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**IS MA'AGALEY TA'ASUKA (CIRCLES OF EMPLOYMENT)
PROGRAM SUITABLE FOR WOMEN FROM THE
UNRECOGNIZED VILLAGES IN THE NEGEV?**

WRITTEN BY SARA HELMAN





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Translator: Dana Peleg

Interviewers: Ibtisam Al-Chorty,
Salima Azazma, Asma Abu-Kaf

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mirkaznagabiya@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This report is based on preliminary research carried out among 30 Bedouin women, mainly from the unrecognized villages, who participated or still participate in the Ma'agaley Ta'asuka (Hebrew: Circles of Employment) program. It is considered the Israeli Employment Service's flagship program. Aiming at preventing long-term unemployment among receivers of public assistance, the program requires participation in various activities (workshops, sessions with a vocational counselor, and fast integration in the labor market). Similar programs have been prevalent in many countries since the 1990s.

The paper is comprised of four parts. The first part describes the employment and educational situation of Bedouin women in the Negev, in relation to the structural problems impeding their integration in the labor market. The second part describes and analyzes the Ma'agaley Ta'asuka program, including its ideology and guiding principles of operation. The third part shows the women's experience in the program, regarding its goals. The last part provides a general view of the evidence and the limitations of Ma'agaley Ta'asuka program.

The interviews conducted with the program participants show that most of them lack the educational resources required to integrate into the labor market (knowledge of Hebrew, high school education, and technological skills), as well as employment experience. They are mothers of children who live in villages without any childcare facilities, or in localities devoid of means of transportation that are available in sufficient frequency, and their access to work is limited by patriarchal norms. The evidence also shows that the workshops offered by the programs, such as job interview simulation, job search, and resumé writing workshop do not match the interviewees' needs. They reported that they would like to learn Hebrew and acquire a profession, but also to find a workplace suitable for mothers.

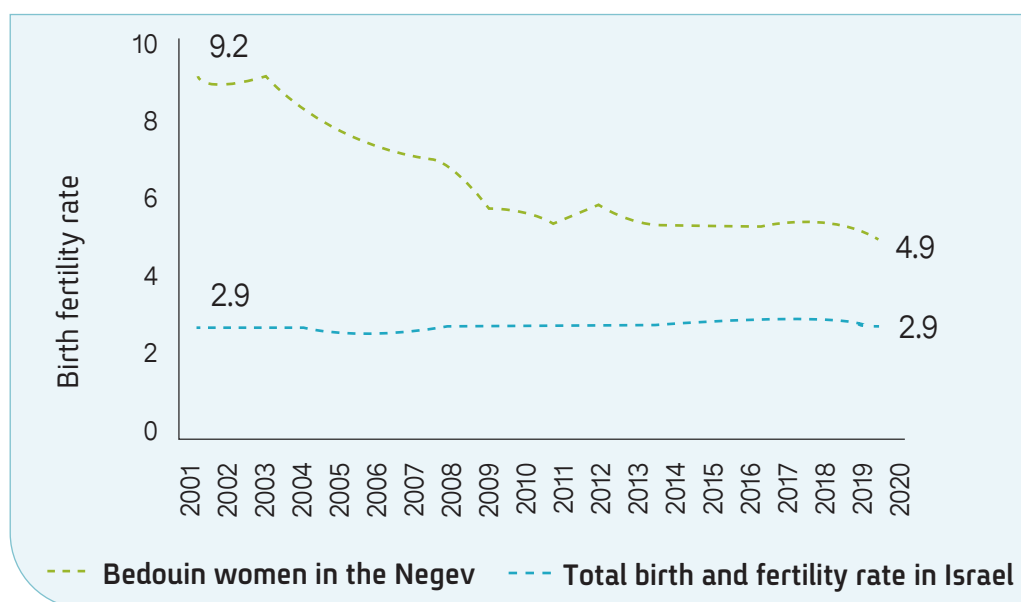
- Most of the participants expressed their willingness to integrate into the labor market. However, they have pointed out that the program was ineffective in assisting their integration into the labor market.
- The participants thought that the program did not consider their level of education; their role in the family, as the caregivers for children; or their mobility issues, considering their economic situation, and the lack of suitable infrastructure and transportation.
- Most participants ended up in cleaning jobs that do not require previous training nor writing a resume or preparing for an interview.
- The participants did not find the training programs' content useful to them: Neither the Hebrew level nor the skills level acquired were useful.
- Preparing for a job interview was viewed as repetitive, ineffective, and a waste of time.
- The program did not fulfill the expectations and did not meet the needs of the participants in acquiring effective professional training for vocational integration within the local community.
- This program seems to be ineffective for the unrecognized villages, due to its unsuitability for the scarcity of employment opportunities for women living in these villages.

GENDER, EDUCATION, AND EMPLOYMENT IN THE BEDOUIN POPULATION OF THE NEGEV

Understanding the socioeconomic situation of the Bedouin population in the Negev, and particularly of Bedouin women is imperative for grasping the effect of this situation on the success or the failure of employment programs. This part of the report is based on data collected from various sources (Israel's National Insurance Institute, Israel's Central Bureau of Statistics, and Israel's Employment Service, alongside secondary sources: JDC's Brookdale Institute and the Knesset's Research and Information Center). Locating data about the Bedouin residents of the Negev encountered multiple difficulties, including lack of data about the unrecognized villages (both the Central Bureau of Statistics and the National Security Institute survey only officially recognized localities numbering 2000 residents or above) (normally the unrecognized villages are not surveyed) and lack of information regarding the number of residents in the unrecognized villages. Another difficulty in locating data about the employment situation of the Bedouins in the Negev is the absence of labor exchange offices in most of the localities aside from the town of Rahat. Residents of Bedouin towns and unrecognized villages are registered in Jewish towns' labor exchange offices. This part of the report attempts to draw as comprehensive a picture as possible. Still, it is based on data from different sources, gathered in different years, so the data is only partial.

The Bedouin population of the Negev numbers 292,288 residents, which comprise 21% of the Negev population. 73,172 of them live in the town of Rahat; 134,393 of them live in seven municipal councils and two regional councils¹; and 84,723 Bedouins live in villages that are unrecognized by the State of Israel². The Bedouin population of the Negev is one of the poorest, most disenfranchised ones in Israel. All the Bedouin localities are rated in the lowest socio-economic cluster (socio-economic cluster 1)³. The Bedouin population of the Negev is also characterized by high birth rates. In comparison to previous years, the birth rates of Bedouin women in the Negev have decreased. Still, these rates are high in comparison to the general population. The general birth rate in Israel was 2.9 children per woman in 2021, while in the Bedouin population of the Negev, it was 4.9 children per woman.

Chart No. 1: The fertility and birth rate in Bedouin women on the Negev vs. the total fertility and birth rate in Israel 2001-2020 (number of children per woman)



Source: Oren Tirosh, Dana Cohen, Bracha Berlin, Ayala Levy-Kobshi and Smadar Somech. 2023: Patterns and Barriers to Employment Amongst the Negev Bedouin Population. Jerusalem, Brookdale.

