

Two hands are shown, palms facing forward, with colorful paint applied to the fingers and palms. The left hand has a yellow palm with a green smiley face, and the right hand has a yellow palm with a blue smiley face. The fingers are painted in various colors: orange, green, blue, pink, and red. The background is a blurred green foliage.

EARLY CHILDHOOD IN ISRAEL

Selected Research Findings, 2022

Taub Center Initiative on Early Childhood Development and Inequality

Jerusalem, November 2022

This publication was prepared through the generous support of the Beracha Foundation, the Bernard van Leer Foundation, and Yad Hanadiv



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Taub Center for Social Policy Studies in Israel

The Taub Center was established in 1982 under the leadership and vision of Herbert M. Singer, Henry Taub, and the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC). The Center is funded by a permanent endowment created by the Henry and Marilyn Taub Foundation, the Herbert M. and Nell Singer Foundation, Jane and John Colman, the Kolker-Saxon-Hallock Family Foundation, the Milton A. and Roslyn Z. Wolf Family Foundation, and the JDC.

The Taub Center is an independent, nonpartisan, socioeconomic research institute based in Jerusalem. The Center conducts quality, impartial research on socioeconomic conditions in Israel, and develops innovative, equitable and practical options for macro public policies that advance the well-being of Israelis. The Center strives to influence public policy through direct communications with policy makers and by enriching the public debate that accompanies the decision making process.

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Taub Center Initiative on Early Childhood Development and Inequality

The Taub Center Initiative on Early Childhood Development and Inequality is tasked with examining the effects of the young child's environment on future achievements and disseminating the latest research on this subject to relevant individuals and agencies. The Initiative's goal is to assist in the advancement of effective policy to improve the environmental conditions of children in Israel during their early years of life, in order to improve their outcomes and reduce disparities due to socioeconomic background. The Initiative encourages empirical research into development and inequality among preschoolers in Israel by, among other things, creating a database that facilitates the investigation of the connection between environmental factors during early childhood and future outcomes. The researchers involved in this initiative draft up-to-date research reports, literature surveys, position papers, and policy papers. As part of its effort to disseminate the latest available knowledge, the Initiative holds an academic seminar to provide a multidisciplinary basis — both theoretical and empirical — for the investigation of early childhood. The seminar is intended primarily for civil service employees who are involved in policy making in this field. The activity of the Initiative is guided by an International Advisory Council consisting of leading academics, policy makers and members of civil society organizations who are committed to the advancement and implementation of effective policy in the area of early childhood in Israel.

The activities of the Initiative are supported by the Beracha Foundation, the Bernard van Leer Foundation, and Yad Hanadiv.

The Initiative is headed by Prof. Yossi Shavit, Principal Researcher, Taub Center for Social Policy Studies in Israel; Professor Emeritus, Tel Aviv University.

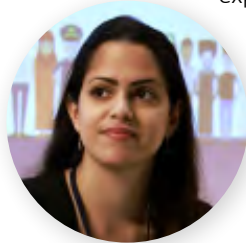
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Foreword

Early childhood is to a great extent the most formative period in an individual's life. Therefore, the socioeconomic situation in which a child develops has a decisive effect on cognitive, social, and emotional development. In this booklet, we have brought together a collection of findings from studies conducted as part of the Taub Center Initiative on Early Childhood Development and Inequality to provide a picture of the status of early childhood in Israel today. The topics discussed in this booklet are employment of parents and their children's participation in early childhood education and care (ECEC) frameworks, enrolment in ECEC frameworks in Arab society, and poverty experienced in early childhood in Israel.



For the first booklet of findings, which was published in September 2021, follow [this link](#).

Pleasant reading,

Dana Shay, Editor

Researcher, Taub Center Initiative on Early Childhood Development and Inequality

Throughout this book are comments from participants in the Taub Center Early Childhood Seminar

The *Early Childhood: From Research to Policy* seminars held by the Taub Center in 2021 and 2022 brought together dozens of leading women in the area of early childhood in Israel, including senior officials from the Ministry of Education and the public sector, organizations that operate preschools, as well as civil society agencies. Special emphasis was placed on the responsibility of local authorities, both Arab and Jewish, in the domain of early childhood. Participants were exposed to recent research on varied perspectives of early childhood and the ways in which inequality develops at this early stage. They also heard lectures on interventions to advance the field of early childhood in various towns and cities to enable them to draw on these ideas as they go about their work. The seminar is a platform for the fruitful exchange of opinions and ideas and the discussion of problems and possible solutions. It is a unique forum for discourse that connects between various players in the field. It is our intention to use this forum to advance early childhood policy in Israel.



