

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 Arab Bedouin communities in the Negev/Naqab as part of the first Five-Year Plan for the socio-economic development of the Arab Bedouin population in the Negev/Naqab (2012–2016) and until recently, it was funded from its budget. However, no funding was provided for the program 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 ensure the continuation of the program, some of the budget (two million NIS) was reinstated and guaranteed until the end of 2019. The issue was discussed at the Knesset Education Committee in November 2018, at which time it was **recommended** to the Ministry of Education and its former Minister, Naftali Bennett, **to guarantee the financing of the program and to expand it over time.**

Background: The need for the program's initiation and operation – High dropout rates and failures in the education system

The program for completing basic education for adults in the Arab Bedouin communities in the Negev/Naqab 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 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 subjects. 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 plan is implemented, for the main part, in community centers in the Arab Bedouin municipalities that are recognized by the Israeli government, but also in the Arab Bedouin regional councils – Neveh Midbar and Al-Kasum.

However, during deliberations in the Knesset Education Committee in November 2018, it was revealed that the budget promised until the end of 2019, covered funding for only 15 classes that are to operate in the ten Arab Bedouin municipalities in the Negev/Naqab. A few months later, in a response to a freedom of information request by NCF, the Ministry of Education admitted that in a fact, **only 510,000 NIS of the budget were used for operating only nine classes in 2018.**

The reasons for high dropout rates from the education system are many

- Late application of the Compulsory Education Law, 1949: Schools in the Arab Bedouin communities were established after a considerable delay and in just a few of the villages, and access to them was problematic.
- Lack of enforcement of the Compulsory Education Law, 1949, in Arab Bedouin communities in the Negev/Naqab, particularly in the unrecognized villages.
- Lack of proper infrastructure: Classes took place in crumbling, overcrowded buildings, without air conditioning or heating, and sometimes without any connection to the national water and electrical grids.
- Not enough 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 electricity grids; old buildings with no air conditioning or heating; hardly any access roads to and from the villages; no preschools and/or kindergartens; and in the absence of local high schools – the need to travel to a far away school, leads many students to drop-out.

- Traditional educational approaches: The students find it difficult to learn in a mixed learning environment.

- Poverty: The Arab Bedouin society in the Negev/Naqab 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 Arab Bedouin women in the Negev/Naqab 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 Arab Bedouin women in the region (ages 15 and over) who had never studied was 22 percent. In the same year it was found that the percentage of women aged 25-64 who completed 12 years of schooling among the Arab Bedouin people in the Negev/Naqab was only 16.3 percent. Completion of education and acquiring basic skills in Hebrew and mathematics can significantly improve the chances of an Arab

Bedouin woman to find work that will support her and her family with dignity, and the governmental program for completing basic education constitutes a 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 the Arab Bedouin society in the Negev/Naqab, this mechanism is intensified, and education serves as a tool 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 [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).

- Completing of 10 years education: Equivalent subjects to those learned in the 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 parallel to those taught in the



education system. The participants receive a matriculation certificate (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 diploma. 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: Opportunity for employment

The program to complete basic education is integrated into the system for the promotion of employment. Students acquire languages and professions that are relevant to the current requirements in the labor market. **At the end of their studies, students are placed in jobs** through employment centers and "Ryan" centers, which accompany them until they are settled in their positions.

The education barrier is critical and impairs employment prospects. Unemployment rates among the Negev/Naqab Arab Bedouins are 16.6%, while the national average is 5.3%. Women who received a matriculation certificate and succeeded in completing higher education system usually do not find it difficult to acquire a job. On the other hand, women who have not completed a high school education find it difficult to obtain 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.
- They also recommended that the program offer activities to children during the hours in which their parent attends classes, to make it easier for them.
- To encourage continuity and to promote higher education.
- To facilitate the transition from completing 12 years of studying to receiving a matriculation certificate.

Cost of the program: Only 2.5 million NIS

The cost of the program is minimal in light of the vital value it produced each year for more than 450 Arab Bedouin residents of the Negev/Naqab, the vast majority of whom are women.

In 2017, it was decided that the plan will not be funded from the budget of the new Five-Year



Plan. The Ministry of Education reasoning was the need to “prioritize” under a limited budget. However, according to the figures published by the Citizen’s Empowerment Center in Israel, **more than half of the budget for the program over the years had not been utilized (a total of only 62% in three years).**

The total unused budget reached 20,664 million NIS from 2015–2017, despite the fact that the Arab Bedouin education system is suffering from neglect and lack of resources. In addition, NCF learned from a trusted government source that the Ministry of Education used only 35% of its budget for the new Five-Year Plan in the years 2017–2018. Thus, the Ministry’s rationale for cutting the program and its funding due to “priority reasons and limited budget” seems questionable.

Recommendations

1. It is necessary to find the funds needed to run the program and even expand it, within a multi-year budget that will provide security for both teachers and students.
2. More classes must be offered to complete 12 years of education and a matriculation certificate. These contribute significantly to successful integration into the labor force.
3. The State should provide a supportive system for women participating in the program, as proposed by the evaluators of the 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.

Resources

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