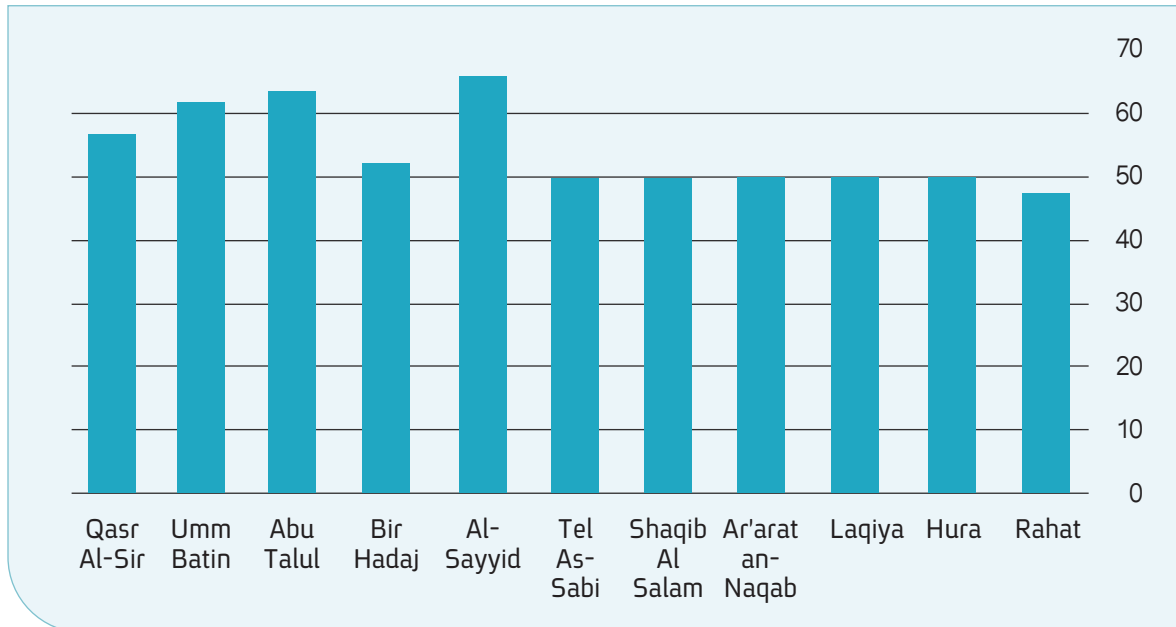
¹ To learn more about the history of the current settlement of the Bedouin population in the Negev, see: The Arab-Bedouin Community in the Negev-Nagab - A Short Background - Dukium.org (retrieved on May 23, 2023)

² See: <https://in.bgu.ac.il/humsos/negevSus/SYBSN/Pages/demographics.aspx> Retrieved on May 23, 2023.

³ See: Central Bureau of Statistics 2019. Characterization of geographic units and their classification according to the socioeconomic level of the population in 2019, Table A: Local authorities by rising ranking of the 2019 socioeconomic index, index value, ranking and cluster, and changes compared to 2017. Jerusalem, Central Bureau of Statistics.

The Bedouin population of the Negev is young. The following chart shows the percentage of children under 17 in selected localities. Children ages 18 and younger comprise 50.5% of the Bedouin population in the Negev.

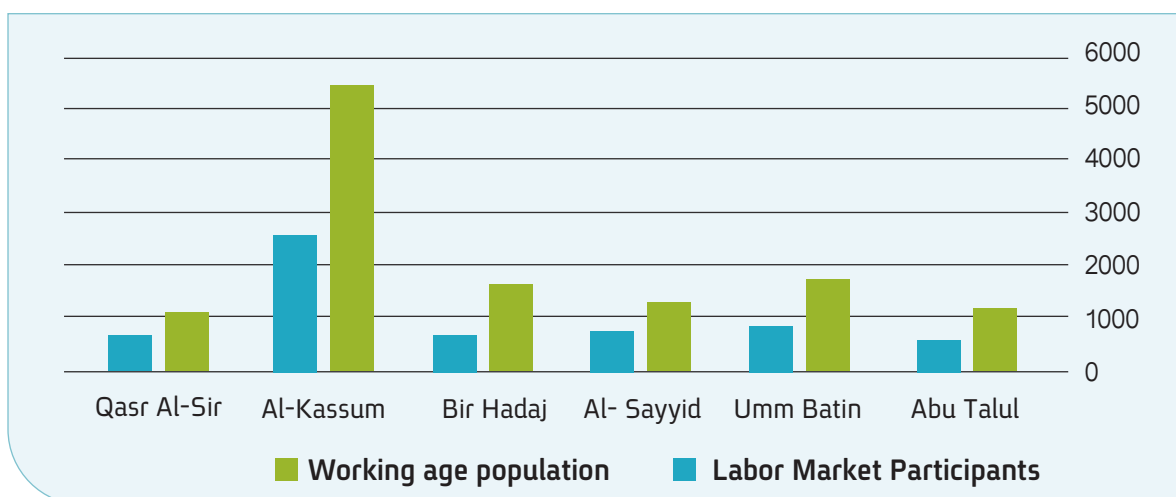
Chart no. 2: Percentage of children under 17 in the Bedouin population of the Negev



Source: Adapted from: *Localities in Israel: Children as a percentage of the population of the locality.* Jerusalem, National Insurance Institute 2021

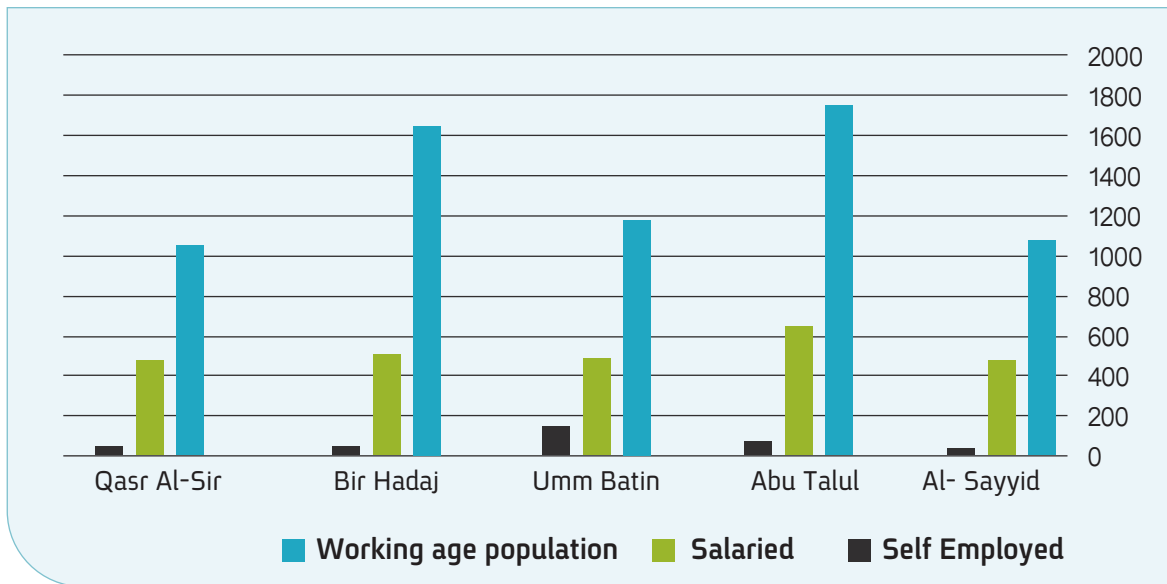
Most of the Bedouin population of the Negev is below the poverty line. For example, in 2018, 66% of the Bedouins in the Negev lived below the poverty line. According to the National Insurance Institute, the employment rate in the Bedouin localities is low. The following chart presents the labor force participation rate in selected localities.