In recognition of the participants' unique viewpoints and based on an understanding of the value of the connection between research and work in the field, participants were asked to choose a study that speaks to them and to comment on it. Some of the responses are included here as short opinion pieces. Each reflects the opinion of the writer, which may or may not be in line with that of the Taub Center and may be based on data not verified by the Taub Center. The comments of the participants add an important perspective and we thank each of the writers for their contribution.

Dr. Carmel Blank, Seminar Coordinator, Taub Center



Section I

Parents' employment and their children's participation in ECEC frameworks

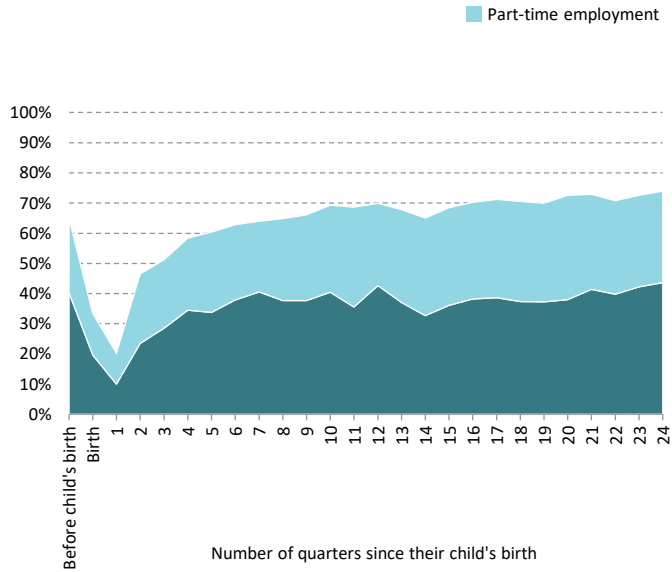
Employment rates among mothers decline after birth: among Jewish mothers, the decline is sharper than among Arab mothers

Mother's employment drops significantly after birth due to the maternity leave; however, there is variation across population sectors in the pace at which they return to work. The figures show the employment rates of mothers and fathers, among non-Haredi Jews and among Arabs, by number of quarters after birth and by whether they work part-time or full-time. The graphs show a sharp drop in the employment rates of Jewish mothers following birth and the recovery during the following quarters, until the rates return to the vicinity of their

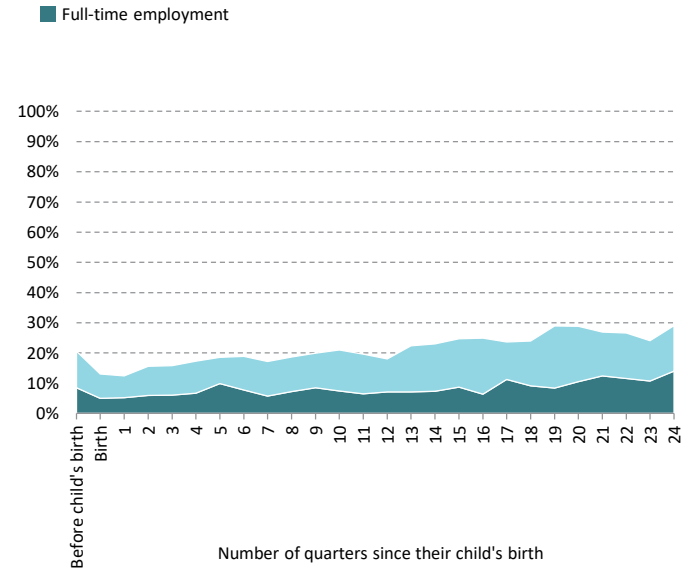
pre-birth levels. This clear trend exists whether the mothers worked part-time or full-time prior to the birth. Among Arab mothers — whose employment rates prior to birth are significantly lower than among Jewish mothers — the drop in the employment rate after birth is more moderate. Among fathers, whether Arabs or Jews, there is no clearly visible difference between employment patterns before their child's birth and in the subsequent quarters.

