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ENGELBERG CENTER FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH

## RESEARCH REPORT

# National Plan for Expanding Access of Arab, Druze and Circassian Students to Higher Education in Israel: Interim Report on the Support of Students as of the End of the 2015-16 School Year

Ayala Hendin ✦ Dalia Ben Rabi

The study was initiated by the Council for Higher Education and funded with its assistance

**National Plan for Expanding Access  
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**Dalia Ben Rabi**

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Hebrew editor: Revital Aviv Matok

English translation: Evelyn Abel

Arabic translation: Nabih Bashir

Production and Print Layout: Leslie Klineman

**Myers-JDC-Brookdale Institute**

Engelberg Center for Children and Youth

P.O.B. 3886

Jerusalem 9103702, Israel

Tel: (02) 655-7400

Fax: (02) 561-2391

Website: <http://brookdale.jdc.org.il>



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Hendin, A. 2016. *From Higher Education to Employment: Evaluation of the Excel HT Program for Arab Students in Hi-Tech Fields – Summary Report*. RR-722-16 (Hebrew)

Hendin, A. Ben Rabi, D. 2015. *The National Plan for Expanding Access to Higher Education for Arabs, Druze and Circassians: Preliminary Findings from the Evaluation*. (Hebrew – website only)

Hendin, A. 2014. *The Model of Community Colleges: Review of the Literature*. (website only)

Ben-Rabi, D. Ayala Hendin, A. 2013. *Preparation for Successful Integration into Higher Education of Arab Students: Evaluation of a Program to Improve Academic Preparatory Programs*. RR-643-13 (Hebrew)

Baruj-Kovarsky, R.; Cohen-Navot, M. 2009. *The University Program to Promote Accessibility to Higher Education in the Negev: Evaluation of the Program in the 2006/2007 Academic Year – Follow-up Study*. RR-525-09 (Hebrew)

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# Executive Summary

## 1. Background

This is the second report in a series of studies on the implementation of the national plan for expanding access to higher education of the Arab, Druze, and Circassian populations (hereafter: ADC). Although the representation of these groups in higher education in Israel has consistently risen in recent years, they are still underrepresented compared to their Jewish counterparts at all levels of education: pre-academic preparatory programs, undergraduate, master's, and doctoral studies, and among faculty members.

These young adults encounter various challenges on the road to full participation in higher education. Some reflect challenges facing disadvantaged populations in general, such as being the first generation of their families to attend higher education, coming from low socioeconomic clusters, being a minority group, and so on. Others are structural and specific to ADCs in Israel. To address both the general and the specific challenges, the Planning and Budgeting Committee (PBC) of the Council for Higher Education (CHE) developed a plan for expanding access to higher education as part of the 2010/11-2015/16 multi-year plan. The plan was re-budgeted in the PBC multi-year plan for 2016/17-2021/22.

The plan is implemented in all institutions of higher education that are budgeted by PBC wherever the student body includes ADC students. It contains structures for support based on the characteristics of the institutions and the student composition. This evaluation study focuses on the components of the support structures within and/or near an institution with undergraduate applicants and students. The main components examined were: support in pre-academic preparatory programs; the “One Step Ahead” preparatory program (*Tzaad lifnei Kulam*) for those already accepted to higher education; academic and social support, mainly for students in their first year; career services; and a national scholarship fund (Irteka).

The study focuses on the process of employing the support components by the institutions up to the 2015/16 school year; on the student experience; on the student utilization of support; and on the first year outcomes of those who began studying towards a BA in 2014/15.

The study encompassed 27 PBC-budgeted universities and colleges with undergraduate ADC students. We conducted 60 interviews with the implementation team at 19 institutions, analyzed the work plans of all 27 institutions, gathered data on implementation through a questionnaire for program implementation teams at 26 institutions, and held two student focus groups. We also conducted a survey of ADC students who had begun their studies towards an undergraduate degree in 2014/15 at 25 institutions who offered the program (5,989 students according to the institutions' reports). The survey probed the students' experiences, their utilization of the program components and extent of satisfaction, and their outcomes at the end of the first year. The analysis and weighting of the survey data considered two variables: the specific institution and receipt or non-receipt of an Irteka scholarship (a total of 1,499 respondents).

