



Inter-Agency Task Force on Israeli Arab Issues

**GATEWAY TO THE ACADEMY:
A Three-Year Government Plan to Enhance Access
to Higher Education for Negev Bedouin¹**

June 2018

In June 2018, Israel's Council for Higher Education (CHE) announced tender recipients for implementation of an unprecedented NIS 130 million three-year plan² to promote higher education among Negev Bedouins in Israel. Five academic institutions have been selected to run a special preparatory program for more than 400 Bedouin students per year over the next two years (targets for the third year have not yet been set): Sapir College (where the model was developed), Ben Gurion University, Ahva College, Open University and the Ashkelon College. Sami Shamon College of Engineering was selected to absorb and support graduates of the five preparatory programs who choose to continue their studies in engineering. In addition, special tracks for excelling Bedouin students will be established at Ben Gurion University and at Ahva College.

[Negev Bedouins are a population of approximately 240,000](#) living in Israel's southern desert region who have the lowest rates of participation in higher education and the economy compared to both Jewish and Arab citizens, and suffer from the lowest socio-economic status in Israel, with poverty rates exceeding 70%. Bedouins comprise today only slightly more than 1% of first-degree students in Israel despite accounting for 4% of the 18-22 age group, a quarter of their proportional representation.

The CHE Plan is a scaled up version the "Gateway to the Academy" model developed and piloted at [Sapir College in the Negev](#) to overcome the distinct barriers to higher education that Negev Bedouin face. The model was developed after evaluation of the [CHE's 2011 national 6-year plan](#) to enhance access to higher education for Arab society in Israel overall showed that Bedouins require additional, specialized programs to address significant and persistent gaps beyond those affecting Arab society in general.

¹ The Task Force extends our gratitude to Aran Zinner and Merav Shaviv from the Israeli Council for Higher Education for their generous provision of data and insights. Thank you as well to Itzik Zivan from the Sapir College Board of Directors for tireless work and collaboration.

² NIS 130 million have been allocated to academic, social and other support of the Bedouin students, but since the state also provides higher education institutions budgetary support for each additional student, the increased number of Bedouin students would mean the total budget of the plan for three years is estimated at NIS 225 million.

The expanded Plan aims for a 75% increase in first-year Bedouin students—from 850 to 1,500 students over its three year span. This means that by 2020, a total of 4,500 Bedouins will be enrolled in first degree programs versus 2,600 in 2016. Through holistic solutions to the barriers affecting the Bedouin community, "Gateway to the Academy" aims not only to increase the number of Bedouin students in higher education, but also to the quality of their educational attainment and the number of students pursuing more market-relevant degrees.

Education Gaps among Bedouins in Israel

In the first years of implementing its national higher education plan for Arab society in Israel, the CHE discovered that barriers to educational achievement were far more significant in Bedouin society than for Arab citizens overall. These include issues of language competency in Hebrew, English, and Arabic (as Bedouins often have a local dialect, standardized Arabic is their second language and Hebrew and English their third and fourth), low standardized test scores, poor study skills, limited access to educational information, support, and technological resources, low participation in pre-academic programs, cultural issues stemming from traditional family structures, geographic remoteness and limited transportation, severe economic hardship, and more.

Education gaps between Bedouins and general society begin in public education, as evident in high school graduation rates—only **23%** of Bedouins meet higher education requirements versus **39%** of Arabs and **54%** of Jews (*Table I*). In higher education institutions, Bedouins comprise slightly over **1%** of first-degree students in Israel despite accounting for **4%** of the 18-22 age group, a quarter of their proportional representation, while Arabs today comprise roughly 15% of first-degree students, over half their share in the age-group (*Table II*). Bedouins who do pursue higher education suffer from higher dropout rates, take an average of over 5 years to complete 3-year first-degree programs, choose less diverse fields of study, and have lower representation in job-market relevant majors—with approximately **63%** of Bedouin students enrolled in education and humanities studies and **2%** in math and science (*Table III at the end*).