Note: The study focused on parents of children born between 2001 and 2005. The number of quarters since birth was defined as follows: parents sampled in the quarter of the birth itself were defined as sampled in quarter 0. Parents sampled in the quarter following the quarter of birth were defined as being sampled in quarter 1, and so on up to quarter 24 (about 6 years after the birth). In order to compare the period following birth to the period preceding it, parents up to four months before the child's birth were also sampled and this group served as the base group for comparing employment in the quarters following birth.

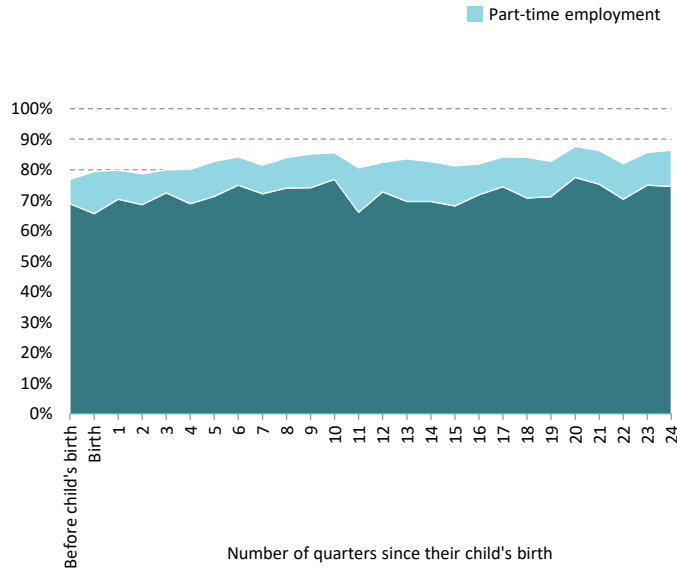
Employment rate of non-Haredi Jewish mothers, by the number of quarters since their child's birth and their employment status



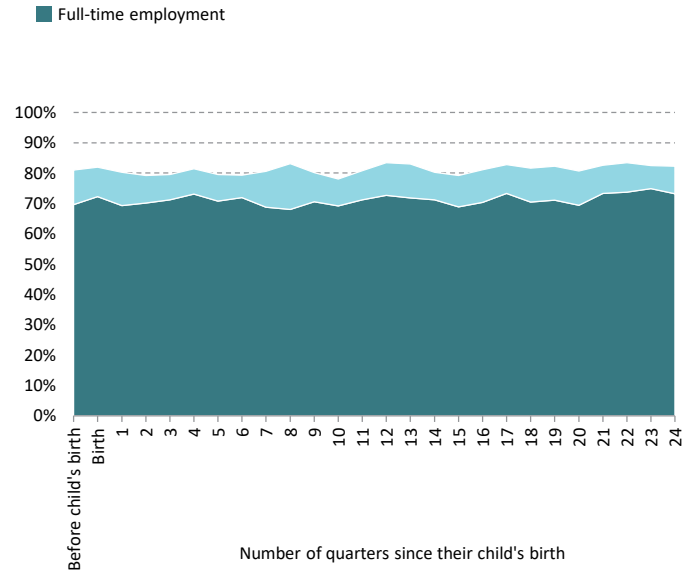
Employment rate of Arab mothers, by the number of quarters since their child's birth and their employment status



Employment rate of non-Haredi Jewish fathers, by the number of quarters since their child's birth and their employment status



Employment rate of Arab fathers, by the number of quarters since their child's birth and their employment status