Chart no. 3: Working Age Population and Labor Market Participants in Selected Bedouin Villages (in numbers)



Source: Adapted from: *Statistics by locality.* Jerusalem, National Insurance Institute

Chart no. 4: Employees and self-employed of working age in selected Bedouin villages

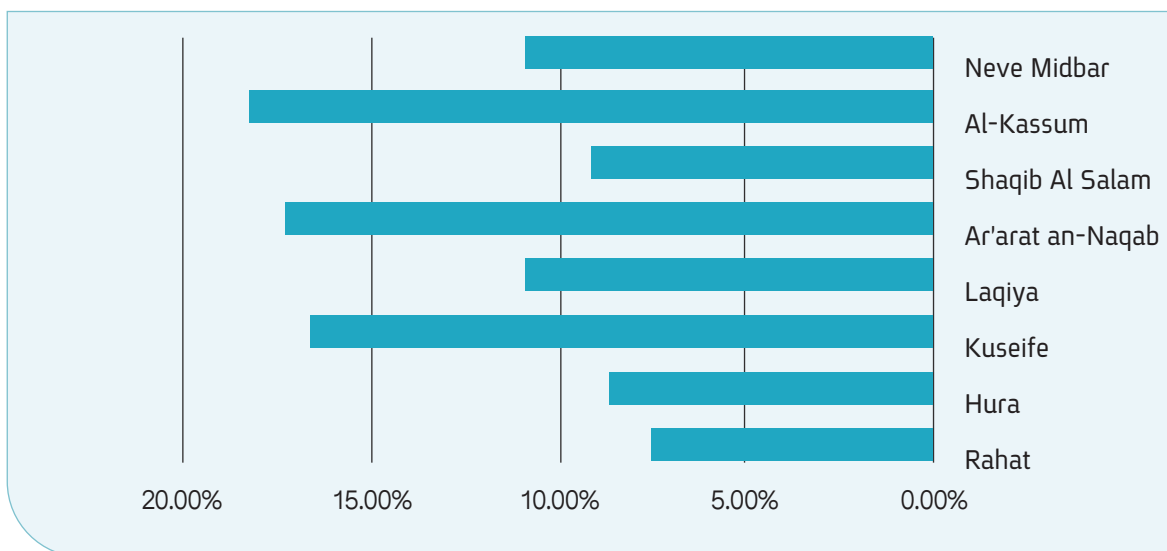


Source: Statistics by Localities. Jerusalem, National Insurance Institute

The labor force participation rate of working-age residents in selected localities is 34%-40%, while the national participation rate is 52.5%. The pay rate of the residents participating in the labor force is low in comparison to the national rate. A Bedouin employee earns 64% of the national average pay level. Additionally, the rate of Bedouin employees earning less than minimum wage is 30% on average, while the national rate is 24.8%.

The low rate of labor force participation, the high ratio of principal earners and dependents, and the low income are reflected in the unemployment data of the Bedouin population in the Negev. In April 2023, the lowest unemployment rate was 7.6% in Rahat, and the highest one was 18% in Al-Kasom Regional Council.

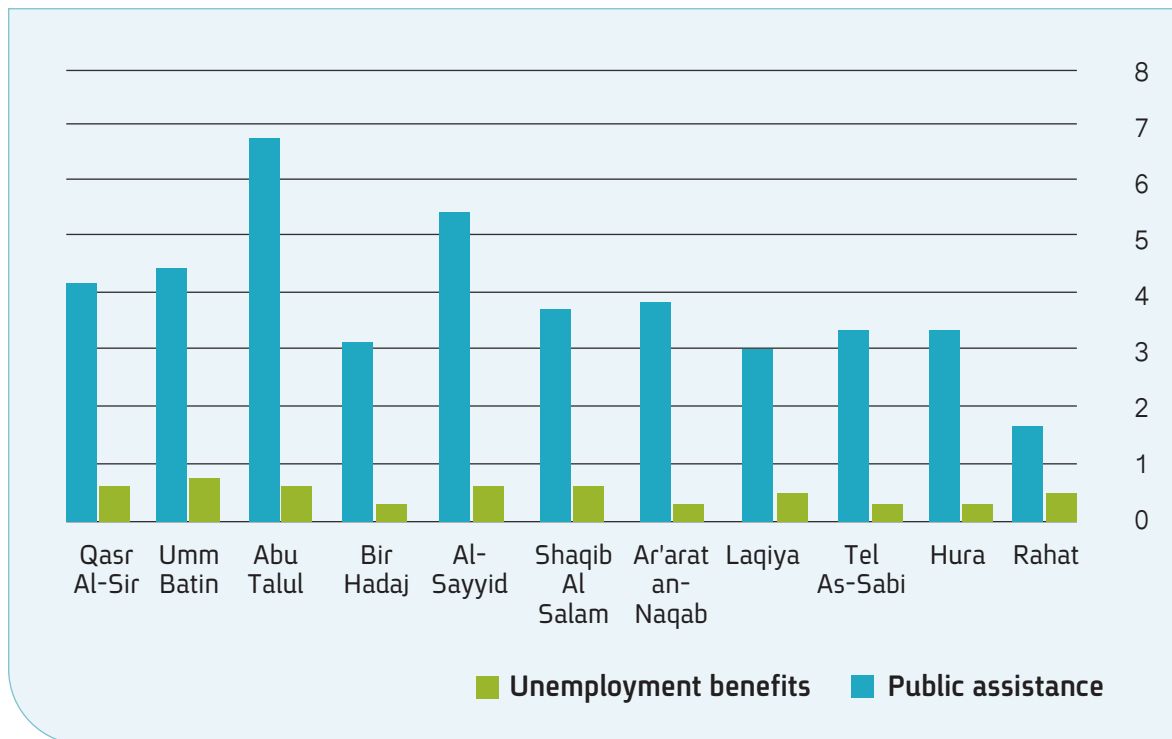
Chart no. 5: Average unemployment rate in selected Bedouin localities- April 2023



Source: Employment Service: Information at the Locality and Regional Council Level 2023

The average unemployment rate among the Negev Bedouins in March 2023 was 13.23% of the labor force, while the unemployment rate in Israel's Arab localities was 4.7%; in the Jewish localities it was 2.78%; and the national unemployment rate was 4.14%. Not only the unemployment is widespread, but among the Bedouin residents, it is mostly long term unemployment as we can observe by the rate of Negev Bedouins receiving public assistance benefits, aimed at long term unemployed and low-income working age individuals. Since public assistance is paid per family, we can conclude that the rate of deeply unemployed women is high.

Chart no. 6: Rate of public assistance and unemployment benefits receivers in selected Bedouin localities



Source: Central Bureau of Statistics. 2021. Localities in Israel: Pension recipients as a percentage of the locality's population.

While the data provided by Israel's National Insurance Institute, and Israel Central Bureau of Statistics refer to localities numbering over 2,000 residents, data collected by the National Insurance Institute at the request of Nagabya that included the gamut of the Negev localities (cities, towns, regional councils, and unrecognized villages) shows a bigger picture of the depth and extent of unemployment in the Bedouin population of the Negev. In December 2022, the average period of receiving public assistance was 9.62 months. In the same month, there were 62,968 public assistance recipients⁴ in Israel. Bedouin families in the Negev are 18% of public assistance recipients despite amounting to 3.02% of the Israeli population.

