Position Paper: The Israeli governmental program for completing basic education for adults in Negev Bedouin communities

The Israeli governmental program for completing basic education for adults was implemented in the Bedouin communities in the Negev as part of the first five-year plan for the socio-economic development of the Bedouin population in the Negev (2012-2016) and until recently it was funded from its budget. However, no funding was provided in the current five-year plan (2017-2021), which is implemented in accordance with Government Resolution No. 2397, nor is it funded separately by the Ministry of Education.

Following a national campaign to continue the funding, it was reinstated and guaranteed until the end of 2019. The issue was discussed by the Knesset Education Committee in November 2018, at which time it was recommended to the Ministry of Education and its Minister, Naftali Bennett, to guarantee the financing of the program and to expand it over time.

<u>Background to the need for the program's initiation and operation: High dropout rates and educational system failures</u>

The program for completing basic education for adults in Bedouin communities in the Negev is intended to serve men and women who have either never studied or dropped out of elementary or high school and are interested in completing their missing education, adding to their knowledge, improving their status and integrating into the labor market. It enables the completion of basic skills in reading and writing in Hebrew and Arabic, as well as basic education in other fields. About 95% of the students are women, and 54% of them are aged 30 and over. Within the framework of the program, there are some 25 classrooms with approximately 450 students each year.

The discussion in the Knesset Education Committee in November revealed that the budget promised until the end of 2019 supplies funding for total of only 15 classes that are distributed among the ten Bedouin municipalities in the Negev.

The plan is implemented, for the main part, in community centers in the Bedouin communities that are recognized by the Israeli government, but also in the Bedouin regional councils - Neveh Midbar and Al-Kasum.

<u>The reasons for high dropout rates from the education system are many</u>

- Late application of the Compulsory Education Law, 1949: Schools in the Bedouin communities were established after a considerable delay and in just a few of the villages, and the access to them was problematic.
- Lack of enforcement of the Compulsory Education Law, 1949, in Bedouin communities in the Negev, particularly in the "unrecognized villages."
- Lack of proper infrastructure: learning took place in crumbling, overcrowded buildings, without air conditioning or heating, and sometimes without any connection to the national water and electrical grids.
- Lack of learning infrastructure: lack of books and study materials, laboratory rooms, gymnasiums, computer rooms and more.
- Discriminatory allocation of resources: In the past - at all levels of education, today mainly in post-primary education.
- Discrimination against the "unrecognized villages": schools without access to the water and electrical grids, old buildings, no air conditioning or heating, lack of access roads to and from the villages, no preschools and/or kindergartens, and in the absence of local high schools – with the resultant need, both in the past and today, for students to travel

educational systems far from their village which becomes one more reason for them to drop out.

- – Traditional educational approaches: the students find it difficult to learn in a mixed learning environment that is often located away from home.
- – Poverty: the Bedouin society in the Negev is in a state of abject poverty. Many of the families are forced to send their sons to work to help support the family or lack the resources to pay for their children's education.

Data (2014) shows that 70% of the male dropouts and 80% of female dropouts leave the system between grades 9-11. The most significant factor contributing to dropout among students in "unrecognized" villages is the lack of access to basic services and infrastructure and the distance between home and school.

Thousands of women in the Negev did not receive a basic education or had access to basic education but were forced to leave the various educational frameworks due to many obstacles placed in their way. In 2014, the percentage of Bedouin women in the Negev (ages 15 and over) who had never studied was 22%. In the same year it was found that the percentage of women aged 25-64 who completed 12 years of schooling among the Bedouin community in the Negev was only 16.3%. Completion of education and the study of basic skills in Hebrew and mathematics can significantly improve the chances of a Bedouin woman from the Negev to find work that will support her and her family with dignity, and the governmental program for completing basic education constitutes the platform for that.

Many studies point to education as a decisive factor in the participation of women in the labor market and the advancement of their social status. Among minority groups, such as Bedouin society in the Negev, this mechanism is intensified, and education serves as a tool for them to extract themselves from a situation of two-forked social marginalization – gender and ethnic.

