebrew).

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

cumulative marginalization (both as women and as a national minority),<sup>9</sup> while in Arab men it is evidenced in low-skill and low-income occupations, high unemployment rates, and relatively early retirement (compared to Jewish men).<sup>10</sup> The situation of Arab men further worsened during the Covid-19 crisis, when the employment rate of those without a higher education dropped dramatically.<sup>11</sup> Notwithstanding all the above and the overall increase in employment rates of Arab women in recent years, recent Central Bureau of Statistics data for 2022 show that they remain at the bottom of the employment scale, ahead only of persons unemployed due to disability.<sup>12</sup>

Despite attempts to link the low employment rate of Arab women to "cultural reasons" or to their "inferior status" in Arab society, most of the studies and reports written in Israel attest to a more complex situation and to many barriers that prevent them from joining the employment market or make such a move viable.

For example, the authors of the Bank of Israel Annual Report-2008 attempted to provide an explanation for the low participation of Arab women by attributing it to patriarchal norms in Arab society and to "traditional norms":

The source of this variance is apparently differences between "modern" and "traditional" women with respect to education, family status, number of children and skill levels (in, for example, English and computers). Also pointing in this direction is the increase in the participant rate over time as levels of education rise and as other cultural changes take place. The abovementioned finding, according to which the participation rates of women are very different from what is commonly observed in Western countries and among Jewish women in Israel and are similar to the rates in Muslim countries, strengthens the conclusion that cultural influences are playing a major role.<sup>13</sup>

However, a study conducted by Dr. Yosef Jabarin in the early 2000s refutes this claim and finds that the proportion of Arab women in Israel's workforce is significantly lower than in Arab and developing countries. Based on a sample of 1,500 Arab women, the study found that the main reason for the low numbers was the lack of jobs, and that the vast

**Contrary to the talk about "cultural gaps", the real problem lies in long-standing structural and political barriers and in the poor opportunities that Arab women have in the employment market in Israel.**

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<sup>9</sup> Haj-Yahya et al 2022, footnote #1.

<sup>10</sup> Bank of Israel Annual Report-2008: *The Labor Market*, Bank of Israel, 19 April 2009.

<sup>11</sup> Shahr Ilan, *Not Only During Corona Crisis: Employment Rate of Arab Men Drops Dramatically*, *Calcalist*, 6 April 2021 (Hebrew).

<sup>12</sup> *Progress Report on Government Employment Targets (Table)*, Central Bureau of Statistics, 2022 (Hebrew).

<sup>13</sup> Bank of Israel 2008, footnote #10.



majority of unemployed women (73%) prefer to work in their place of residence and close to their homes due to their multiple other roles. The study found that 43% of unemployed Arab women were ready to start working immediately, if a job became available.<sup>14</sup>

Prof. Amalia Sa'ar's numerous studies on Arab women's employment also indicate that, contrary to the talk about "cultural gaps," which manipulatively uses the cultural characteristics of Arab society as the supposed explanation for the economic and social gaps with Jewish society, the real problem lies in the long-standing structural and political barriers and in the poor opportunities available to them in the Israeli labor market. Given the lack of suitable jobs, the absence of reliable and accessible employment-supporting infrastructures, and the low wages, the cost of women joining the formal workforce is too high for most families. The "opportunity cost" calculation of maximum return for work, both monetary and non-monetary (such as a sense of satisfaction versus personal and social costs), leads to the conclusion that Arab women continue to be absent from the official workforce because this remains unviable in the present conditions.<sup>15</sup>

Therefore, in order for the cost of joining the official workforce to become worthwhile, the state needs to remove existing barriers by means of the following measures.<sup>16</sup>

- Massive development of employment opportunities in Arab localities.
- Development of employment-supporting infrastructures, especially reliable and financially accessible childcare facilities and adequate public transportation.
- Proactive enforcement of labor laws and laws against discrimination in the labor market.
- Encouraging employers to hire Arab women and provide them with trainings for proper inclusion of Arab women.<sup>17</sup>

## Turning Point in Israeli Government Policy

In the last two decades, Israeli governments changed their policy with regard to the employment of the Arab population, particularly the incorporation of Arab women in the labor market. The issue rose to the public agenda when the losses to the Israeli economy as

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<sup>14</sup> Dr. Yosef Jabarin, [Employment of Israel's Arabs: The Challenge of Israel's Economy](#), 18th Caesarea Economic Policy Planning Forum and Israel Democracy Institute, June 2010 (Hebrew).

<sup>15</sup> Amalia Sa'ar, [The Gender Contract Under Neoliberalism: Palestinian Israeli Women's Labor Force Participation](#), *Feminist Economics*, 20 June 2016.

<sup>16</sup> Sa'ar 2022, footnote #6; Knesset Research and Information Center 2016, footnote #3.

<sup>17</sup> An Adva Center report points to unconscious biases on the part of managers, including racist remarks by potential employers, as a barrier to the integration of women into the Israeli employment market. See Barbara Swirski, Noga Dagan-Buzaglo, and Yael Hasson, [A Look at Employers: Employment of Arab, Ultra-Orthodox, and Ethiopian Women](#), *Adva Center*, 17 October 2021 (Hebrew).

a result of the low employment rate of Arab and ultra-Orthodox women grew noticeable.<sup>18</sup> Many studies and reports started to point to the benefits of integrating Arab women into the labor force, both for them and their households and for significantly increasing Israel's GDP.<sup>19</sup> In 2007, as negotiations began for Israel's accession to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD),<sup>20</sup> the issue of Arab women's employment gained public prominence due to its impact on Israel's ranking of employment and poverty rates conducted by OECD.