## 2. Main Findings

### 2.1 Program Characteristics and Target Population

- a. *General implementation model:*** The PBC manages and funds the program on the national level. The institutional implementation teams noted that the earmarked budget enabled them to coordinate the pre-existing support provisions in various ways: to expand, formalize and professionalize them, among other things by recruiting additional professionals specifically for the ADC population. At the same time, many of the institutions are still coping with the difficulty of getting students to utilize the support components offered.
- b. *Institutional implementation model:*** The implementation model at the institutional level contains an internal steering committee, an academic chair-person and an administrative coordinator. This infrastructure provides the institutional foundation for bringing the program to fruition. It enables an institution to devote attention to all ADC students in such aspects as providing assistance, designing additional supporting policies, and allowing the ADC voices to be heard. The form that implementation takes in each institution depends on its characteristics – for example, its type, size and location – and on the personal and scholastic backgrounds of the student body.
- c. *Program development:*** The pace at which the institutions joined the program and implemented its components went according to plan. The number of participating institutions increased from 23 in 2013/14 to 27 in 2015/16.<sup>1</sup> As of the start of the 2016/17 academic year, and with the transition to the next PBC multi-year plan, the access plan maximized its potential in terms of the number of participating institutions.

The support structure consists of three main components: support in pre-academic preparatory programs, the "One Step Ahead" preparatory program for those already accepted to higher education, and academic and social support mainly for students in their first-year. The number of institutions offering all three of these components increased from 11 in 2013/14 to 21 in 2016/17. There are, however, institutions that do not implement all three components.

- d. *The rate of students from ADC populations and their distribution by field of study:*** A main goal of the access plan was to increase the rate of ADC students that enrolled in, and completed, studies towards an undergraduate degree, thereby increasing their representation in higher education to more closely correspond to their rate in the population. From 2012/13, prior to the broad implementation of the program, to 2015/16 the number of ADC students entering higher education increased, as did their proportion within all BA students at PBC-budgeted institutions (from 13% to 16%).

Another program goal, promoted through the Irteka Scholarship Fund, was to change the distribution of students in different fields of study so that greater numbers would enroll in fields in demand in the job market. Indeed, from 2012/13 to 2015/16, the third year of Irteka, there was an increase in the

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<sup>1</sup> 29 institutions at the time of including the colleges also budgeted for teaching.

proportion of ADC students at budgeted institutions starting their studies in fields that are in demand and that enjoy a higher rating in the scholarship acceptance process, such as art and design, music, architecture, chemistry and economics; and a decrease in the proportions studying in fields which award a lower rating, such as dentistry and optometry.

## 2.2 The Student Experience

One area of interest in the research literature on higher education is the student experience itself. In general, survey respondents (completing the questionnaire at the start of their second year of studies) reported positive feelings about their ability to cope with the required learning skills, such as reading the assigned materials and writing exercises and papers. However, they were less positive about their ability to locate study materials independently, take notes in classes, actively participate in class, and read material in English. These reports indicate a need for more substantial investment in supporting these learning skills.

Most survey respondents (71%) expressed positive feelings about their personal experience at the institution. At the same time, 81% attributed importance to an institution's acknowledgment of ADC identity – that it take into account non-Jewish holidays and events, employ ADC members of faculty and the administration, and exhibit a command of Arabic.

## 2.3 Support Structures: Utilization and Perceived Contribution

In the 2014/15 academic year, the students at most of the institutions were able to turn to the three main program components mentioned above: support in pre-academic preparatory programs, the "One Step Ahead" preparatory program for those already accepted to higher education, and academic and social support mainly for students in their first-year. The evaluation found that utilizing one support component raised the chances of utilizing an additional component. Therefore, the access plan's impact on personal outcomes appears to amount to the cumulative effect of the student experience and of support components utilized.

