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# **Employment Patterns and Barriers to Employment in the Bedouin Population in the Negev**

## **Summative Evaluation Study**

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This study was part of a multifaceted research program for the Government of Israel's five-year plan to promote the well-being of the Bedouin in the Negev, carried out in cooperation with the Department for the Socio-Economic Development of the Bedouin Society in the Negev



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## **About the research program of the five-year plan for the Bedouin in the Negev**

The research program was jointly funded by the Department for the Socio-Economic Development of the Bedouin Society in the Negev and the Myers-JDC-Brookdale Institute. It spanned 3.5 years and includes an array of topical studies, including education, children with disabilities, employment, and local government, as well as cross-cutting studies evaluating the five-year plan work programs; the values, strengths, and challenges of the Bedouin population and their leaders; key indicators of the health, economic, and social well-being of the Bedouin population; and an integrative assessment of the five-year plan.

The research program was carried out as a cooperative effort between the Department for the Socio-Economic Development of the Bedouin Society in the Negev and the Myers-JDC-Brookdale Institute (MJB). The Department led the choice of issues to be studied and provided feedback on the research. MJB coordinated the research program and was responsible for the quality of the studies.

# Abstract

## Background

The poverty rate in the Bedouin population in the Negev is among the highest in Israel, due among other things to low employment rates and wages. The government of Israel is active in promoting employment in the Bedouin population in the Negev in a variety of ways. Nevertheless, the employment rates and wages in this population, particularly among Bedouin women, are still low compared to the general population.

This evaluation study examined the employment of the Bedouin population in the Negev in depth, as an input into adjustment of the policy tools to the unique needs, barriers and strengths of this population, with an emphasis on Bedouin women. The study was conducted in 2020-2022 as part of the evaluation of the five-year plan for the socio-economic development of the Bedouin population in the Negev, 2017-2021 (Government Decision 2397).

## Goal

The overarching goal of this study was to identify sociocultural factors that contribute to employment barriers and affect the employment patterns of the Bedouin population in the Negev.

## Method

The study focused on the Bedouin population in the Negev in the main employment ages (25-54). The study was based on four information sources: (1) Forty in-depth interviews with 24 women and eight men from Bedouin population, as well as with eight professionals (ministry representatives and policymakers and professionals in the fields of employment, Bedouin culture and society, and urban planning); (2) A telephone survey of 335 women and 147 men from Bedouin population; (3) Analysis of administrative data and the Labour Force Survey data (2012-2020) of the Central Bureau of Statistics; and (4) A review of the international literature on employment barriers faced by deprived populations and policy tools for promoting their integration in the labour market. The research tools were culturally and linguistically adapted with the assistance of experts on Bedouin culture and were approved by the Brookdale Institute's Ethics Committee.

## Key Findings

The last decade has seen improvements in the main employment indicators among both men and women from the Bedouin population in the Negev. However, the gaps between the Bedouin population and the general Israeli populations have stabilized in most indicators. The study points to employment barriers that explain these trends and identifies opportunities for their improvement.

### Employment Barriers

1. **Low education levels** reduce employment and earning opportunities among the Bedouin population in the Negev, particularly among women.
2. **Traditional social norms** held by the Bedouin population in the Negev regarding employment and education affect the employment and education patterns of both women and men, despite the fact that in recent years, Bedouin society has been transitioning from a traditional to a modern society.
3. **Low availability of workplaces near residential areas** constitutes a barrier mainly for women, who are socially expected to stay close to their family and thus cannot travel too far for the sake of employment.
4. **The low rate of toddlers integrated in day-care centres** is an employment barrier mainly for women.
5. **Physical disability or prolonged illness of individuals or their family members** are among the main reasons for unemployment of both men and women.
6. **Social restrictions on women's presence in public** and fear for their personal safety affect women's employment patterns.
7. **Discrimination in the labour market based on personal acquaintance or family kinship** reduces the employment options of educated women and encourages the integration of low-skilled employees in local authorities and schools.

### Employment Opportunities

1. **Higher education** was found to be correlated with quality employment for both men and women. Education provides women with social legitimacy to be employed, and employment contributes to women's independence and social status.
2. **Having a driver's license** was found to be correlated with women being employed. A driver's license was also found to contribute to women's independence and sense of personal safety.

3. **Employment models emerging in the community**, including work performed by women within their homes in occupations considered legitimate may be an opportunity for women to work despite the social restrictions imposed on them. Similarly, **employment opportunities near residential areas** can help women who cannot travel far from home.
4. **Strong local leadership** can facilitate improvement in employment rates. Given the local leadership's influence on residents, enlisting its support can help formulate employment development programs based on local needs.

## Summary and Recommendations

Despite the government's activity in promoting the employment of the Bedouins in the Negev, in recent years the trend of reducing gaps between this population and the general population in Israel has ground to a halt. The findings of this study confirm some of the employment barriers discussed in the literature, including low levels of education and vocational training, limited employment opportunities within the local communities, and physical disability of individuals or their family members. The study shows that in addition to those barriers, social norms also have a significant effect on the education and employment patterns of Bedouin women and men, and that they also affect the previously identified barriers.

Some of the policy tools implemented hitherto have been effective in reducing the known barriers to employment, but they have not taken the structure of Bedouin society or its expectations of Bedouin women and men into sufficient account. It can be assumed that due to that limitation, these tools have been limited in their ability to improve the employment of this population. Our findings suggest potential directions for action, including formalizing a mechanism of cooperation and coordination among the relevant offices and institutes, ensuring cultural adaptation of policy tools; offering young women a toolkit that enhances their independence at an early age; improving young men's education and technological training; developing models of preparation for the labour market and adult life among boys and girls during secondary school and immediately upon graduation; creating local employment infrastructures; supporting employment models emerging in the community; and improving personal safety in public space.