**The issue of Arab women's employment rose to the public agenda in 2007, as negotiations began for Israel's accession to the OECD**

A chart contained in the Bank of Israel Annual Report-2008 appears to show that the employment rates of men and women (excluding ultra-Orthodox and Arabs) were above the target set by the government, while that of Arab men was close to it. However, despite an increase in preceding years, the employment rate of Arab and ultra-Orthodox women was still considerably lower than the general target, set in accordance with OECD standards.<sup>21</sup> The Labor Force Participation Rate table shows Arab women at the bottom of the chart, with a participation rate of a mere 22.6% (compared to the 71% target set for the main working ages).<sup>22</sup>

The impact of the global economic crisis in 2008, the position of Arab women at the bottom of the scale, the impact on the general employment rate, and Israel's desire to equate local figures with OECD standards constituted decisive factors incentivizing the government to place the issue on the public agenda. Thus, alongside the intense ethnic nationalism that excluded Arab citizens from the political arena and the enactment of the Nationality Law, Israel took steps to reduce the economic gaps between Arabs and Jews, promote diversity, and integrate the Arab population in the labor force as an idea that is good for the economy.<sup>23</sup>

The turning point that explains the new policy toward Arab women is critical and important as it illustrates how a political, social, and gender issue becomes a matter of public interest the moment the state realizes the damage to the economy. It is this economic interest that motivated decision-makers to allocate vast budgets and set goals in the current five-

**The turning point that explains the new policy toward Arab women illustrates how a political, social, and gender issue becomes a matter of public interest the moment the state realizes the damage to its economic and public interest**

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<sup>18</sup> Mickey Peled, *Women's Unemployment Costs State NIS 1.6 Billion Annually*, *Calcalist*, 27 January 2014 (Hebrew).

<sup>19</sup> Knesset Research and Information Center 2016, footnote #3.

<sup>20</sup> *Israel's Accession to the OECD*, *Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development*, 7 September 2010.

<sup>21</sup> Bank of Israel 2008, footnote #10.

<sup>22</sup> *Arab Women's Employment Rate: A Mere 22.6%*, *Ynet*, 12 April 2009 (Hebrew).

<sup>23</sup> Amalia Sa'ar, *Palestinian Women in the Israeli Workforce and the Idea of Economic Citizenship*, *Economic Sociology*, The European Electronic Newsletter, March 2015.

year economic plan for Arab society (Government Resolution No. 550). However, as we will elaborate later, five-year plans do not really remedy the inequality between Arab and Jewish citizens, given that they are driven by Israel's economic and foreign policy interests and do not necessarily aim to change the attitude about the state's permanent obligation to see to the rights of one and all equally.

## Academic Women in The Employment Market

Governmental and non-governmental studies have found that the level of higher education in Israeli Arab society has been steadily rising, but gaps with Jewish society persist. While 15% of the Arab population has an academic degree, the figure is almost double among the Jewish population (33%). Disparities in education affect not only the ability to integrate into the labor market, but also the earning capacity and working conditions of the Arab population.<sup>24</sup> What's more, notwithstanding the considerable increase in their wages, the corresponding increase among the Jewish population has been greater and the gaps between the two populations have widened.<sup>25</sup>

In the last two decades, the number of Arab students seeking bachelor's degrees, especially among women, has been constantly growing. The number of undergraduate female students is almost double that of Arab men, but the gap narrows for master's degrees and reverts again for doctoral students.<sup>26</sup>

Research about the employment of Arab women academics in Israel indicates that many of the barriers mentioned in this report and in countless governmental and non-governmental studies apply also to this group, as they are forced to deal with the same lack of infrastructure and inadequate public transportation, low wages, and the hardships of combining a paid job with their role as mothers and caregivers at home.<sup>27</sup> Therefore, the progress made by Arab women in education is incompatible with their dismal employment situation.<sup>28</sup>

Studies have shown that finding a job close to home or in its immediate vicinity also influences women's choice of career. Accordingly, many Arab women aspire to a job that fits in with having a family, caring for children, and is located nearby, which is why some choose traditional professions such as teaching.<sup>29</sup> In the absence of supportive conditions from the

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<sup>24</sup> Haj-Yahya et al 2021, footnote #1.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Amalia Sa'ar and Hawazin Younis, [Diversity: Palestinian-Israeli Career Women](#), *Open University and Ben-Gurion University*, June 2021 (Hebrew).

<sup>27</sup> Yaser Awad, [Arab Academic Women in the Employment Market](#), *Women Against Violence*, 2007 (Arabic).

<sup>28</sup> Jabarin 2010, footnote #14.

<sup>29</sup> Khaled Abu-Asba, [Arab Academic Women Unemployed in Israel: 2018 Situation Report and Proposed Model for Intervention](#), Massar Institute and National Insurance Institute, November 2018 (Hebrew).

state, such as public transportation and childcare centers, many Arab women find it difficult to break the glass ceiling given that they are expected to retain their gender roles at home.<sup>30</sup>

The work-life balance question and the expectation from women to bear a greater share of the burden of childcare and housework is not exclusive to Arab women and affects women in Israel and around the world. The social contract between women and men, whereby women are still expected to assume the brunt of housework and childcare,<sup>31</sup> severely limits women's disposition toward a paid job and the types of work they can choose from, especially due to the lack of high-quality and accessible public facilities such as subsidized childcare and daycare centers. The consequences are reflected in gender gaps in income and assets, limited bargaining power in the labor market, and inadequate access to social security and retirement savings.<sup>32</sup>

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Studies indicate that women's workplace vulnerability worsened during the Covid-19 crisis because of the prolonged stays at home to care for children, forced upon them as schools remained closed during the lockdown. OECD data also show that women dedicate almost twice as much time to housework than men.<sup>33</sup>

Arab women academics are extremely troubled by the career-home balance question and the roles expected of them, what Sa'ar and Hawazin Younis call the "gender contract." While their native surroundings do not prevent them from getting a paid job, the modern gender contract invites them to do so in addition to housework, and not as a drastic change in the division of labor between women and men.<sup>34</sup>

Thus, the increasing legitimacy for Arab women getting a paid job and an academic education has not reduced their responsibility for the emotional and physical work of caring for the family, an obligation that many men continue to shirk or at most are willing to share sporadically. Women's success in integrating into the workforce depends on their ability to find satisfactory solutions for the housework and childcare. Sometimes these solutions entail working double shifts, both at home and outside it, and hiring external caretakers if possible.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Carole Pateman, *The Sexual Contract*, Polity Press, 1988.

<sup>32</sup> Yael Hasson, *The Care Economy: Ideas That Are Changing the World*, *Telem*, 7 January 2022 (Hebrew).

<sup>33</sup> Ido Avgar, *Women Under Corona: Data Collected Ahead of International Women's Day 2021*, *Knesset Research and Information Center*, 7 March 2021 (Hebrew).

