

Topic: **Education**

Updated: **June 2014**

## **General**

- The government regulates and funds the education system in Israel through the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of the Interior. In Israel there are two major educational subsystems: Hebrew-language schools and Arabic-language schools. Both are supervised by the Ministry of Education.<sup>2</sup>
- The curricula in both systems are almost identical in math, sciences, and English, yet differ in the humanities. Students in the Arabic-language schools have to study Jewish history and Hebrew literature, while Palestinian history and literature is severely under-represented in the curricula of Hebrew schools.
- “Discrimination against the Arab population in the field of education is today a recognized fact, as expressed in the Dovrat Report (2004),<sup>3</sup> in High Court rulings, in Knesset committees, and in statements by top officials in the education system. This discrimination has severe implications in regard to the ability of young Arabs to integrate into society and become productive and useful citizens with a chance to advance on the basis of their qualifications.”<sup>4</sup>
- This discrimination is evident in the unequal allocation of budgets, lack of sufficient classrooms, laboratories or sports facilities, dropout rates, education achievements (matriculation rates) and funds for special education.

---

<sup>1</sup> Compiled by Prof. Elie Rekhess, Associate Director, Crown Center for Jewish and Israel Studies, Northwestern University

<sup>2</sup> Human Rights Watch, *Second Class: Discrimination against Palestinian Arab Children in Israel's Schools* (September 2001), pp. 13-14. Available at: <http://www.hrw.org/reports/2001/israel2/>

<sup>3</sup> The National Task Force for the Advancement of Education in Israel, headed by Shlomo Dovrat, was appointed in September 2003 by the Government of Israel. The Task Force (“The Dovrat Commission”) was charged with conducting a comprehensive examination of the Israeli education system and recommending an inclusive plan for change. English summary of the Commission’s report is available at: <http://www.etni.org/docs/dovrateng.doc>.

See also: Yulie Khromchenko, “Dovrat Commission publishes conclusions on reform in the education system.” *Ha’aretz*, 23 December 2004, at: <http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/pages/ShArt.jhtml?itemNo=518347>

<sup>4</sup> *The Sikkuy Report 2006: The Equality Index of Jewish and Arab Citizens in Israel* (Sikkuy – The Association for the Advancement of Civic Equality, March 2007), p. 53. See: [http://www.sikkuy.org.il/english/en2006/sikkuy\\_english.pdf](http://www.sikkuy.org.il/english/en2006/sikkuy_english.pdf)

## Schools and Students

- Due to the rapid growth of the Arab population in Israel since the establishment of the state in 1948, the number of students and schools in the Arab education system increased dramatically, as shown by the following table:<sup>5</sup>

**Table 1: Students and schools in the Arab sector**

	1948/9	1979/80	2011/12
<b>Students (total)</b>	11,129	177,226	512,391
Elementary school students	9,991	121,985	251,621
Secondary school students	14	37,276	165,250
Other (private/church)	1,124	17,965	95,460
<hr/>			
Elementary schools	45	312	504
Secondary schools	1	59	360

- Since 1948, the number of schools in the Arab sector grew over 19-fold, while the number of schools in the Jewish sector increased over 7-fold.<sup>6</sup>
- The 1949 Compulsory Education Law applies to all children from the age of three. Nonetheless, there is a severe shortage of educational framework for infants in the Arab sector. While 49.3% of all two-year-olds in the Jewish sector attend educational framework, this rate is more than three times higher than in the Arab sector (13.4%).<sup>7</sup>

## Teachers

- Teachers in both Jewish and Arab schools have similar levels of academic education. In 2011/12, 80% of the teachers in Hebrew-language elementary schools and 86.8% of the teachers in Arabic-language elementary school had academic degrees.
- In secondary education, 94.6% of the teachers in the Arab system and 93.4% of the teachers in the Hebrew system had academic degrees.

**Table 2: Teachers with academic degrees, by school type and system, 2011/12<sup>8</sup>**

	Arabic-language schools	Hebrew-language schools
Elementary	86.8%	80%
Secondary school	94.6%	93.4%

<sup>5</sup> Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS), *Statistical Abstract of Israel, 2012*, Tables 8.7, 8.8, 8.18, 8.19.

National Council for the Child, *Statistical Abstract of Children in Israel 2012*, p. 6. See:

<http://www.children.org.il/Files/File/SHNATON/%20%202012.pdf>.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.* 2012, Table 8.7, 8.18.

