



# An Overview of Negev Bedouin Graduates of Israeli Higher Education during 2002/3–2015/16

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# Abstract

## Background

Higher education is considered an important determinant of social integration and financial success by governments, societies, and individuals. Furthermore, studies have indicated that higher education has an important role in the social integration of minorities in society. Regrettably, minorities have been found to often have reduced and limited access to education and higher education. Inequality in access to higher education, in turn, influences minorities' occupational, financial, and social futures, maintaining social inequality, and even exacerbating it. In Israel, Arab society on the whole, and Bedouin society specifically to an even greater degree, have been found to be underrepresented in the higher education system. An in depth examination of Negev Bedouin graduates of the Israeli higher education system over time is an important first step in making a significant change.

## Study objectives

The study objective is to expand on previous reports by presenting an in-depth examination of Negev Bedouin graduates of the Israeli higher education system between 2002/3-2015/16. The first section of the report includes a literature review on the social-financial importance of higher education, higher education among minorities, higher education in Israel, and higher education among Negev Bedouin society. The second section of the report presents findings on Negev Bedouin graduates of the Israeli higher education system. The third section of the report presents a discussion of the findings addressing the implications of the findings, and practical policy recommendations.

## Method

The report presents an analysis of data from the Israeli Bureau of Statistics on Negev Bedouins who graduated from colleges and universities in Israeli between the academic years 2002/3-2015/16. To extract the relevant data, Negev Bedouins were defined as all individuals who defined themselves as Muslim and resided in the Southern district of Israel when they enrolled in their studies. The report presents these data according to the type of institution (universities, the Open University, academic colleges, and teachers' training colleges), degree (bachelor, master, doctorate, academic certificates and special programs), field of study, and year of graduation.

## Findings

Findings indicated a significant growth in the number of Negev Bedouin graduates of Israeli higher education at all degree levels and in both colleges and universities between 2002/3-2015/16.

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<sup>2</sup> Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics

Nonetheless, the increase in the number of Negev Bedouin graduates is less significant when the high natural population growth in Negev Bedouin society is taken into account. Furthermore, findings indicate that gaps between Negev Bedouin society and Israeli society on the whole remained significant over the years examined. Negev Bedouin graduates represent a very small percentage of all graduates in Israel in comparison with their representation in society. The growth in the number of Negev Bedouin graduates was found to be higher in colleges than in universities. In relation to the field of study, the majority of graduates completed degrees in education and teachers' training, as well as the humanities. A low percentage of graduates was found in other fields, especially STEM, management, architecture, and agriculture. Furthermore, findings indicated that in colleges, there was an overrepresentation of Negev Bedouin graduates in the fields of education, teachers' training, and the humanities, compared to underrepresentation in other fields. Finally, findings indicated that in teachers' training colleges, there were few Negev Bedouin graduates of early education, kindergarten, and informal education study tracks.

## **Discussion**

The study findings indicate a growth in the number of Negev Bedouin graduates of Israeli higher education. An examination of this growth in relation to population growth indicates that it is insufficient in closing the gaps between Negev Bedouin society and Arab society and Israeli society at large. These findings have negative social and financial implications for Negev Bedouin individuals, Negev Bedouin society, and Israeli society at large. Thus, it is important to continue working to improve the educational services and opportunities provided to Negev Bedouin society. A number of recommendations are suggested: (1) Strengthening the Negev Bedouin school system comprehensively and continuously at all stages of education in order to close educational gaps and to enable Negev Bedouin youth to succeed in higher education in prestigious fields of study. (2) Promoting continuity between educational programs at earlier stages of schooling and higher education programs to maintain ongoing support for students over time and achievement of program goals over time. (3) Improvement and precision of higher education programs for Negev Bedouin Society, especially in Ben-Gurion University, in order to effectively address the unique challenges that Negev Bedouin society copes with, taking the wide range of factors which influence success in higher education into account. (4) Improvement and precision of career and academic counselling provided to Negev Bedouin society, emphasizing the youth's choice of study field according to their interests and strengths, the options and admission criteria at different academic institutions, and taking the job market's needs into account.

The Tamar Center Research and Policy Unit aims to make research on education and higher education in Negev Bedouin society accessible to the public and to decision makers. The Tamar Center works to close gaps between Negev Bedouin Society and Israeli society at large through education.