<sup>34</sup> Sa'ar 2011, footnote #6.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

In their book *Diversity: Palestinian Career Women in Israel*, Sa'ar and Younis argue that Arab women academics in prestigious professions (law, medicine, engineering) have much higher chances of being employed, but still face multiple barriers that make their situation in the labor market vulnerable. They divide these barriers into two main types: barriers rooted in the domestic environment (the fact that working women continue to be the main person responsible for the housework, a task from which men are exempt) and a work environment rife with intersecting national and gender discrimination. In order to increase their participation rate, the integration of Arab women into the labor market must come to be viable and they must be provided with supportive conditions.<sup>36</sup>

All the above clearly indicates that the incentive for Arab women to join the labor market is affected by the barriers they face and by a problematic opportunity structure.

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<sup>36</sup> Sa'ar and Younis 2021, footnote #26.

## Government Programs to Encourage Employment of Arab Women

This chapter reviews examples of various government programs to encourage the employment of Arab women, including the creation of placement and recruitment hubs (Rayan Centers) and promotion of small entrepreneurship. Although these programs brought the issue of Arab women's employment to the public agenda, were backed by the allocation of budgets to Arab society, and even helped improve employment rates in the last decade, they still came up short as some of their goals were never achieved and the promised budgets were never fully allocated.

### Examples of Limitations of Government Programs

As of the early 2000s, upon the intensified public debate about the low employment rate of Arab women and its effect on the economy, Israeli governments initiated various programs aimed at increasing their participation rate. Below are the main government resolutions setting higher employment targets for Arab women:

- Government Resolution No. 1994 of July 2010: Set employment targets for the years 2010–2020, ending with a 40% participation rate by 2020.<sup>37</sup>
- Government Resolution No. 198 of August 2021: Set a participation rate of 53% by 2030.<sup>38</sup>
- Government Resolution No. 550 of October 2021 (The Five-Year Plan): Set a participation rate of 46.3% for Arab women of prime working age by 2026.<sup>39</sup>

It should be noted that although these resolutions essentially seek to reduce the gaps in workforce participation, their impact has been limited since they cannot change the overall inequality between Arab and Jewish citizens and the targets set are still far from closing the disparities. Some claim that the inequality between the two populations in terms of employment rates and average salary has even broadened in recent years due to a rise in the employment rate of Jewish society.<sup>40</sup>

**It should be noted that although these resolutions essentially seek to reduce the gaps in workforce participation, their impact has been limited since they cannot change the overall inequality between Arab and Jewish citizens**

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<sup>37</sup> [Employment Targets for 2010–2020: Government Resolution No. 1994](#), Prime Minister's Office, 15 July 2010 (Hebrew).

<sup>38</sup> [Economic Plan for 2021–2022: Government Resolution No. 198](#), Prime Minister's Office, 1 August 2021 (Hebrew).

<sup>39</sup> [Economic Plan for Reducing Gaps in Arab Society by 2026: Government Resolution No. 550](#), Prime Minister's Office, 24 October 2021 (Hebrew).

<sup>40</sup> Dr. Nasreen Haddad Haj-Yahya, Aiman Saif, Nitsa Kasir, and Ben Fargeon, [An Employment-Promotion Plan for Arab Society](#), Israel Democracy Institute, July 2021 (Hebrew).

For example, the participation rate supposed to be achieved by 2030 is 53%, at a time when the participation rate for Jewish women stands at 83% already today.<sup>41</sup> This shows that even if the goals set by the government are achieved, the inequality between the two populations will persist and Arab women will still be at the bottom of Israel's employment participation scale.

This is compounded by the limited effect of the incentive programs launched by the state. The 2016 State Comptroller Report notes that government plans came up short, some were inadequate and ineffective, and what's more, no strategic plan existed to deal with the problem.<sup>42</sup> In addition, the budgets allocated to various programs were never fully utilized nor were their goals achieved. Bottom line, the report states, despite the existence of various government programs to encourage employment in Arab society, these have done nothing to reduce the gaps with Jewish society or solve the problem of discrimination against Arab society:

The government programs to reduce employment gaps were inadequate and some were even ineffective. Difficulties arose in the implementation of these multi-year plans, budgets allocated for this purpose were not fully utilized and their goals were not achieved. Although the Arab population has for years suffered from under-budgeting in different areas, investment has been meager and erratic, and no strategic decision has been made to reduce the gaps with the Jewish population. Furthermore, **it is feared that with the current scope of investment and rate of progress, existing plans will not considerably reduce the gaps. The report also points to deficiencies in the training and placement of the Arab population, as well as to a shortage of employment-supporting facilities such as public transportation and childcare centers.**<sup>43</sup>

It should be noted that already in 2009, a report written by the Knesset Research and Information Center noted the limitations of the programs involved in placement and promoting employment operated by various government ministries as well as those run with public funding. All the programs focus primarily on increasing the supply of female workers, at a time when one of the main barriers hindering their integration into the employment market is the lack of a job infrastructure within Arab localities. The report indicated that unless an adequate infrastructure was built, there was little point in increasing the number of potential female workers, since they would find no jobs to integrate into.<sup>44</sup> Moreover, the programs direct Arab women to integrate into "feminine" professions, such as cleaning, caregiving, and secretarial work, which condemns them to low-paying jobs.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Knesset Research and Information Center 2022, footnote #3.

<sup>42</sup> State Comptroller 2016, footnote #7.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid, emphasis not in original.

<sup>44</sup> Orly Almagor-Lotan and Hodaya Kinn, [Public Programs for Increasing Employment Rates of Arab Women](#), *Knesset Research and Information Center*, 10 September 2009 (Hebrew).

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

## Rayan Centers

Rayan Centers provide employment guidance, counseling, and placement services for the Arab population and operate in conjunction with various bodies, such as Joint Israel, the Prime Minister's Office, and the Ministry of Economy. Budgets of millions of shekels have been poured into them, including per Government Resolution No. 922. However, these centers, too, are limited in their ability to increase the employment rate of Arab women in a way that will lead to fundamental change.