<sup>7</sup> National Council for the Child, *Statistical Abstract of Children in Israel 2012*, p. 6. See:

<http://www.children.org.il/Files/File/SHNATON/%20%202012.pdf>.

<sup>8</sup> Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS), *Statistical Abstract of Israel, 2012*, Tables 8.6, 8.17.

- Only four teacher training institutes operate in the Arab education system, compared to 55 in the Hebrew education system (2011 figures).<sup>9</sup>

### **Educational Attainment**

- The level of educational attainment of the Arab sector increased significantly since the establishment of the State of Israel. This improvement is apparent in all categories of educational attainment, from elementary school to academic level education.<sup>10</sup>

**Table 3: Educational attainment of Arabs and Jews by year and level of schooling<sup>11</sup>**

Years of Schooling	1961	1975	1994	2011	
	<b>Arabs</b>				<b>Jews</b>
0 (illiterate)	49.5%	22.9%	10.0%	5.0%	1.6%
1-8 (elementary)	41.4%	50.9%	31.0%	18.1%	5.9%
9-12 (secondary)	7.6%	21.7%	46.2%	53.1%	43.7%
13+ (academic)	1.5%	4.5%	12.7%	23.8%	48.8%
Median years of schooling	1.2	6.5	10.0	12	12

- Of particular significance are the drop in illiteracy rates (from 49.5% in 1961 to 5.0% in 2011) and the growth in academic educational attainment among Arabs (from 1.5% in 1961 to 23.8% in 2011).
- Nonetheless, considerable disparities between the levels of educational attainment of Jews and Arabs in Israel still exist, as can be seen from the comparative figures in the table above for 2011.
- The disparity is striking when comparing Arab and Jewish women: 26.7% of all Arab women have eight years of schooling or less, compared to 8.5% of all Jewish women (figures from 2011).<sup>12</sup>
- High illiteracy rates still exist among Arabs aged 45 and above. In 2011, almost 16% of Arabs aged 45-64 years and almost 31% of those aged 65 years and above were illiterate.<sup>13</sup>

### **Matriculation**

- The matriculation exams (“Bagrut”, in Hebrew) at the end of high school are a major criterion for admission to higher education and the job market. Bagrut certificates are awarded on two levels. One meets the minimum legal requirements for matriculation and the other meets

<sup>9</sup> Katie Hesketh, “The Inequality Report: The Palestinian Arab Minority in Israel *Adalah* (March 2011), p. 40. See: [http://adalah.org/upfiles/2011/Adalah\\_The\\_Inequality\\_Report\\_March\\_2011.pdf](http://adalah.org/upfiles/2011/Adalah_The_Inequality_Report_March_2011.pdf).

<sup>10</sup> For further details see: Amnon Rubinstein, *Israeli Arabs and Jews: Dispelling the Myths, Narrowing the Gaps* (American Jewish Committee, December 2006), available at: [http://www.ajc.org/atf/cf/%7B42D75369-D582-4380-8395-D25925B85EAF%7D/arabs\\_and\\_jews.pdf](http://www.ajc.org/atf/cf/%7B42D75369-D582-4380-8395-D25925B85EAF%7D/arabs_and_jews.pdf).

<sup>11</sup> CBS, *Statistical Abstract of Israel, 1986*, 37, Table 22.1; *Statistical Abstract of Israel, 1995*, 46, Table 22.1; *Statistical Abstract of Israel, 2001*, 52, Table 8.1; *Statistical Abstract of Israel, 2012*, Table 8.73.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS), *Statistical Abstract of Israel, 2012*, Tables 8.73.

minimum university admission requirements. The gap in the kind of certificate between Arabs and Jews is significant.

**Table 4: Percentage of students eligible for Bagrut certificates in 2011, by population group, gender and religion<sup>14</sup>**

<b>Hebrew-language schools</b>	<b>57.8%</b>
<b>Arabic-language schools</b>	<b>52.5%</b>
Of which:	
Male	43.6%
Female	59.7%
Muslims	50.5%
Christians	65.4%
Druze	56.6%
Negev Bedouin	29.7%