- ◆ The *Support in pre-academic preparatory programs* is planned to be offered in 23 institutions in the 2016/17 academic year (preparatory programs specifically for ADC students in 14 institutions, and a mixed preparatory programs in which ADC students study alongside other students in 17). Over 1,700 ADC students are expected to participate in these programs. According to the student survey, 79% of the graduates of pre-academic preparatory programs reported that the program had positively contributed to them to a great or very great extent.
- ◆ The *One Step Ahead Program* is planned to be offered in 21 institutions in the 2016/17 academic year. 1,615 students are expected to participate in the program. According to the student survey, 72% of the "one step ahead" graduates reported that the program had positively contributed to them to a great or very great extent.
- ◆ The *Academic and social support* is planned to be offered in 27 institutions in 2016/17. It includes a range of support components to all undergraduate ADC students, with an emphasis on those in their first year. According to the student survey, 72% reported participating in at least one support program in their first year of studies; 61% reported participating in at least one scholastic support

(scholastic assistance, reinforcement classes in Hebrew or English); 50% – in at least one social support (personal-social mentoring, dialogue group, social activity); and 37% – in two types of supports. According to the survey, 67% on average reported that the scholastic supports had positively contributed to them to a great or very great extent, and 64% reported similarly regarding social supports.

- ◆ **Financial aid** is offered to ADC students as part of the Irteka scholarship program. An outside body is in charge of the scholarships through the Perach tutoring project. Every year, 650 new scholarship recipients begin their studies. In 2014/15, 604 recipients attended institutions that are part of the access plan. A considerable proportion of the students also receive financial aid from other sources. In total, 68% of respondents in the student survey reported receipt of financial aid from Irteka or other sources.
- ◆ **Career centers** began to provide services in the format of a pilot program at five institutions in 2014/15. The services are adapted to ADC students and include: workshops and marathons on preparation for employment, vocational assessments, personal counseling, internships, exposure to working life and placement. Since then, the career centers have been embedded in the institutions of higher education and as of 2016/17, 27 have requested that the career components be implemented for ADC students (six, to introduce suitable services; and 14 to operate an expanded career center under the responsibility of the institution).

## 2.4 First Year Outcomes

At the end of the first year of studies, 56% of survey respondents reported completing at least 30 credit points (a full annual study load is usually 40). 87% estimated that they would complete the degree in the required time, and 28% expect to make the Dean's List. The implication is that for them to meet these assessments, they would have to carry a heavy study load in the following years. Concomitantly, the implications for the PBC is to consider whether a defined time frame for study is appropriate for all students, or whether adjustments should be made for certain student groups. Another aspect is that continuing support in the more advanced years is expected to help increase the rate of graduates in the time frame currently acceptable.

## 2.5 A Look at Sub-Groups

Apart from the students' answers as a whole, we had a special interest in some distinct groups: women, Bedouin, and recipients of Irteka scholarships.

- ◆ **Findings of the comparison between women and men:** Similar to the over-representation of women among all undergraduate students and the ADC population, women were over-represented in the student survey as well (69%). We did not find consistent, significant differences between women and men as regards their student experience, the utilization of supports, the perception of contribution, and the outcomes at the end of the first undergraduate year.
- ◆ **Findings of the comparison between Bedouin students and their peers:** Bedouin students accounted for 9% of the survey respondents. Most (82%) were women, and a few were recipients of the Irteka scholarship (6%). Bedouin students participated more than their counterparts in pre-

academic preparatory programs. As for other program components – we did not find consistent, significant differences between Bedouin and non-Bedouin students. Bedouin students reported a more challenging student experience and the completion of less credit points by the end of the first year. On the other hand, their assessments of their subsequent outcomes were similar to those of their peers and, in some cases, even higher.

- ◆ *Findings of the comparison between recipients and non-recipients of the Irteka scholarship:* Irteka scholarship recipients enjoy financial aid while committing to volunteer work throughout their studies. Due to the rating system of scholarship candidates, recipients are concentrated in tracks for which there is demand in the job market and/or in which ADC students are under-represented. Recipients reported a more positive student experience as compared with non-recipients, a higher rate of program participation before the start of studies and in various first-year support programs, and the completion of many more credits by the end of the first year.

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