Close to half of all Arab women placed through Rayan Centers are employed in sales, services, and clerical jobs, while a third of the men are employed in industrial and construction jobs, which once again determines their status and low wages in the labor market.<sup>46</sup> Moreover, according to Ministry of Economy data, there is no evidence to show that those who find placement, stay in their jobs for more than six months.<sup>47</sup> A report by the Brookdale Institute also indicates that although Arab women make up 60% of all enrollees, the impact of Rayan Centers on their employment numbers remains minimal.<sup>48</sup> A State Comptroller Annual Report also criticizes Rayan Centers for not adapting to the needs of the underprivileged population in Arab localities they are supposed to serve and for their insufficient collaboration with the Ministry of Social Welfare. The report notes that their budgeting method leads to irregular and inefficient service, and that cooperation between their head office and the Israeli Employment Service is extremely limited.<sup>49</sup>

## Small Entrepreneurship Programs

Similar to the Rayan Centers, most of the programs to promote small business entrepreneurship, including MATI Centers and projects funded by the Authority for the Economic Development of the Arab, Druze and Circassian Sector (AEDA) established in 2007, had a limited effect. The success rate of small businesses is relatively low, the income that women may derive from such businesses is low and does not frequently go above the allowance income from National Insurance Institute. . Moreover, many businesses do not survive beyond a short period of time and may consign women to common "feminine" occupations, such as baking and handcrafts.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Knesset Research and Information Center 2016, footnote #3.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Zvika Deutsch, Oren Tirosh, Nir Levy, and Smadar Somekh, [The Impact on Employment of the Riyan Employment Centers for the Arab Population](#), Myers JDC Brookdale Institute, March 2021.

<sup>49</sup> State Comptroller 2016, footnote #7.

<sup>50</sup> Knesset Research and Information Center 2009, footnote #44.



## Lack of Adequate Public Transportation

Academic and professional literature, governmental and non-governmental studies, and even State Comptroller reports all agree that the lack of adequate public transportation in Arab localities is a major barrier to the participation of Arab women in the employment market and to maximizing the economic potential of the Arab population in general.<sup>51</sup>

Already in 2008, the Bank of Israel pointed to mobility difficulties, lack of public transportation, and lack of access to workplaces as factors influencing patterns of participation in the employment market.<sup>52</sup> This view is supported by the Knesset Research and Information Center,<sup>53</sup> the Israel Democracy Institute,<sup>54</sup> and a long list of researchers and professionals who agree that in order to encourage employment among Arab society, especially women, a solution must be found to the absence of adequate public transportation in Arab localities. The same goes for the studies on the employment of Arab women academics, which also cite this factor as a barrier to their integration in the employment and labor force.<sup>55</sup>

The State Comptroller also noted the problem, recommending to the Transportation Ministry to address the lack of public transportation services in Arab localities:

Studies have indicated that **the lack of public transportation or its low accessibility in Arab localities are among the factors contributing to the low employment rates of the Arab population, at times to the point of cutting them off from the employment market.** Israeli Arab localities have for years suffered from an almost complete lack of regular public transportation. At the time of this audit, access to public transportation in the Arab localities remains insufficient, both in terms of bus routes and subsidized fares.<sup>56</sup>

The efforts to improve public transportation face quite a few challenges due to the weakness of Arab local authorities, infrastructure problems, and unavailability of public land. This issue also impedes the establishment of industrial and commercial zones (only 2.4% of all industrial zones in Israel are located in Arab localities), which is a direct cause of the economic hardships and dearth of employment

**The scarcity of industrial and commercial zones, combined with the absence of adequate transportation, cuts off residents of Arab localities from major employment centers**

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<sup>51</sup> [Advancement of Public Transportation in Non-Jewish Localities](#), *State Comptroller's Special Report*, 13 March 2019 (Hebrew).

<sup>52</sup> Bank of Israel 2008, footnote #10.

<sup>53</sup> Knesset Research and Information Center 2016, footnote #3.

<sup>54</sup> Haj-Yahya 2021, footnote #1.

<sup>55</sup> Awad 2007, footnote #27; Abu-Asba 2018, footnote #29.

<sup>56</sup> State Comptroller 2016, footnote #7, emphasis not in original.

in most Arab localities.<sup>57</sup> Moreover, the scarcity of industrial and commercial zones, combined with the absence of adequate transportation, cuts off residents of Arab localities from major employment centers.

### **Public Transportation Adapted to Gender Needs**

The work patterns of women, especially Arab women who prefer to work close to home due to the double burden of a paid job and childcare/housekeeping, further limits their access to work opportunities. A study carried out for the National Insurance Institute in 2018 found that workplace accessibility is the most important factor for the incorporation of Arab women academics into the employment market.<sup>58</sup> Studies around the world show that women rely more on public transportation than men. There is growing recognition worldwide, including in developing countries, of the need to develop gender-sensitive transportation that is adapted to women's needs and guarantees a space safe from physical assaults or sexual harassment before and during the trip.<sup>59</sup> The findings of a survey conducted in 2011 among 500 women in Tel Aviv show that 1 in 4 women experienced sexual harassment or an indecent act on public transportation and 1 in 5 women witnessed such incidents. Over the years, the Authority for the Advancement of the Status of Women has addressed the issue and promoted advertising campaigns to raise awareness of sexual harassment on public transportation.<sup>60</sup> The Knesset Committee for the Advancement of the Status of Women has also dealt with the subject.<sup>61</sup>

Women's use of public transportation follows a unique pattern due to, among other things, the double burden of paid work and childcare: they make more trips per day but for shorter distances than men; they cannot move around easily and comfortably because they carry small children, strollers, and shopping bags; low-income and unskilled women tend to work close to home and to travel shorter distances.<sup>62</sup>

In other words, a policy that seeks to encourage women to use public transportation should take into account their unique needs, including the provision of a safe space, which is why they should be included in the decision-making positions at all stages of the planning.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Orwa Switat, Status of Arab Population in Israel's New Planning and Land Policy, *Zulat*, 2023 (Hebrew).

<sup>58</sup> Abu-Asba 2018, footnote #29.

<sup>59</sup> International Transport Forum, *Women's Safety and Security: A Public Transport Priority*, OECD Publishing, 2018.

<sup>60</sup> *Implementation of Law for Prevention of Sexual Harassment*, State Comptroller's Annual Report 70b, 4 May 2020 (Hebrew).

<sup>61</sup> Committee Chair MK Touma-Suleiman: Measures To Prevent Sexual Harassment on Public Transportation Unclear, We Must All Take Responsibility for Our Public Space! *Knesset News*, 21 March 2016 (Hebrew).