Table I. Gaps in High School and Access to Higher Education (2016)

	Negev Bedouins	Arabs (w/o Bedouins)	Jews (including Haredi)
Age group: 17-18 y/o	5,694	22,677	93,131
12 th grade students	74%	85%	91.5%
Matriculation eligible	34%	51%	62%
Meet higher ed. requirements	23%	39%	54%
Access higher education (out of an average annual cohort)	17%	39%	67%

Table II. Gaps in Higher Education (2016)

First degree students 2016	Israeli Universities	Open University	Academic Colleges	Colleges for Education	Total No. of Students
% Bedouins (of total Bedouin first-degree students)	16.3%	22.7%	37.7%	23.2%	2,632
% Arabs (of total Arab first-degree students)	34.9%	18%	30.7%	16.4%	33,331
% Jews (of total Jewish first-degree students)	33.2%	18%	39.2%	9.5%	200,413
% Bedouins of total student population	0.5%	1.4%	1.1%	2.4%	1.1%

In addition, Bedouin students have higher representation in academic and education colleges and the Open University than standard universities (*Table II*), which can make them less desirable to potential employers upon graduation. Many Bedouins also choose to study outside of Israel, particularly in Palestinian institutions such as Jenin and Hebron Universities, leading to degrees less suitable for the Israeli labor market, as well as more severe language competency and cultural integration issues. Despite a recent decline in such cases, in 2016 Hebron University alone, which attracts Bedouin women in particular due to special accommodations and transportation, had 194 first-year Bedouin citizens of Israel enrolled compared to 639 in all of Israel that same year (meaning that around a fifth of Bedouins who began their studies that year did so at Hebron University).

The "Gateway to the Academy" Program

The new and scaled up "Gateway to the Academy" model is an extension of CHE's long-term investment in higher education for Arab citizens, and of a wider government strategy for the socio-economic development of the Negev Bedouin.³ In 2011, the CHE passed a historic [six-year NIS 330-million plan](#) to enhance access to higher education among Arabs, which is recognized as crucial to the economic development of Arab society and the Israeli economy. In 2016, the plan was [renewed for an additional six years](#) with a government investment of roughly NIS 600 million. The plan has made significant strides and met many of its targets in recent years. Its implementation has also been accompanied by extensive research and evaluation—leading to the conclusion that Bedouins require additional, specialized programs to address significant gaps that continue to differentiate them from general Arab society, including lower matriculation completion and enrollment eligibility, higher dropout rates, lacking diversity in field of study, and ultimately, lower rates of job-market integration. As of 2014, Bedouin men and women showed employment rates of 56% / 24%, respectively, compared to 80% / 35% among Arabs, and 90% / 85% among Jews.

³ "Gateway to the Academy" is a cooperation between CHE, its Planning and Budgeting Committee (PBC), and the Bedouin Development Authority of the Ministry of Agriculture. For more on the socio-economic development plan for Negev Bedouin, see IATF briefing paper, [GOVERNMENT RESOLUTION 2397](#), March 3, 2017.

The "Gateway to the Academy" model adds a preparatory year to first-degree programs, which includes academic, personal, and financial support. The added year, which essentially divides the first academic year in two, is meant to improve the quality of participants' academic experience and attainment, and provide an alternative for those who do not initially meet enrollment requirements. During the year, participants undergo prep-courses for admissions tests, academic reinforcement, personal empowerment and soft skills workshops, and individual mentoring. In the process, they accrue 12 credits toward their degree through intro-courses in selected academic fields. Once they complete this initial stage, participants can apply for official acceptance to the college/university in which their prep-year was conducted and integrate into respective departments with continued support throughout the duration of their studies.

"Gateway to the Academy" first piloted at the Negev-based Sapir Academic College in 2015-2016 as a program in cooperation between CHE and Sapir, and has been running there ever since on a trial basis with ongoing evaluation by JDC-Myers-Brookdale. It is based on Sapir's previous "Takadem" program for Bedouin students, established in 2010, which had successfully helped integrate candidates and enhance their academic attainment. In 2016, the first year of the Sapir-CHE cooperation, out of 111 participants 87 continued their academic studies (77%), 77 of which did so at Sapir College with continued support from "Gateway to the Academy." Participants showed significant improvement in grades, more diverse study field selection and lower dropout rates.