Chart no. 7: The number (in absolute numbers) of public assistance receivers and the average period (in months) of receiving public assistance. Bedouin localities in the Negev (recognized and unrecognized)

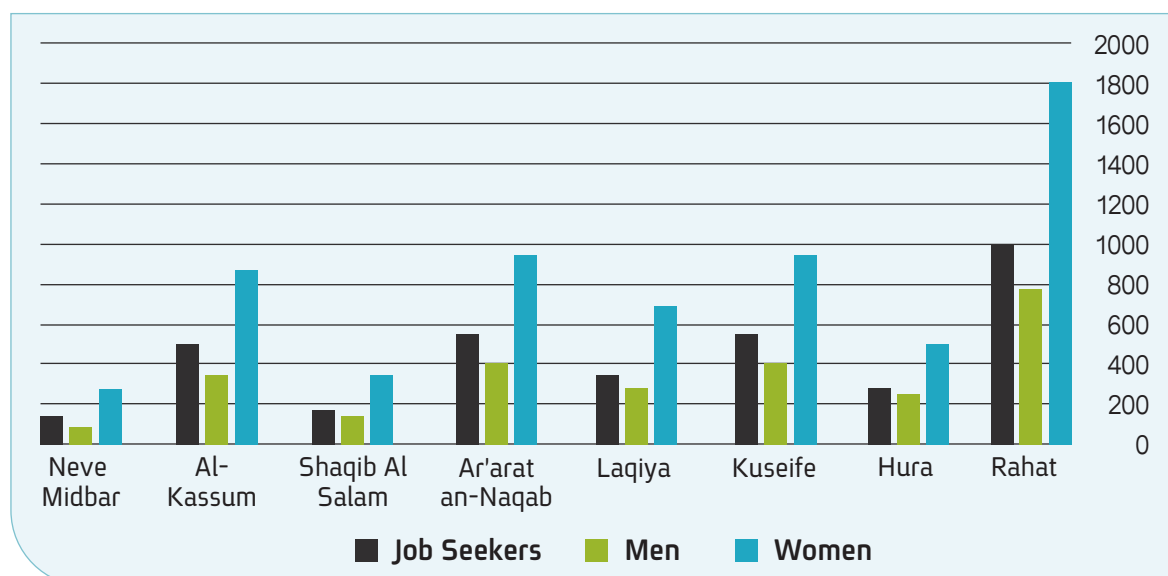
⁴ Source: Central Bureau of Statistics. 2021. Localities in Israel: Pension recipients as a percentage of the locality's population. Jerusalem, Central Bureau of Statistics

Average months in public assistance	Recipients of Public Assistance and Unemployment Benefits	Recipients of Public Assistance and Unemployment Benefits (Couples only)	locality
12	*	*	Abu Amra
11	*	*	Abu Srihan
10.04	849	850	Mas'udin
9.14	35	35	Huzael
10	13	13	Ukbi
8.25	13	13	Abu Abadon
11.75	*	*	Apinish
9.4	31	31	Assad
9.83	451	451	Abu Rokaiek
9.44	485	485	Assam
10.05	140	140	Kodira Ha Sanah
9.28	153	153	Atrash
10	443	447	Abu Rabia
10.26	218	220	Abu Guidat
10.17	294	296	Abu Krinat
8.7	*	*	Atauna
9.24	60	60	Tarabin El Sana
8.81	24	24	Kuwain
9.86	63	63	G'anabib
9.93	20	20	Nasasra
12	*	*	Abu Amar
9.19	1087	1090	Tel Sheva
10.21	1144	1146	Kesaifa
9.98	678	679	Lagya
9.41	1959	1960	Rahat
10.11	80	80	Awashla
8.96	37	37	Said
9.51	1123	1126	Arara Naqab
9.75	73	74	Kvuha
8.87	459	461	Segev Shalom
9.54	826	826	Hura
9.18	41	41	Abu Krinat (locality)
9.36	52	53	Mikhol
9.55	58	58	Tarabin Al Sana (locality)
9.93	87	87	Kasar Ha Sir
10.2	156	156	Bir Hadaj'
8.71	17	17	Darejat
7.99	142	142	Um Battin
9.2	56	57	Al Sayyed
9.83	99	99	Sawa
11.06	13	13	Kohla
9.32	94	95	Abu Talul
.	.	.	
9.62	11590	11615	Total

Source: Data collected by National Insurance Institute at the request of Nagabya.

According to the Israeli Employment Service data, 54.62% of Bedouin women are registered as job seekers, and the equivalent rate of Bedouin men is 45.8%. While nationally there are more unemployed women than men, the rate of job-seeking Bedouin women is higher than the equivalent rate of Arab and Jewish women in Israel and is higher than that of women in mixed Arab-Jewish localities.

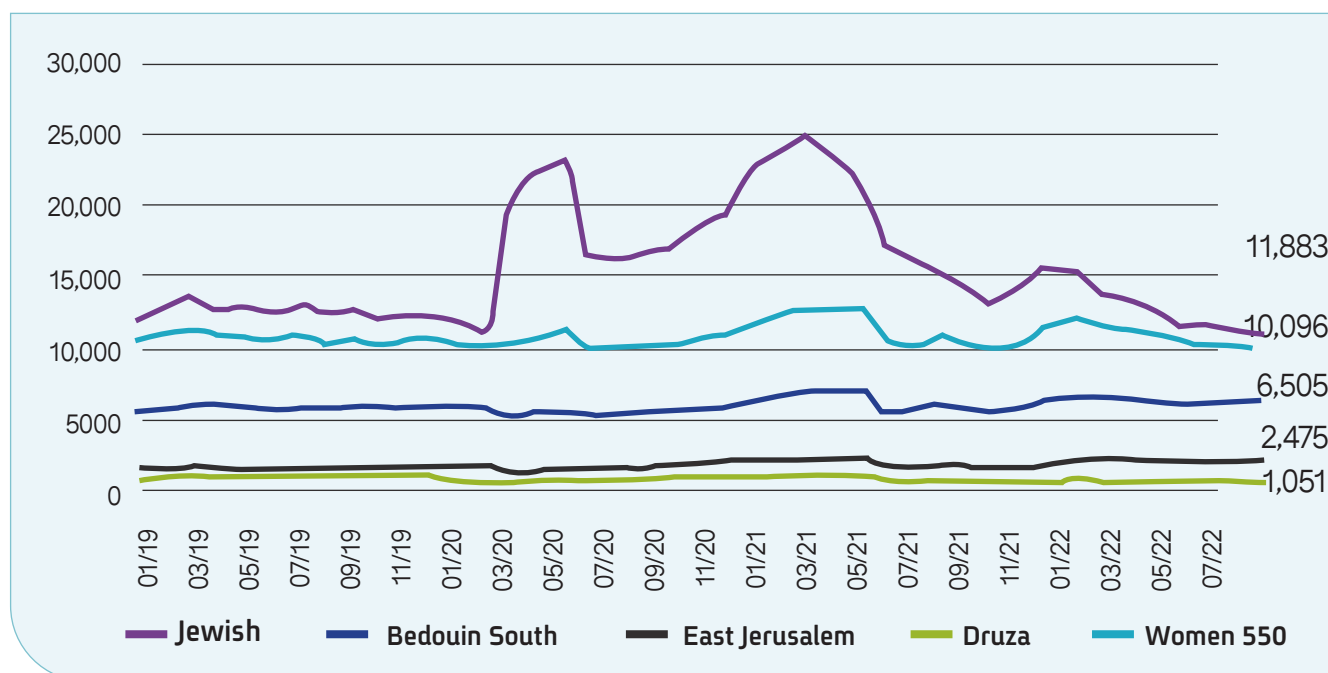
Chart no.: 8 Number of unemployed by gender in selected localities



Source: Employment Service. April 2023. Information at the locality and regional council level.