<sup>62</sup> Yael Hasson and Marianna Polevoy, *Gender Equality Initiatives in Transportation Policy*, Adva Center, July 2011.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

## Examples of Government Decisions to Improve Public Transportation

The state of public transportation in Arab localities is difficult and widely differs from the situation in Jewish localities in terms of roads, infrastructure, accessibility, and availability. These disparities did not arise by accident, but stem from a long-standing policy of discrimination and neglect by Israeli governments.<sup>64</sup>

In recent years, however, important government decisions have been adopted about the economic development of Arab society, including public transportation: Resolution No. 922 and Resolution No. 550 (The Five-Year Plan for Arab Society):

- Resolution No. 922 proclaims the achievement by 2022 of full equality in the level of public transportation services between comparable Jewish and "minority localities" in three key parameters: frequency of service, coverage area, and number of destinations. As of 2016, at least 40% of the total investment in infrastructure in non-urban areas would be earmarked for the development of road infrastructure in Arab localities, starting with 45% in 2016. It was noted that the resolution was expected to significantly increase the number of projects and the scope of investment in roads in such localities, particularly major traffic arteries.<sup>65</sup>
- Resolution No. 550 states that the Ministry of Transportation, the Treasury, and AEDA will examine the possibility of budgeting projects, as of the last quarter of 2021, without detracting from the ministry's commitment under Government Resolution No. 922. A decision on the allocation of up to an additional NIS 1 billion would be made in 2023, in accordance with the progress made in the execution of the plan and subject to the agreements reached by the Treasury, AEDA, and the Ministry, and would be submitted to the government for approval. Other clauses in the resolution refer to the expansion of public transportation services, construction of accessible bus stops for people with disabilities, and assignation of bus lanes.<sup>66</sup>

These are welcome decisions demonstrating that Israeli governments are allocating budgets to the economic development of Arab localities, with an emphasis on public transportation, but the big improvement of the last few years is not enough given the huge gaps compared to Jewish localities. The Transportation Ministry's quantitative metrics do not necessarily reflect the extent of these gaps given that they do not account for level and quality of service, which

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<sup>64</sup> State Comptroller 2019, footnote #51.

<sup>65</sup> [Government Actions for Economic Development of Minority Populations in 2016-2020: Government Resolution No. 922, Prime Minister's Office, 31 December 2015](#) (Hebrew).

<sup>66</sup> [Economic Plan for Reduction of Gaps in Arab Society by 2026: Government Resolution No. 550, Prime Minister's Office, 24 October 2021](#) (Hebrew).

greatly affect the public's potential use of transportation.<sup>67</sup> The findings of a study conducted by Sikkuy-Aufoq comparing Arab and Jewish localities based on such criteria as number of residents, socio-economic status, etc., mostly show that the level of service in Arab localities is lower than in Jewish ones. For example, frequency of service per week and average number of external destinations in Jewish localities is 1.5 times higher and the average number of bus routes is 2.5 times higher.<sup>68</sup> Noting the Ministry's unfamiliarity with the needs and conditions in Arab localities, the study proposes to engage in regular consultations with the residents, the transportation board of the National Committee of Heads of Arab Localities, and professionals as a prerequisite for the implementation of a policy to reduce gaps.

A special report prepared by the Knesset Research and Information Center in 2016 points to poor quality of service and disparities between Arab and Jewish localities, as well as the lack of annual reports comparing the level of public transportation service in localities with comparable characteristics.<sup>69</sup> A special State Comptroller report on public transportation in Arab localities also points to many deficiencies in the execution of plans, including lack of control over private public transportation, non-mapping of existing infrastructure, and the overall absence of a broad vision about the entire Arab population.<sup>70</sup> The report indicates two serious problems:

- 1. Lack of a comprehensive and integrated blueprint to ensure the realization of goals and closure of Arab-Jewish gaps:** In Resolution No. 922 the government set a goal to fully reduce gaps by 2022. However, a blueprint to ascertain whether goals have been realized and existing resources (including dedicated budgets) enable their realization has yet to be finalized.<sup>71</sup> It should be noted that a master plan for the Arab communities was published in 2019, but it included no clear goals for the future or oversight mechanisms.<sup>72</sup>
- 2. Lack of a transparent procedure setting prioritization criteria to ensure equality among Arab localities:** The State Comptroller recommends setting criteria according to an equal and transparent procedure to avoid the creation of gaps between Arab localities with dire public transportation needs that have not been allocated the necessary resources and localities that have seen investments.<sup>73</sup> A 2012 Sikkuy-Aufoq report affirms that local Arab authorities are unaware of the resources available to them for the purpose of improving

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<sup>67</sup> Inna Branzburg, Omar Mansour, and Muammar Abu-Ahmad, [Gaps in Public Transportation Services Between Arab and Jewish Localities in Israel: Comparative Study, Sikkuy-Aufoq](#), 9 February 2021 (Hebrew).

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Rinat Benita and Sharon Sofer, [Public Transportation Services in Arab Localities: Situation Report, Knesset Research and Information Center](#), 18 February 2016 (Hebrew).

<sup>70</sup> State Comptroller 2019, footnote #56.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> [Master Plan for Public Transportation in Arab Localities, Ministry of Transportation and Road Safety/National Public Transportation Authority](#), August 2019 (Hebrew).

<sup>73</sup> State Comptroller 2019, footnote #51.

public transportation and the Transportation Ministry does not avail them with all the necessary information about the types of service the Ministry itself can provide, which is why in many cases these resources remain unused.<sup>74</sup>

The aforementioned description shows that in a reality where Arab localities with infrastructure deficits totaling billions of shekels<sup>75</sup> and with needs that only grow from one government decision to the next, it is not enough to allocate budgets in five-year plans that hinge on the goodwill of governments motivated by political or foreign policy considerations such as Israel's ranking in relation to other OECD countries. The structural discrimination against Arab society is very deep, which is why efforts must be made to achieve formal and substantial equality by means of legislation compelling state authorities to implement an egalitarian policy and an equal and regular allocation of resources. Of course, this does not guarantee an actual equal application of policy, but it is a first and necessary step to monitor the implementation of such decisions.

**The structural discrimination against Arab society is very deep, which is why efforts must be made to achieve formal and substantial equality by means of legislation compelling state authorities to implement an egalitarian policy and an equal and regular allocation of resources**

The state of public transportation in Arab localities illustrates how governments can neglect the needs of an entire population for years on end, creating economic and social disparities that are truly intractable. Despite the goal set in Resolution No. 922 to fully reduce inequalities in public transportation between Arab and Jewish localities by 2022, the objective does not seem to have been achieved nor is it evident that the gaps are consistently and regularly measured. Neither is it clear if budgets to improve public transportation will continue to flow, if the allocations in the five-year plans will be realized in full, or what will happen when the five-year plans expire. A report from 2022 points to huge inequalities in the planning of train stations and bus lines. For example, most of the new train stations are set to be built near Jewish localities (of the five stations planned along the northern route of Israel Railways, not one is set to be built near an Arab locality). Furthermore, there is no comparison between the frequency of urban and intercity bus lines serving Jewish localities versus those serving Arab localities.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Hagit Naali-Joseph and Tobi Cohen, [From Barriers to Opportunities: Public Transportation in Arab Communities](#), *Sikkuy-Aufa*, November 2012 (Hebrew).