- The difference in eligibility rates between Jews and Arabs has declined significantly since the late 1980s (24%) and reached 5.3% in 2011.
- Bagrut eligibility rates vary among the different groups comprising the Arab population. In 2011, Bagrut eligibility rates were highest among Arab Christians (65.4%), lower among Muslims (50.5%) and lowest among the Negev Bedouin (29.7%).
- The major explanation for these differences within the Arab and Druze communities comes from the fact that some secondary schools are privately owned and operated by various Christian denominations. These private institutions are generally considered to be of better quality than state-run Arab schools, and are preferred by those who can afford to attend them. Private Christian schools are selective in their admissions policy, and generally give preference to Christian applicants over other applicants (Muslim and Druze). Arab private schools are generally located in larger urban areas, which have higher concentrations of Christians than do smaller localities.<sup>15</sup>
- The relative disparity between Jews and Arab is much greater when it comes to Bagrut certificates that meet university requirements: 49.3% in the Hebrew-language schools compared to 35.7% in Arabic-language schools (2010 figures).<sup>16</sup>
- Success rates in the matriculation exams are traditionally correlated with the socio-economic status of the localities in which the students reside. According to partial figures for 2011, the highest success rate (73.7%) was measured in affluent Jewish localities whereas the lowest rate has been found in Bedouin localities in the Negev (29.7%)

<sup>14</sup> CBS, *Statistical Abstract of Israel, 2012*, Tables 8.24, 8.25, and *Ha'aretz*, August 9, 2012.

<sup>15</sup> Elie Rekhess, "The Dilemmas of Education in Mixed Cities." In: Elie Rekhess (editor), *Together but Apart: Mixed Cities in Israel* (Tel Aviv University: The Konrad Adenauer Program for Jewish-Arab Cooperation, 2007), p.103.

Barbara S. Okun and Dov Friedlander, "Educational stratification among Arabs and Jews in Israel: Historical disadvantage, discrimination and opportunity." *Population Studies*, vol. 59, no. 2 (July 2005), p. 166.

See also: David Ratner, "Haifa's Christian schools lead the league." *Ha'aretz*, May 25, 2004.

<sup>16</sup> CBS, *Statistical Abstract of Israel, 2012*, table 8.24. See: [http://www.cbs.gov.il/shnaton63/st08\\_24.pdf](http://www.cbs.gov.il/shnaton63/st08_24.pdf).

### Classrooms

- In 2011, average classroom density in Arabic-language schools was 29.3 pupils per classroom in both elementary and secondary schools, compared to 26.7 pupils in Hebrew-language schools.<sup>17</sup>
- One of the explanations for the higher density in Arab schools is the shortage of classrooms. According to figures presented by the Follow-up Committee on Arab Education, in 2012 there was a total shortage of almost 6,100 classrooms in the Arab sector.<sup>18</sup>
- In 2007, the government approved a five-year plan (2007-2013) to build 8,000 new classrooms, 40% of which (3,200) were designated for the Arabic-language education system.<sup>19</sup>

### Dropouts

- A dropout is defined as a minor of compulsory education age (5-17) who does not attend a school that is under the supervision of the Ministry of Education.<sup>20</sup> While the official drop-out rate in Arabic-language schools has declined significantly (from 14.2% for students aged 15-17 in 1986/7 to 8.0% in 2007/8),<sup>21</sup> the disparity in the drop-out rates between Jewish and Arab youth aged 15-18 is still relatively high: 3.7% and 6.6%, respectively.

**Table 5: Dropout rates among 7-12 grade pupils, by population group and gender, 2010/11<sup>22</sup>**

	Arabs	Jews
Boys	5.9%	3.8%
Girls	2.1%	1.4%
<i>Total</i>	4.0%	2.6%

- One explanation for the higher drop-out rate among Arabs lies in the lack of vocational training opportunities and institutions for technological education and the lack of adequate psychological and educational consulting services.<sup>23</sup>
- However, according to a 2010 survey conducted by the Galilee Society, 43.8% of Arab pupils stated that the major cause for leaving school was their lack of interest in education. Other causes have been economic difficulties (25.8%), physical disabilities or health problems (2.8%), problems in the family (2.3%), and mistreatment in school (2.5%).<sup>24</sup>
- Arab educators and scholars contend that the phenomenon of dropping out of school is reflected not only in leaving school entirely. “Covert dropouts”, i.e. youths who are registered as

<sup>17</sup> Yuval Worgan, Class size in the education system in Israel, *Knesset Research and Information Center*, August 2011. See: <http://www.knesset.gov.il/mmm/data/pdf/m02912.pdf>.