According to the Employment Service data, in the summer of 2022, 84.7% of the Bedouin women job seekers claimed public assistance and only 13.1% claimed unemployment benefits. Moreover, the following chart shows that the number of Bedouin women claimants of public assistance did not decrease after the COVID-19 pandemic.

Chart no. 9: Women claimants of public assistance by population group 2019-2022⁵



Source: The Employment Service, press release.

⁵ See: Group 550 includes Arab women excluding of Bedouin and Druze women. Press Release. Israel Employment Service Report for 2023 third quarter

77% of the Bedouin women do not participate in the labor market, in comparison to 14% of the Jewish women, and 62% of the Arab women. Bedouin women earn 44% of the average men's earnings and 45% of Jewish women's earnings⁶ in Israel.

MA'AGALEY TA'ASUKA (CIRCLES OF EMPLOYMENT) PROGRAM

During the 1990s, many Western welfare states promoted politics of conditionality by establishing extensive reforms in unemployment insurance, as well as programs for public assistance for the working age unemployed. The politics of conditionality was a far-reaching transformation in the social and labor market policy of these countries, replacing passive policy (providing benefits as a substitute for salary during the unemployment period so that the unemployed can keep their standard of living) with a transition into active labor market policy. Such active policies conditioned receiving unemployment and public assistance with fulfilling duties, rapid integration in the labor market (Dwyer, 2004; Reese, 2011).

One of the underlying assumptions of the labor market policy was that unemployment is an individual issue, not structural one (stemming from economic slowdown and labor market issues). Hence, the programs developed were meant to motivate the unemployed and help them acquire habits that might have been lost during prolonged periods of unemployment (such as motivation, work ethics, punctuality, and obedience). Moreover, policymakers believed that a combination of coercion, conditionality, and financial incentives would change individuals' behavior, enhance employment capabilities, and lead to rapid integration in the labor market. In 1996 the US initiated the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act federal program. It abolished the entitlement to public assistance, and limited receiving it to five years maximum (i.e., the claimant cannot receive public assistance for a period longer than five years, and cannot claim it once the five years are over), and required the eligible recipients (mainly poor single-parent families) to participate in placement programs, while rapidly integrating in the labor market. These programs did not provide professional training or improvement of the participant's employment capabilities but focused primarily on their motivation. These programs were not aimed at creating new jobs for the unemployed, but to channel employees into jobs nobody wanted (Peck, 2001, p. 6), in the secondary labor market, with no job security and benefits.

The program, which operated in the State of Wisconsin in the US, became a model for similar programs in many countries since it led shortly to an extensive decrease in the number of public assistance beneficiaries. The Wisconsin Program model spread out like wildfire and was adopted by many countries as a solution for prolonged unemployment problems (Lodemel & Trickey, 2000). In 2005 Israel established the MeHalev Program (Me'Havtahat Hachnasa L'Ta'asuka Betucha - From Public Assistance to Secure Employment) as an experiment in four cities and their surroundings (Jerusalem, Hadera, Ashqelon, and Nazareth). This program required public assistance receivers to report to one-stop centers operated by private agencies, and participate in diverse activities for 30-40 hours a week, or to integrate in the labor market (Helman & Maron, 2017, 2019). The program operated from 2005-2010 (in 2007 it was dubbed Orot L'taasuka, "Lights for Employment"). It caused public unrest and protest among participants, politicians, and civil society organizations, due to the violation of participants' rights and the intention to privatize the Israeli employment service. It was abruptly interrupted in May 2010 (Helman, 2021).

Ma'agaley Ta'asuka Program was launched in 2014, under the responsibility of the Employment Service, (Adut, 2017). The program aims to "address all work seekers and mainly public assistance claimants, to integrate them in an appropriate job and prevent prolonged unemployment and dependence on benefits."⁷ It was developed by the Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, based on the Strive Program⁸. Similarly to other active labor market programs (see above), this program is based on the work first principle, meaning rapid integration in the labor market along with acquiring soft skills. Soft skills, or life skills, include work ethics, motivation, teamwork, and communication skills (Moss & Tilly, 1996). Public assistance recipients and claimants are supposed to participate in the program three times a week: Twice a week in various activities and once a week meeting a designated placement coordinator.

⁶ See: Jerry Alamo-Capital. 2022. Data on the employment of Arab women, with an emphasis on Bedouin women in the Negev. Jerusalem, the Knesset Research and Information Center

⁷ See: Employment Service. 2022. Placement Program Procedure - Employment Circles - page 3. Jerusalem, the Israeli Employment Service.

⁸ See: Purpose, Mission, Vision & Values – STRIVE

The workshops offered for job seekers are: A preprocess workshop aimed at locating barriers⁹ such as lack of motivation, and incapability. This workshop "is a preliminary stage followed by the employment process, a stage that aims to help job seekers to connect to their inner motivation, to become willing and able to move their current life situation forward¹⁰."

A change or steps towards employment workshop, which incorporates preparation for job seeking, alongside skills and tools for work integration including breaking complex barriers. This workshop is meant to encourage people who never have worked, or those who have lost their employment skills due to prolonged unemployment, to find employment and keep it. The main focuses of this workshop are finding one's employment identity; resumé writing and acquiring effective tools for job finding; job interview preparation and individual financial management.

A guided job search workshop: active job search using computers.

Ma'agaley Ta'asuka is less demanding than Me'halev and Orort L'Taasuka programs, however, it is based on the same principles and does not consider the cultural, economic, social, and spatial differences between the various groups that comprise the families who receive public assistance. Most of the workshops assume basic Hebrew literacy (despite the module on Occupational Hebrew).



⁹ Using the term "barrier" turns structural problems (such as low-level education, lack of professional skills, lack of employment experience, lack of access to public transportation, issues in finding childcare, lack of Hebrew literacy, and lack of nearby jobs) to personal traits of individuals who are expected to change their behavior and become employed (and hence reduce and even diminish their dependence on welfare benefits). These barriers become targets of intervention in various employment programs (e.g., Houser, Schram, Soss & Fording, 2014).