The purpose of the program

The field of completing basic education focuses on developing and promoting of adult learning "in order to narrow the gaps, increase social mobility, and enhance the development of the individual and society at large. The Department [of Adult Education] emphasizes education that leads to change and improvement in employment."

In 1994, the government set the goal of 41% employment rate among Arab women in Israel to be reached by 2020. This decision is derived from the need of the economy in increasing the rate of participation in the labor force and constitutes part of Israel's commitment to the OECD.

Study contents

The program operates on three levels:

- Completion of pre-primary / basic education – basic proficiency in Arabic, Hebrew, mathematics, civics and computers – 3 days a week for one year.
- Completion of education to 10 years of study – subjects similar and parallel to those learned in the mandatory educational system. The participants receive a certificate confirming 10 years of study. 4-5 days a week for one year.
- Completion of education to 12 years of study: subjects similar and parallel to those learned in the mandatory educational system. The participants receive a matriculation certificate – high school diploma (completion of 12 years of schooling). 4-5 days a week for one year.

The Department of Adult Education in the Ministry of Education oversees the educational content.

Program staff

The teachers are, for the most part, qualified teachers. About one fifth of them are studying for their teaching degree. Most of the teachers are Arabs, and a few are Jewish. In addition, the program employs a pedagogical administration and local coordinators that are responsible for the recruitment of women and for the organization of the studies.

Contribution of the program to employment

The program to complete basic education is integrated into the system for the promotion of employment: students acquire languages and professions most of which are relevant to employment, and some of them also attend lectures and workshops to prepare them for entering the working world. **At the end of the studies, the students are placed in jobs** through employment centers and "Ryan" centers, which accompany them until they are settled in their work positions.

The education barrier is critical and impairs employment prospects. Unemployment rates among the Negev Bedouin are 16.6%, while the national average is 5.3%. Women who received a matriculation certificate and succeeded in completing studies in the higher education system usually do not find it difficult to find employment. On the other hand, women who have not completed a high school education find it difficult to find permanent employment at fair wages and are forced into part-time or temporary work in occupations that do not require special education or skills.

Evaluation of the Program for Completing Basic Education – Comments from the Evaluation Report of the Five-Year Plan:

- "The program provides a **significant opportunity** for Bedouin women interested in learning and developing."
- "According to the women, they **enjoy learning**, the knowledge they accumulate gives them **confidence and a sense of ability**."
- "Thanks to the acquisition of the Hebrew language, they are able capable of approaching the National Health Services, the National Insurance Institute or their bank branch on their own and understand what they have been told."
- "They **help their children with their homework** and push them to invest in studies from an early age."
- "We will open an avenue for them to **professional development** and **to the labor market**."
- "These women describe the positive change they are undergoing, which also **radiates to their families and their surroundings**."

Recommendations of the evaluators:

The evaluators recommended that the program be promoted:

1. In order to offer activities for children during the hours when the parent learns, in order to make it easier for him/her to study.
2. To encourage continuity between studies in the framework of the completion program and continued higher education outside of the program.
3. To facilitate the transition from a certificate of completion of 12 years of schooling to completion of a matriculation certificate.

Cost of the program

The cost of the plan is minimal, a mere 2.3 million NIS.

Recommendations

1. It is necessary to find the funds, within a multi-year budget, needed to run the program and it should be expanded. A multi-year program provides security for both teachers and students.
2. More classes must be offered to complete matriculation. These contribute significantly to successful integration into the labor force.
3. The State should provide a supportive system for the women participating in the program, as proposed by the evaluation program.
4. The State, and the relevant ministries, must appoint a responsible body that will set benchmarks and monitor the implementation of the plan in all its aspects.
5. The possibility of expanding the program to include the "unrecognized villages" should also be considered – it can be based on existing infrastructures (essential service centers and schools), even though they are minimal.

Resources

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- Negev Coexistence Forum for Civil Equality, 2018. "Perspectives on Arab-Bedouin women employment in the Negev/Naqab: A report for International Women's Day, March 2018. pp. 10-11.
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Negev Coexistence Forum for Civil Equality

Shlomo Hamelech 7, Beer Sheva

08-6483804

www.dukium.org

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