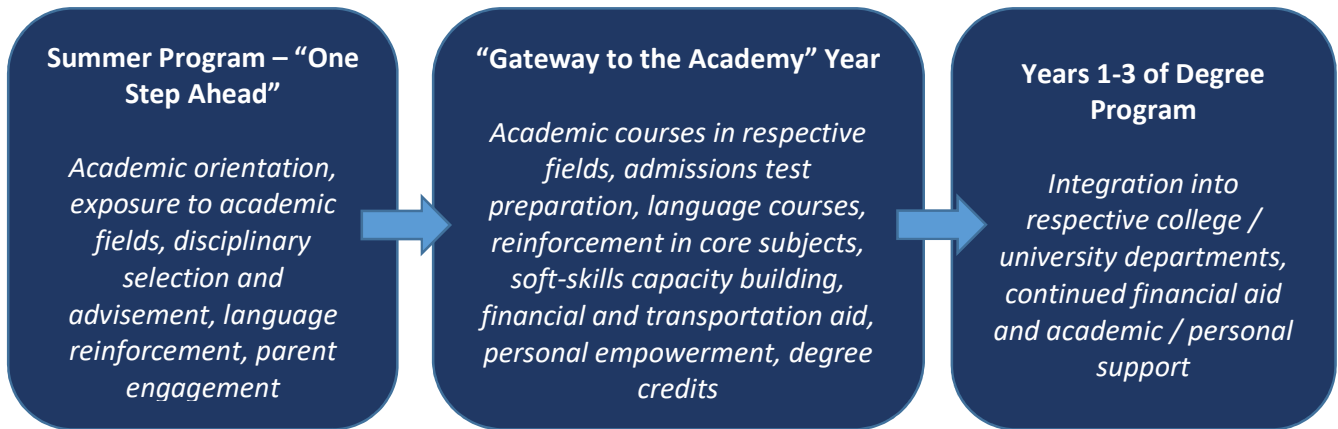
Scaling Up & Targets for 2020

Based on the effectiveness of "Gateway to the Academy" in its trial years at Sapir, CHE's recent decision aims to scale the program to a total of five accredited higher education institutions in the southern region starting October 2018—with the goal of reaching 1,500 first-year Bedouin students by 2020 (75% increase from 2016).

The five higher education institutions, Sapir College, Ben Gurion University, Ahva College, Open University and the Ashkelon College, were announced in June 2018 following a tender released by the CHE in March 2018. These selected institutions had to meet certain conditions, such as previous acquaintance with the Bedouin community and previous relevant programming, physical and geographical accessibility, and a scope of available first-degree programs, with priority for institutions that "employ staff and relevant experts from the Negev Bedouin community." Sami Shamoon College of Engineering, a sixth tender recipient, is incorporated into the program in this respect—rather than providing a first year preparatory program, it will accept students pursuing engineering fields for further studies once they have completed the preparatory program at any of the five other participating institutions, and will continue to provide them special support.

In addition, the previously separate "One Step Ahead" summer preparatory program, which has also been offered at Sapir College, will be integrated into this model and precede the prep-year. Separate tracks for excelling students are being established as well, and according to the tender results, will take place in Ben Gurion University and in Ahva College for approximately 45 students each year. In addition, the CHE will fund a "centralized selection and orientation program" for "Gateway to the Academy" among high school students and recent graduates in Bedouin localities. This will be implemented by the CHE-operated [Rawad Program](#) already working in Bedouin communities (as well as in dozens of Arab localities across Israel), and in cooperation with the participating academic institutions.

Below are the main components of the "Gateway to the Academy" model to be scaled by the CHE:



Beyond increasing the number of Bedouin students and supporting their academic achievement, the Council for Higher Education has established targets for field-of-study diversity among Bedouin students. As indicated below, the primary goals are to increase Bedouin students' participation in business, math, engineering, and sciences, and mitigate over-representation in education and the humanities.

Table III. Field of Study Diversity among First Degree Students