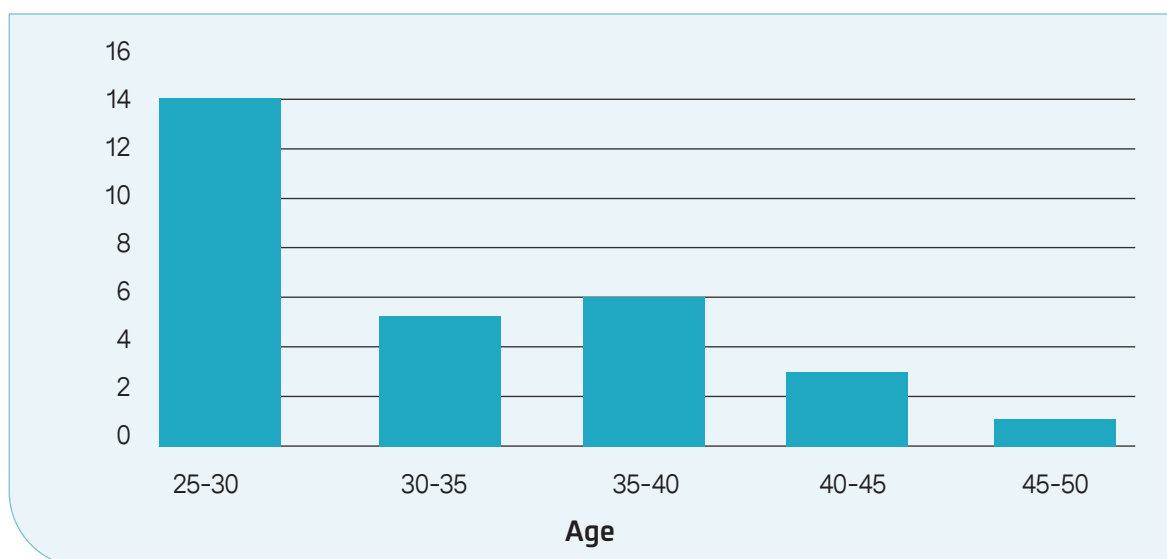
¹⁰ See: Employment Service. 2022. Placement Program Procedure - Employment Circles - page 13. Jerusalem, the Israeli Employment Service.

BEDOUIN WOMEN'S EXPERIENCE IN MA'AGALEY TA'ASUKA PROGRAM

Participants' characteristics:

The interviewees live in unrecognized villages and one town. They participate or participated in Ma'agaley Ta'asuka program and were required to report to labor exchange offices: in Be'er Sheba and Yeruham. Most of them are married (68.97%) and the rest are single (17.24%) or divorced (13.9%). Their ages are 25-50.

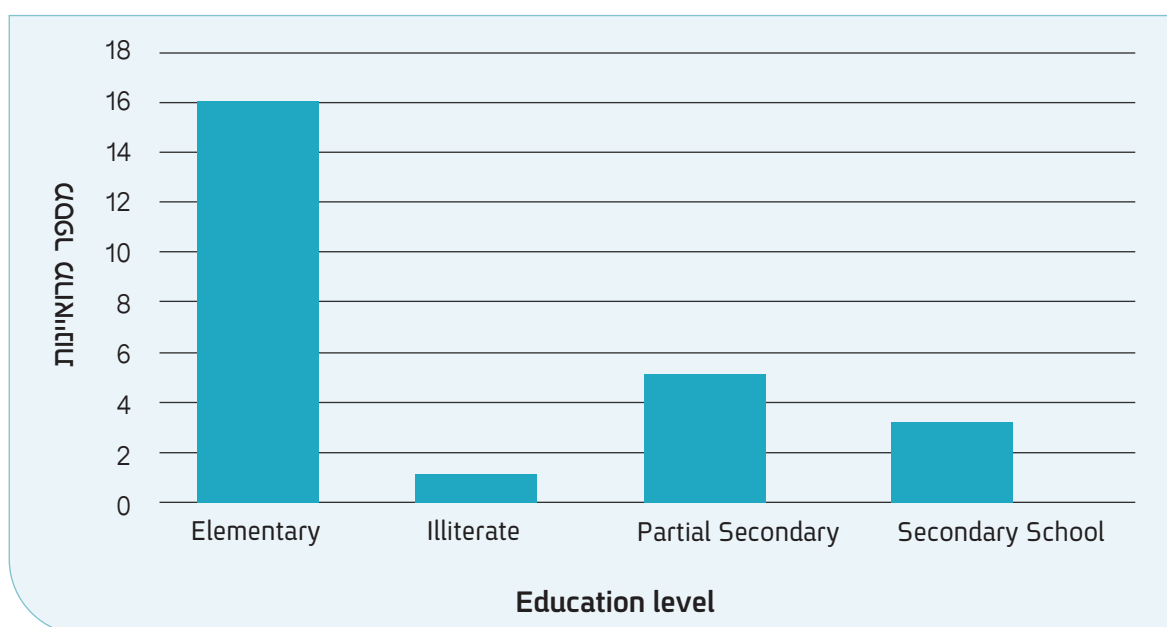
Chart no. 10: Interviewees' Age



Source: Interviews.

The interviewees' children's number was 1-8 children. Most attended elementary school only (16), only two graduated high school and the rest haven't graduated high school.

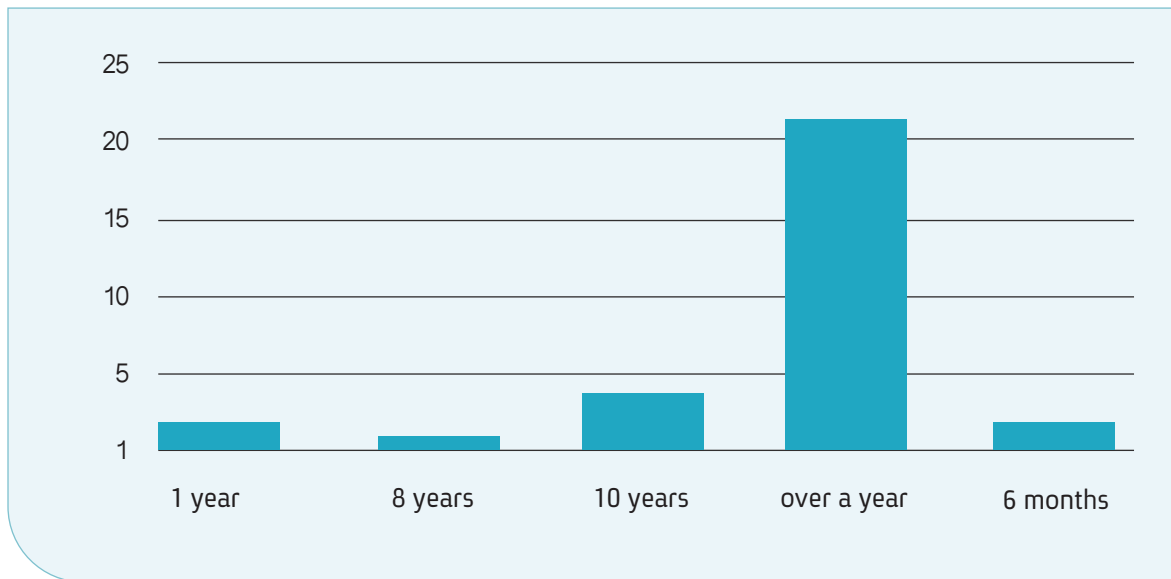
Chart no. 11: Interviewees' education level



Source: Interviews.

62% (18) of the thirty interviewees have never worked, and the rest had part-time and small-scale jobs, and jobs that did not require any training (such as cleaning, caring for children and the elderly). The interviewees and their spouses (among the married and the divorced women) have received public assistance for a long time. 21 of them have been in the public assistance system for over a year, two interviewees have been in it for six months, two interviewees have been in it for a year, one interviewee has been there for eight years and four of them have been receiving public assistance for ten years. This is not a representative poll; however, it does indicate the depth of unemployment in the unrecognized villages (see Chart 13).