<sup>75</sup> Knesset Research and Information Center 2016, footnote #69.

<sup>76</sup> Fadi Amun, [Israel's Public Transportation Policy Throws Arab Communities Under the Bus](#), *Shomrim-The Center for Media and Democracy*, 25 July 2022.

In light of this situation, Zulat is proposing a new law and an amendment to an ordinance that would require the Ministry of Transportation to adopt an egalitarian policy and to promote equality in public transportation when approving and budgeting infrastructure and services (see Appendix A). These proposals may ensure that the question of public transportation in Arab localities becomes a constant item on the government and Transportation Ministry's agenda, may promote an equal allocation of resources that upholds the right to equality, and may even contribute to a policy of affirmative action until the gaps are narrowed.

The vast economic disparities between Arab and Jewish society call for a permanent long-term commitment from Israeli governments to close the gaps and institute substantive equality. We believe this obligation should be enshrined in law, in legislation that is not subject to political considerations or the goodwill of governments. Five-year plans, however good they may be, are an uncommon way to correct distortions and close gaps as they do not ensure equal fulfillment of the rights of Arab citizens in terms of allocation of basic resources and services. As we have seen in the context of employment, even if the government's goals are realized in full, Arab women will remain at the bottom of the employment scale and the gaps with Jewish women will persist. Five-year plans are by their very nature subject to modification and approval of specific allocations, some of which are not wholly utilized in practice. To ensure better monitoring and control over the realization of the rights of Arab citizens, it is necessary to enact laws that establish a legal obligation to apply the kind of equality that is not time-limited and is a constant presence on the agenda of decision-makers.

The draft amendment to the Traffic Ordinance [New Version] attached as Appendix A to this report proposes to appoint a council for the promotion of equality in public transportation consisting of 15 members (six of them public representatives), which would ensure diversity and adequate representation of the Arab population, women, people with disabilities, etc. It also proposes a channel through which CSOs would submit opinions, including gender-based opinions, examining the suitability of public transportation services for different usage by different populations, such as women, elderly persons, youngsters, people with disabilities, and more.

It should be noted that the aforementioned resolutions lack a gender perspective. Although the issue of Arab women's employment is on the government's agenda, no gender-based analysis is being conducted that takes into account the differences between men and women with regard to the use of public transportation, which is why the introduction of diverse opinions is important.

Zulat also proposes to amend the Traffic Regulations, 1961 (see Appendix B) to compel the Transportation Ministry to factor in the promotion of equal quality, availability, and accessibility of intercity and local services when setting regulations for the operation of a bus line.

## Lack of Childcare Facilities

Another major obstacle impeding the proper integration of Arab women into the employment market is the lack of childcare facilities for toddlers under the age of three. Here, too, the academic and professional literature are of one mind about the need to remove this barrier and increase the number of childcare facilities and nurseries as an employment-supporting tool for Arab women.<sup>77</sup>

The Supervision Law on care facilities enacted in 1965 regulated the operation of care facilities for children, the elderly, and persons with disabilities, including day care facilities for children. In its quest for solutions, the Ministry of Economy's Senior Division for Promotion of Parental Employment increased the number of daycare centers, nurseries, and after-school facilities, subsidized tuition fees, and supervised their operations.<sup>78</sup> The division's work was based on the realization that these facilities were an important instrument enabling parents to integrate into the employment market, especially mothers with children of preschool age.

The Toddlers Childcare Supervision Law<sup>79</sup> enacted in 2018 regulated the licensing and supervision of facilities for kids up to three years of age, who are not covered by the Compulsory Education Law.<sup>80</sup> The purpose of a law dealing specifically with childcare centers was to adapt to modern standards of toddler education, and its implementation fell to the Ministry of Economy. However, in January 2022, the licensing and supervision of childcare centers was transferred to the Ministry of Education, while tuition subsidization remained the responsibility of the Ministry of Economy's Labor Department.<sup>81</sup>

The link between the availability of good-quality and reasonably-priced toddler childcare centers and women's economic participation is an issue faced by many countries around the world, including developed ones. International organizations such as the World Bank and the OECD promote policies that encourage parents (especially women) to go out to work, by providing state-funded and subsidized childcare and making costs more affordable.<sup>82</sup>

There is no denying that even in this area the disparities between Jewish and Arab society are stark, and that childcare in Arab society today is far from meeting the needs of working parents or working women. The reality is that a major barrier impeding Arab women's participation in the employment market remains unresolved and they are forced to look for

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<sup>77</sup> Sa'ar 2011, footnote #6; Haj-Yahya 2022, footnote #1; Knesset Research and Information Center 2016, footnote #3; Bank of Israel 2008, footnote #10.

<sup>78</sup> [Senior Division for Promotion of Parental Employment](#), *Ministry of Economy* (Hebrew).

<sup>79</sup> [Toddlers Daycare Supervision Law, 2018](#), *Nevo* (Hebrew).

<sup>80</sup> [Compulsory Education Law, 1949](#), *Nevo* (Hebrew).

<sup>81</sup> [Ministry of Education's portal](#) (Hebrew).