<sup>18</sup> Jackie Khoury, The shortage of classrooms in arab schools, *Ha'aretz*. 23 August 2012.

<sup>19</sup> *Kul al-Arab*, March 23, 2007.

<sup>20</sup> Ministry of Education definition, cited in: Haider, *Sikkuy Report 2008*, p. 44.

<sup>21</sup> CBS, *Statistical Abstract of Israel, 2009*, table 8.32.

<sup>22</sup> Figures compiled from: CBS, *Statistical Abstract of Israel, 2012*, table 8.34.

<sup>23</sup> *Sikkuy Report, 2007*, p. 44 [Hebrew].

<sup>24</sup> *The Galilee Survey 2010*, p. 197.

students but in fact are uninterested in school, display a high rate of absenteeism, and do not experience any significant learning, should therefore also be taken into consideration.<sup>25</sup> According to a 2008 research study, the current covert drop-out rate among Arab pupils is at least 30%.<sup>26</sup>

### **Students in Academic Institutions**

- The percentage of Arab students who attend institutions of higher education has increased significantly in recent years as a result of the notable expansion of the higher education system in Israel in the 1990s, which led to a multiplicity of academic institutions and to a significant increase in the number of students in general.<sup>27</sup> In 1989/90, Arabs constituted 5.7% (3,825) of the total student body at institutions of higher learning. In 1998/9 this figure rose to 7.0% (7,700), and continued to rise to 8.1% (9,735) in 2003/4, 8.3% (10,154) in 2004/5 and 10.3% (24,700) in 2010/11.<sup>28</sup>
- The highest growth was registered among students enrolled in undergraduate programs. This increased from 6.8% (3,145) in 1989/90 to 11.6% (19,755) in 2007/8 to 12.1% (22,898) in 2010/11.<sup>29</sup>
- Impressive growth was registered in the number of Arab women attending universities and colleges. In 2008/9, 64% of all Arab university students enrolled in undergraduate programs were women (55% of all students enrolled in graduate programs, and 34% of all students enrolled in PhD programs).<sup>30</sup>
- In 2008, approximately 39,000 Arab women in Israel (8.7% of all Arab women aged 20-64) held an academic degree. The level of education among Arab women aged 18-64 increased steadily between 1990 and 2008. The percentage of those with 13-15 years of education doubled (from 6.1% to 13.3%), and the percentage of those with 16 years of education and above increased fivefold: from 1.8% to 10.3%.<sup>31</sup>
- However, based on 2008 figures, the “input disparities in education, the high dropout rate and low academic achievements are expressed in the low percentage of Arab students in universities.” The rate of enrollment of Jewish students in the 20-34 year-old age group is almost three times higher than the rate of enrollment of Arab students of the same age group: 9.0% compared to 3.4%, respectively.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Ali Haider, *Sikkuy Report 2008*, p. 44.

<sup>26</sup> Amira Karakra-Ibrahim, “Overt and Covert Dropout from the Arab Educational System.” In: Elie Rekhess and Arik Rudnitzky (editors), *Arab Youth in Israel: Caught between Prospects and Risk* (Tel Aviv University: The Konrad Adenauer Program for Jewish-Arab Cooperation, 2008), pp. 55-59.

<sup>27</sup> Haider, *Sikkuy Report 2008*, p. 45.

<sup>28</sup> CBS, *Statistical Abstract of Israel*, 2000, Table 22.35; 2006 Table 8.48; 2012, table 8.56.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> Ramsees Gharrah (editor), *Arab Society in Israel (5): Population, Society, Economy* (Jerusalem: The Van Leer Institute, 2012), pp. 147 (Hebrew).

<sup>31</sup> Judith King, Denise Naon, Abraham Wolde-Tsadick and Jack Habib, *Employment of Arab Women Aged 18-64* (Jerusalem: Myers-JDC-Brookdale Institute, Center for Research on Disabilities and Special Populations, March 2009), p. 3. See an abstract of the research report at: <http://brookdale.jdc.org.il/Uploads/PublicationsFiles/527-09-ArabWomensEmployment-ES-ENG.pdf>.

CBS, *Statistical Abstract of Israel*, 2009, Table 2.10

Arab academics in Israel 2001-2008, *Ministry of Industry Trade and Labor* (September 2011).

<sup>32</sup> Ali Haider, *The Sikkuy Report 2009*, p. 55.