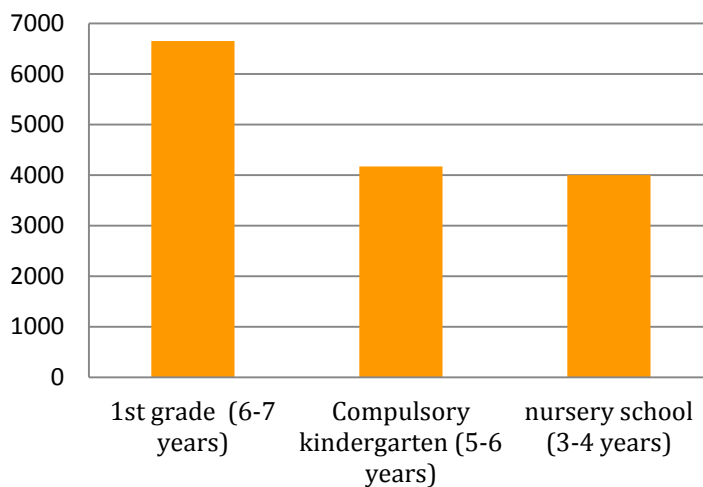




State Negligence of Pre-School Education of Bedouin Children in the Negev-Naqab

Research conducted by the Negev Coexistence Forum shows that the state fails to apply the Compulsory Education Law, which stipulates that mandatory education of children starts at the age of 3, among the Bedouin population of the Negev. The findings, based on the official database of the Ministry of Education, demonstrate that in the Bedouin villages in the Negev a large proportion of children are educated only from first grade, since the State does not provide nursery schools in the unrecognized villages.

Number of children that were registered in pre-school frameworks and first grade in the Bedouin villages in the Negev (2013-2014)*



As the figure indicates, in the 2013-2014 academic year, 6651 children were registered in the 1st grade, constituting 96% of the total number of children in that birth cohort.¹ In contrast, only 4170 children were registered in the compulsory kindergartens, constituting about 60% of all children in the 5-6 year age group. In the nursery school (age group 3-4) data for two birth cohorts show that only 7994 children were registered (about 3997 from every birth cohort), constituting about 58% of all children in this age group.

The significant differences between the rate of nursery school registration and 1st grade registration are a direct result of the State's policy with regards to the establishment of nursery schools in the unrecognized villages. The data of the Ministry of Education show that in the seven urban Bedouin planned towns and the 11 recognized villages, educational institutions (elementary schools and nursery schools) were established in each village. Simultaneously, of the 35 unrecognized villages only 6 are provided with similar services. Under these circumstances, the inhabitants of most of the unrecognized villages are forced to register their children in the educational institutions of towns or villages situated at a distance from their homes.

* The Ministry of Education reports all children as registered in pre-compulsory nursery schools. The number of children is divided in two since it refers to nursery schools that provide services to children in two birth cohorts.

¹ The number of children each year was calculated on the basis of the average number of births minus the average annual deaths. Between 2001 and 2007, the number of children was 6869. Statistical Data on the Negev Bedouin, 2010, the Robert H. Arnow Center for Research on Bedouin Society and its Development, at the Ben Gurion University of the Negev.



The Ministry of Education provides school buses for children from the age of 5, allowing most of them to register for kindergarten or school despite its remote location from their homes. Yet, busing of children below the age of 5 is considered unsafe and the Ministry of Education does not provide transportation. Therefore Bedouin parents in the unrecognized villages find it impossible to send their children to nursery schools. Due to above mentioned circumstances, there is a significant rate of under-registration of Bedouin children in nursery schools, which in turn greatly hampers their academic performance in elementary schools. This has a damaging effect on the welfare of the Bedouin population because it deepens social divisions and diminishes future prospects for integration. It also places young Bedouin children at increased health and safety risks as they are oftentimes left at home alone without proper supervision or educational framework.

The Southern District administration of the Ministry of Education expressed no objection to opening new nursery schools in the unrecognized villages. According to the MoE, new nursery schools can be established upon formal requests by the Regional Council. The head of administration within the Education Department of 'Neve Midbar' regional council, which provides education services to the unrecognized villages, claimed that their submission of requests for new nursery schools is subject to the guidelines of the Ministry of Interior. Since the head of a regional council is nominated by the Ministry of Interior, rather than elected by the inhabitants, the councils are in fact prevented from fulfilling the goals of the Ministry of Education and acting for the benefit of its residents.

Based on the findings articulated above, the Negev Coexistence Forum for Civil Equality recommends the following measures:

1. Immediate call for local elections for the Regional Councils 'Neve Midbar' and 'Al Kasom', which would allow the local educational authorities to act for the benefit of the local inhabitants.
2. Rapid approval by the Planning Administration of the Ministry of Interior to enable the opening of nursery schools to accommodate the needs of inhabitants in the unrecognized villages.

We implore the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Interior and the regional councils to work together and to provide fair and sound solutions for delivering vital early childhood services to unrecognized villages.

Writing: Ofer Dagan

Contact NCF: Phone number 050-7701118/9 E-mail info@dukium.org

Visit our website: www.dukium.org



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