<sup>82</sup> Tea Trumbic, Diva Dhar, Alena Sakhonchik, and Jungwon Kim, [Filling the Gaps: Childcare Laws for Women's Economic Participation](#), *World Bank Blogs*, 14 June 2022.

alternative solutions, such as relying on unpaid care by women in their extended family, their own mothers or mothers-in-law, which is one of the reasons for the high rates of early retirement among Arab women.<sup>83</sup>

Many governmental and non-governmental studies have been written on this topic as well, including a report by the Knesset Research and Information Center from 2008 that pointed to a huge gap, by a factor of four, between Arab and Jewish society in the availability of childcare facilities (only 4% of Arab children under the age of four are enrolled in childcare facilities compared to 16% of Jewish children in the same age group). The report also indicates that the dearth of licensed childcare centers partly stems from the financial difficulties of Arab local authorities due to lack of budgets and availability of public land.<sup>84</sup>

Although the situation has improved in recent years, the disparities remain high: while 13% of toddlers in Arab society are enrolled in supervised childcare facilities, in Israeli society as a whole the rate is 27% and 40% in the ultra-Orthodox community.<sup>85</sup>

Data collected by Sikkuy-Aufoq also point to disparities between Jewish and Arab society in the number of childcare centers, as high as by a factor of five: while in Jewish localities there is one daycare center for every 200 children, in Arab localities there is one for every 990 children. The 2019 position paper lists the barriers faced by local authorities that prevent them from opening licensed childcare centers for toddlers: lack of public spaces, bureaucratic and planning red tape (such as the requirement to present a building permit based on a certified detailed blueprint and the denial of subsidies to mothers working part-time jobs, who constitute a third of Arab women). Sikkuy-Aufoq notes that the root of the problem lies in the government's disregard for the unique situation of Arab local authorities, and claims that it is up to government ministries to remove these barriers.<sup>86</sup> Therefore, despite the allocation of budgets to this end in the five-year plans, the gaps and problems remain unresolved.

In a similar vein, a State Comptroller's report from 2016 notes that the Ministry of Economy's childcare and Nurseries Department did not adapt the mechanism for budgeting the construction of childcare centers to the unique needs and constraints of Arab localities, thus

**While in Jewish localities there is one childcare center for every 200 children, in Arab localities there is one for every 990 children**

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<sup>83</sup> Maha Karkabi-Sabbah, Sami Miari, and Amalia Sa'ar, *Early Retirement Under Gender and Ethnic Marginalization: Evidence from Palestinian Arab Women in Israel* (in preparation).

<sup>84</sup> Orly Almagor-Lotan and Hodaya Kinn, [Licensed Daycare Center for Toddlers in Arab Sector](#), *Knesset Research and Information Center*, 7 July 2008 (Hebrew).

<sup>85</sup> Shira Kadari-Ovadia, [Only 13% of Toddlers in Arab Society Get To Enroll in Subsidized Daycare Centers](#), *Haaretz*, 10 May 2022 (Hebrew).

<sup>86</sup> [Construction of Daycare Centers in Arab Localities: Barriers and Policy Recommendations](#), *Sikkuy-Aufoq*, July 2019 (Hebrew).



impeding the implementation of government policy for the integration of Arab women in the employment market and reducing disparities.<sup>87</sup> The Eckstein and Trachtenberg Committees identified this barrier, and some of their recommendations were intended to induce a significant increase in childcare enrollment in Arab localities, which is why government resolutions allocated NIS 220 million to this end. Nevertheless, only 40% of the target set by the Trachtenberg Committee was reached.<sup>88</sup>

The report indicates that although Arab local authorities apply for permits to establish childcare centers, these are not granted due to requirements about blueprints and empty public spaces. Despite the introduction of an easier procedure for filing the documentation, the State Comptroller's audit found that none of the 33 Arab authorities that had applied for a budget received it and the funds that had been earmarked for them were eventually transferred to non-Arab localities.<sup>89</sup>

A special State Comptroller report from 2022 also points to a lack of childcare centers in Arab localities and a low number of toddlers enrolled in subsidized facilities. Pursuant to the effort in 2015-2020 to increase the number of childcare centers eligible for a subsidy, only 10% were built in Arab localities. While Arab toddlers comprise 24% of all toddlers in Israel, only 8% of the budget for subsidies was allocated to them in 2020.<sup>90</sup> Bearing in mind that Arab society suffers from high poverty rates, these data show that the disparities between Arab and Jewish society with regard to the availability and subsidization of childcare centers are not expected to close any time soon, with the attendant negative impact on Arab women's employment.<sup>91</sup>

Similar to the barrier created by the lack of public transportation, here too a picture emerges whereby assorted government decisions, including five-year plans and allocation of budgets, do not guarantee the desired result and the gaps between Arab and Jewish society persist and might even deepen. Here, too, the conclusion is that as opposed to five-year programs that hinge on the goodwill of governments, action is needed to promote formal and substantial equality on the issue of childcare centers by means of legislation obligating state authorities to implement an egalitarian policy and to allocate resources equally. This does not guarantee an actual equal application of policy, but it is an essential step to monitor the implementation of such decisions. Therefore, the draft law attached as Appendix C proposes to add the obligation to promote equality in quality, accessibility, and availability of daycare centers, an equal establishment of such facilities within and among localities, and equality in subsidies and tuition fees. The draft law further obliges the minister in charge to submit to the Knesset

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<sup>87</sup> State Comptroller 2016, footnote #7.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> [Toddlers Care and Education in Daycare Centers](#), *State Comptroller*, May 2022 (Hebrew).

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

Education, Culture, and Sports Committee an annual account of the actions taken in regard to licensing and supervision, subsidies, tuition fees, quality, availability, and accessibility of childcare centers. Such a reporting mechanism will allow for better supervision over the implementation of equality in the establishment of childcare centers within and among localities.

**Formal and substantial equality on the issue of childcare centers must be promoted by means of legislation obligating state authorities to implement an egalitarian policy and to allocate resources equally**

## Conclusion

The low employment rates of Arab women in Israel stems from long-standing structural and political barriers, as well as the poor structure of opportunities available to them in the labor market. As of the early 2000s, when the public debate began about their low participation and its effect on the Israeli economy, various government decisions were made (including within the framework of five-year plans) that set goals for increasing their employment rates alongside programs to encourage employment. Three main government resolutions were passed during this period: Resolution No. 1994, which set a 40% employment target by 2020; Resolution No. 198, which set a 53% employment target by 2030; and Resolution No. 550, which set a 46.3% employment target for Arab women of prime working age by 2026.