Chart no. 12: Interviewees' seniority as public assistance recipients



Source: Interviews with participants.

WHAT DID THE INTERVIEWEES KNOW ABOUT MAAGALEY TAASUKA PROGRAM?

When the interviewees were required to report at the labor exchange offices in order to take part in Ma'agaley Ta'asuka program, they knew very little about it. Most of them received a letter, but few kept it or understood they were to participate in a placement program.

Here are some of the participants' testimonials:

"I had no idea about it beforehand. I was told (at the employment office) that Ma'agaley Ta'asuka would help me find a job."

These testimonials indicate that some women were told that they were in a placement program, while other women said they did not know for certain that they participated in Ma'agaley Ta'asuka. Other interviewees were not sure that they took part in the program but indicated that they participated, or currently participate in the workshops.

A 33-year-old mother of five, pointed out: "I think that I have received a letter, some sort of confirmation that I participated in the workshop." Other women indicated that they had received a letter but did not know what it said. Another woman mentioned "I don't know any Hebrew. I have had many letters; I don't know what they wrote there."

This sentence is repeated in most of the interviews. Only a few women could identify the program's title. A 40-year-old mother of seven indicated: "I started participating in Ma'aglay Ta'asuka two years ago." Another woman who had participated in the program previously, a mother of five, testified that she

received a referral from the Employment Service, and told that "she will be trained for the labor market." Another woman was told that she would receive a full explanation once she reported to the program. Other women said that they were informed about a program where they could study. The phrase about studying and participating in workshops was repeated several times, even when the participants could not indicate that they participated in Ma'agaley Ta'asuka.

These testimonials show that very few women identified the program by its title. Women did not remember if they were summoned to the program by a letter they had received. Those who did remember receiving the letter indicated that they did not understand its content. Considering that most of the interviewees only graduated from elementary school, assuming the letter was in Hebrew, the lack of knowledge is not surprising. Furthermore, the bureaucratic language used in the referral form requires a relatively higher level of Hebrew literacy and reading comprehension. Other interviewees said that not only they did not know anything about the program, but when they asked about it, they were referred to "what's written in the form." Another participant mentioned that "they keep yelling at me, and don't treat me respectfully."

Most of the interviewees said that the goals of the program were explained to them in person. A 35-year-old interviewee, a mother of five, and an elementary school graduate mentioned that "some read that the program helps people to find a job and get ahead in life." Another woman, a mother of seven and who graduated seventh grade said that she "was told how to find a job." Assistance in job search and getting ahead in life were mentioned as the program goals in most of the interviews. The program explanation was not devoid of sanctions for non-compliance. A single 43-year-old interviewee testified: "They will give you a letter, and tell you: If you don't come, you don't get any money, you'll be considered as no cooperating. They speak Hebrew and I can't understand a single thing." The sanctions issue repeated in an additional interview with a 33-year-old mother of eight: "I don't know anything, they sent us to a big room, and if you don't come you are considered a refuser, you don't get money. They divided us into groups and every one of us wrote what was best for them."

WHAT DID THE INTERVIEWEES STUDY IN THE PROGRAM?

According to Ma'agley Ta'asuka - placement program procedure," following the preprocess workshop (see under Ma'agaley Ta'asuka program, p. 16.) the participants are referred to a transformation/steps towards employment workshop. This workshop incorporates a personal process along with acquiring skills for integration into the labor market. It is comprised of five modules, which are the main topics of the workshop: 1. Finding one's employment identity; 2. Writing a resumé; 3. Acquiring effective tools for job search and finding a job; 4. Preparation for a job interview; and 5. financial management.

The interviewees said that they have participated in workshops for Hebrew learning, resumé writing, and preparation for a job interview.

A 35-year-old mother of five and an elementary school graduate said: "I took part in a Hebrew language workshop and in a workshop for preparing my resumé." Another interviewee (a 43-year-old single woman, who graduated 7th grade) reported that she has "studied Hebrew, but it was as if I didn't learn anything. They are not responsible for people's learning. This is how I felt. My teacher wasted time." Writing a resumé was the most common answer to the question of what you have learned in the program. Other interviewees mentioned that they participated in a workshop for resumé writing and preparing for a job interview. This is what a 28-year-old, mother of one child who graduated high school said: "Every once in a while, they ask me to attend the same lecture, every time, "how to prepare for a job interview". The repetitiveness of the workshop and the lack of diversity also came up in the interviews: "Yes, there were trainings for the first session at work, and they repeat more than once, sometimes every week."

Other interviewees spoke about a worker's identity process, as well as the resumé preparation: "We need to talk about ourselves all the time and to prepare a resumé. They teach resumé without teaching a profession." Finding one's worker's identity, including "breaking complex barriers" as part of the

workshops, was described by a 33-year-old mother of eight, who completed elementary school: "Once we were taught to prepare a resumé, and then they told us to talk about our problems in life." Talking about life and our problems was another issue that repeated in the interviews. The participants experienced it as a waste of their time.

Programs like Ma'agaley Ta'asuka aspire to teach the participants time management. The underlying assumption here is that one of the causes for the lack of participation in the labor market is the job seekers' incapacity to manage their time in a beneficial way. A single 25-year-old interviewee said, "So far we haven't started studying, we only had a workshop about organizing our time and resumé."

Most of the participants lacked Hebrew literacy and had only a low level of education. Still, they took part in workshops meant for people who can read Hebrew and have basic digital literacy .

The question that arises here is: What is the value of these workshops for women who lack employment experience? 20 out of our 30 interviewees had no employment experience, eight of them worked in part-time jobs that did not require any training, one interviewee was training to become a kindergarten teacher's assistant and another one worked at the Soda Stream factory in Rahat.

TO WHAT KIND OF JOBS WERE THE PARTICIPANTS REFERRED?

Most of the participants were referred to cleaning jobs. A 29-year-old mother of five reported: "I was sent to clean offices, two hours in the morning, two in the evening. That's hard for me." A 40-year-old mother of eight said she was sent to cleaning jobs in Be'er Sheba a few times.

A 30-year-old mother of six was sent to a chicken packing facility. "They sent me to a cleaning job in Be'er Sheba, and once they sent me to a chicken factory in Kfar Haim, I had to be there at 6 am. But I can't leave home at that time. I have no one to watch the kids, give them breakfast, and take them to school." Other women, also mothers of multiple children, were sent to work far away from their residence, in Kiryat Gat. A 25-year-old mother of one child, who works as a caregiver for an elderly relative, was also sent to a cleaning job.

WHO WATCHES THE CHILDREN?

One of the main issues that were brought up in the interviews by the Ma'agaley Ta'asuka program's participants was childcare. The interviewees indicated that leaving home early, working in shifts, or the afternoon is not suitable for mothers.

Other interviewees found childcare arrangements in the family. Adolescent girls don't go to school on the days their mothers attend the program. A spouse of one of the women, a mother of five watched the children. Others use their mothers or sisters: "My 67-year-old mother, she can't take care of the children, but there is no choice" (mother of five). In other cases, when family support is not available, the children take care of themselves. However, families are not always dependable as a mother of one child pointed out: "I ask my husband's parents. They do it sometimes, and another time they say they can't." A mother of seven testified: "I ask my sister-in-law to take care of them [the children]. It's not like that all the time. They spend many hours alone at home."

The distance of the villages from the jobs offered to the interviewees, scarce transportation, hazardous weather (mainly in winter), as well as the fact that they were mothers of young children, with no employment experience, and the patriarchal tradition led frequently to sanctions and the suspension of their public assistance benefits.



SURVIVAL STRATEGIES FOLLOWING DENIAL OF PUBLIC ASSISTANCE

In Israel public assistance benefits are relatively low (compared to other countries) and barely cover basic needs (Koreh, Gal & Cohen, 2007).

Chart no. 13: Public assistance by sum and personal status, Public Assistance for claimants reporting to the Employment Office

Marital status	Public Assistance for claimants reporting to the Employment Office
Single	NIS2136
Couple	NIS 2848
Couple +1	NIS 3180
Couple + 2 children or more	NIS 3702
Single parent + child	NIS 3180
Single parent + 2 children or more	NIS 3702

Source: The Institute for National Insurance. The sum of payment assistance from January 1, 2023, for claimants receiving it consecutively since 2022.

Suspension of public assistance benefits, which is the last resort (Gal & Doron, 2000) exposes the mothers among the interviewees to extreme deprivation. A 43-year-old woman, mother of seven testified: "It's hard to buy food and stuff for the home and the children. We have no one to turn to for help, no relatives. Often, we don't have food at home and in the winter, I didn't buy clothes. It's very difficult. "A 33-year-old mother of eight pointed out: "It's very hard. I had no food. We lived only on the children's allowances. Sometimes we went with no food for a week. I couldn't buy clothes."

Other women use survival strategies such as getting assistance from parents and neighbors: "I can't buy any clothes at all, I receive hand-me-downs from neighbors, and I ask my parents for food" (a 45-year-old mother of eight). A 35-year-old mother of five mentioned that despite the help she received from other people during the time she was denied payment assistance, "it wasn't enough. In these times, I have no food for a month or two. I can't buy clothes either. I can't buy meat for my children. I haven't bought meat for a year."

The main survival strategy is receiving food from parents and neighbors. Still, most of the interviews show that even this sort of assistance is not sufficient, and many times families suffer from food deprivation.

WHAT ARE THE PARTICIPANTS' EMPLOYMENT EXPECTATIONS?

Lack of sufficient education, Hebrew literacy, and employment experience do not prevent the participants from aspiring to integrate into the labor market. Many of them expressed their willingness to work, and even to acquire a profession that would allow them to provide for their children and avoid the deprivations the children suffer in their current state.

A 33-year-old mother of eight pointed out: "I'd like to do any kind of non-shift job to help my family. I'll do any work." A 33-year-old mother of five: "I'll do any job to help my family."

A 31-year-old single woman said: "I'll do any work I can do in the hours that are convenient for leaving

home. Working at night is hard for me. I like a job that starts at 8 am." Other women asked to work in 8 am-2 pm jobs.

A 35-year-old mother of five said: "The job itself is not the problem, but its location. I want to work close to home."

Other interviewees expressed their desire to study and become professionals. For example, a 30-year-old mother of three expressed her desire to study Hebrew and office work. Others wanted to study Hebrew as well as to become hairdressers, beauticians, and seamstresses. Other women wanted to study early childhood education.

Some women express their desire to work, saying they would take any work if it wasn't for the transportation and childcare difficulties. A 25-year-old mother of five said: "I want to work, but I live in an unrecognized village, I can't get to work and there isn't a kindergarten for the children."

Only one woman mentioned that her family blocked her path to education and work: "My family doesn't let girls work. That is a problem too. I can't study either. Our family is very difficult."

EXPECTATIONS FROM MA'AGALEY TA'ASUKA PROGRAM

The interviewees were asked what they would change in Ma'agaley Ta'asuka program. All of them, with no exception, were deeply disappointed by the program. When they were told that they would study in the program, they understood it as professional training. They felt that the program did not assist them and did not advance them.

Many of them expressed their desire to study so they could integrate into the labor market in worthwhile jobs. They suggested including a wide array of professions in the program, from undergraduate studies to professional training in occupations that would allow them to work in their locality or from home. They asked for consideration as mothers of children in unrecognized villages, devoid of childcare facilities. Other interviewees pointed out that the program took over their time: "It doesn't teach us anything important. We want to study something interesting. They waste people's time;" and "I think that Ma'agaley Ta'asuka is nothing serious. I'd like to tell them to give us proper assistance."

All of the interviews show disappointment from the programs, which do not offer a better chance at finding a job, and from the lack of knowledge (or disregard) of the interviewees' life conditions: "I'd like to tell them, come to our village, where we live, to see how hard it is to go to the job they send us to."

SUMMARY

This report examined the experience of thirty Bedouin women who currently participate or have participated in Ma'agaley Ta'asuka program. Their experience was examined in the context of the structural conditions that shape the constraints and opportunities of the general Bedouin population in the Negev, women in particular. The interviews show that the interviewees, residing in the Negev's unrecognized villages, suffer from limited educational and employment opportunities, and have a limited capacity to travel outside their localities. Most of the interviewees are in prolonged financial distress and have been living off public assistance for a long time. Most of them are mothers (of 1-8 children). Raising families with many children, lack of childcare facilities and employment options within their localities, as well as lack of public transportation availability, and patriarchal tradition, are all structural impediments on the path to employment, in addition to the lack of Hebrew literacy and the low level of education most of them have. All these factors obliterate any option for employment that would save them from poverty, and their opportunity to take advantage of employment programs offered by the State of Israel and the third-sector organizations operating under its name.

Ma'agaley Ta'asuka program is aimed at preventing deepening the unemployment of public assistance receivers and that of new unemployed. In the case of the women who live in the unrecognized villages, it is implemented in a population suffering from deep and prolonged unemployment. This program, similarly to other programs in Israel and many other countries, assumes that prolonged unemployment is an individual problem, stemming from low occupational self-esteem, skills that were lost due to this prolonged unemployment, and low motivation to provide for oneself without government benefits. These basic assumptions dictate a plan of action that is focused on the unemployed subjectivity, and not on the underlying structural conditions that cause this long-term unemployment, and the situation of certain participants' groups ("one size fits all" program). Ma'agaley Ta'asuka offers the participants tools that assume that deep unemployment may be reduced by preparing a resumé, coaching for a job interview, and online job search, alongside sessions meant to motivate the participants. The interviews show that most of the interviewees were given cleaning jobs, which do not require special skills, and certainly not preparing a resumé, or coaching for a job interview.

Hence, the ubiquity of suspension of public assistance benefits among the participants was not surprising. This denial of benefits from a population that barely manages to survive only deepens the distress of these women and their children.

This report is based on a small number of participants. Still, it implies not only the hardships of Bedouin women in the unrecognized villages but also the required direction of social and the labor market policy which would be sensible to the needs of this specific group of women, from establishing employment opportunities within the localities, the need for childcare facilities, promoting Hebrew literacy, education completion and developing short-term professional trainings to help these women improve their and their families quality of life.

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מרכז הידע והמחקר של האוכלוסיה הבדואית בנגב

mirkaznagabiya@gmail.com