These government decisions merely committed to reduce gaps, rather than achieving substantial equality between Arab and Jewish citizens. To wit, the employment target for Arab women that is supposed to be achieved by 2030 is 53%, while the rate of participation of Jewish women already today stands at 83%.<sup>92</sup> This shows that even if the goals set by the government are achieved, the inequality between the two groups will persist and Arab women will still be at the bottom of the scale of participation in the employment market. Likewise, the State Comptroller notes that even if the government's goals are achieved, the existing disparities in employment rates between Arab and Jewish society will remain very significant.<sup>93</sup>

Five-year plans, however good they may be, are an uncommon way to correct distortions and close gaps as they do not ensure the equal fulfillment of the rights of Arab citizens with regard to the allocation of basic resources and services. As explained above, budgets allocated through these programs are often not fully utilized, or at best are used only partially.<sup>94</sup>

In a reality where Arab localities are afflicted by infrastructure gaps totaling billions of shekels, it is not enough to allocate budgets in five-year plans that hinge on the goodwill of governments motivated by political considerations. What is needed is a commitment anchored in law to take steps to promote formal and substantial equality, both in the implementation of egalitarian policies and allocation of resources. This does not guarantee an actual equality in the application of the policy, but it is an initial and necessary step to monitor the implementation of such decisions.

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<sup>92</sup> Knesset Research and Information Center 2022, footnote #3.

<sup>93</sup> State Comptroller 2016, footnote #7.

<sup>94</sup> Special Committee on Arab Society Affairs, [Five-Year Plan for Economic Investment in Arab Sector-Resolution No. 922: 90% of Budget Allocated, Only 62% Utilized](#), *Knesset website*, 21 June 2021 (Hebrew).

Two main barriers discussed in this report impede the integration of Arab women into the Israeli employment market, the strengthening of their status, health, and well-being in their community and in Israeli society in general, as well as the social and economic prosperity of Arab society at large. The proposals presented by Zulat could help increase the state's commitment to removing these two major barriers and would facilitate closer oversight of their implementation.

We hope that the law proposals that will be submitted to the Knesset will increase the commitment of Israeli decision-makers to an egalitarian resolution of the question of public transportation and childcare centers in Arab localities, and will lead to placing these two issues on the permanent agenda of the government and the Knesset.

# Appendices

## Appendix A:

### Bill to Promote Equality in Public Transportation, 2022

Amendment of Traffic Ordinance [New Version]: Insert Article 4a after Article 4 as follows:

(a) The government shall appoint a council for the promotion of equality in public transportation comprising 15 members recommended by the minister, in keeping with the principle of adequate representation stipulated in Article 15(a) of the Civil Service Law (Appointments), 1959:

- (1) A representative of the minister;
- (2) A representative of the Minister of Finance;
- (3) A representative of the Minister of Interior;
- (4) A representative of the Minister of Economy and Industry;
- (5) A representative of the Minister of Labor and Welfare;
- (6) A representative of the Minister of Social Equality;
- (7) A representative of the Authority for the Economic Development of Minorities (AEDA);
- (8) A representative of the Local Government Center;
- (9) A representative of the Organization of Regional Councils;
- (10) Six public representatives with knowledge and experience relevant to the promotion of equality in public transportation.

(b) These are the Council's functions:

- (1) Counsel the minister regarding the promotion of equality in quality, availability, and accessibility of intercity and local public transportation, based on the right to freedom of movement and in support of the government's goals, especially employment and reducing social, economic, and gender gaps.
- (2) Counsel the minister on the introduction of standards for licensing both intercity and local public transportation in an equal manner.
- (3) Counsel the minister on the introduction of standards for funding both intercity and local public transportation in an equal manner.
- (4) Counsel the minister on the reduction of disparities and discrimination in intercity and local public transportation.
- (5) Counsel the minister on the removal of barriers impeding the development of intercity and local public transportation in an equal manner.

- (6) Counsel the minister on the development and budgeting of the infrastructures needed to promote intercity and local public transportation in an equal manner.
  - (7) The Council shall allow the submission of opinions from civil society organizations, including gender-based opinion , examining the suitability of public transportation services to the needs of various populations such as women, minorities, the elderly, persons with disabilities, etc.
  - (8) The Council shall consult with residents, local transportation boards, and other relevant parties when formulating advice to the pertinent minister regarding the promotion of equality in quality of public transportation services in certain local and regional authorities.
- (c) The minister in charge of implementation of this law shall every year submit to the Knesset Economy Committee, no later than the first day of the month of Kislev, an account of actions taken to promote equality in the quality, availability, and accessibility of intercity and local public transportation services.

## Appendix B: Traffic Regulations (Amendment No. 9), 1961

	By virtue of my authority according to Articles 70 and 71 of the Traffic Ordinance [New Version], <sup>95</sup> and with the approval of the Knesset Economic Committee, I hereby introduce the following regulation:	
Addition of Rule 389a	(1)	After Rule 389 to the Traffic Regulations, 1961, <sup>96</sup> insert:
		389a. Upon setting the conditions and rules for the activation of a service line, as stated in Regulation 389, the pertinent authority shall consider the promotion of equality, availability, and accessibility of intercity and local public transportation services, based on the right to freedom of movement and in support of other government goals, especially employment and reducing social, economic, and gender gaps.
Addition of Rule 394(5)	(2)	After Rule 394(4) of the Traffic Regulations, insert:
		The service provided does not promote equality in the quality, availability, and accessibility of intercity and local public transportation.

<sup>95</sup> Traffic Ordinance [New Version], 1961, Nevo (Hebrew).

<sup>96</sup> Traffic Regulations, 1961, Nevo (Hebrew).

## Appendix C:

### Bill to Promote Equality in Childcare Centers for Toddlers, 2022

Amendment of Law on Supervision of childcare Centers for Toddlers, 2018	(1)	After Article 1 of the law, insert:
		1a. The purpose of this law also is to promote equality in the quality, availability, and accessibility of childcare centers for toddlers, in accordance with the provisions of the law.
	(2)	After Article 7 of the law, insert:
		7a. (a) The state will encourage and promote the establishment of childcare centers for toddlers in accordance with the provisions of the law and equally within and among localities.  (b) The minister in charge of subsidies and tuition fees for toddler childcare centers, in consultation with the Attorney General and organizations dealing with the promotion of relevant rights, will set standards assessing the promotion of equality and reduction of disparities within and among localities regarding the distribution of the amount set in the budget.  (c) The minister in charge of implementation of this law shall every year submit to the Knesset Education, Culture, and Sports Committee, no later than the first day of the month of Kislev, an annual account of the actions taken for licensing, overseeing, and promoting equality within and among localities with regard to the quality, availability, accessibility, and subsidization of the establishment and tuition fees of toddler childcare centers.



Zulat institute works to promote a policy of equality and human rights and to restore the legitimacy of the human rights discourse in Israel.

**President** | Zehava Galon

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