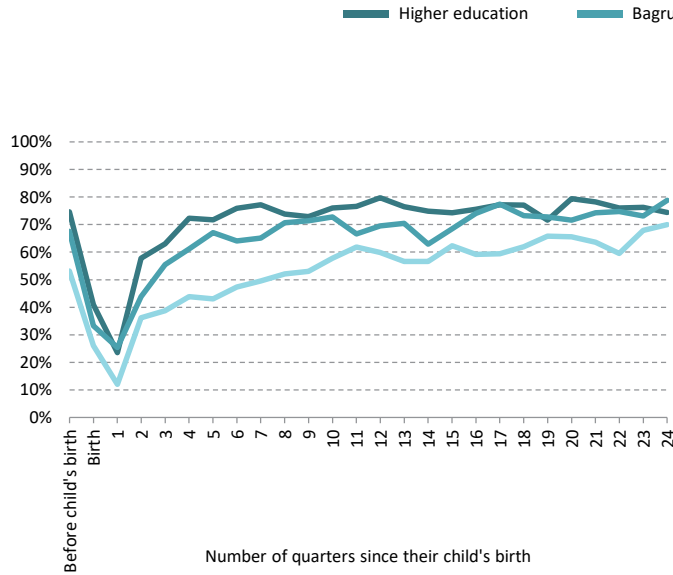
Mothers with higher education tend to return to work more quickly after their child's birth than mothers with lower education levels

The higher the level of education, the higher is the employment rate of mothers before birth. After birth, there remain differences in employment rates — which are low in any case — among mothers according to education level: mothers with a higher education level tend to be employed at higher rates. It appears that the process of returning to work after maternity leave for mothers without a bagrut certificate (matriculation) takes much longer than in the case of mothers with a higher level of education, and in particular relative to mothers with an academic education, whose rates of employment by the fourth

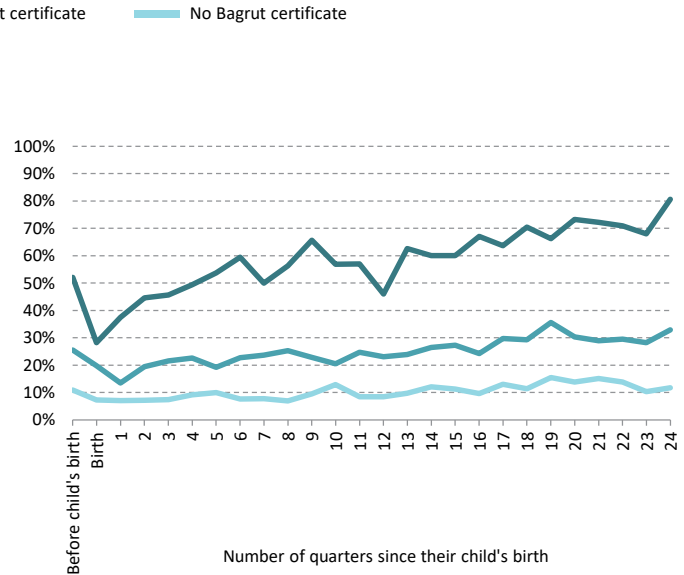
quarter after birth, are very close their prior rates. Even in Arab society, mothers with an academic education return to work sooner than those with lower levels of education. In general, there is an impressive upward trend in the rate of employment among women in Arab society, primarily among those with an academic education.

Mothers with a low socioeconomic status — who often have a low earning potential — face a particularly acute dilemma in deciding whether to work or care for their children at home, which can save them the high costs of ECEC frameworks.

Employment rate of non-Haredi Jewish mothers, by the number of quarters since their child's birth and their education level



Employment rate of Arab mothers, by the number of quarters since their child's birth and their education level



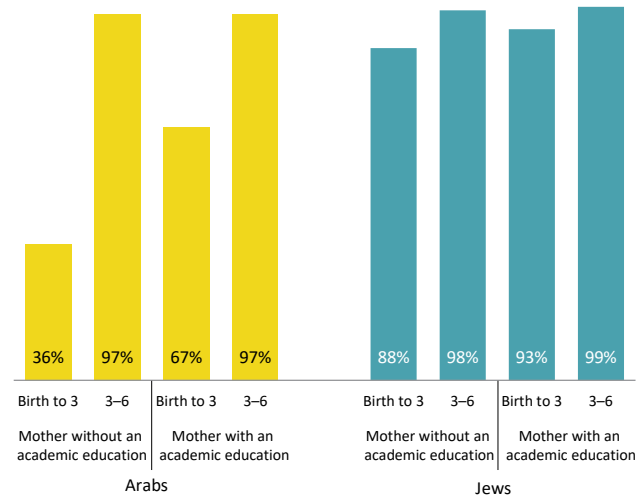
Source: Noam Zontag, Taub Center | Data: CBS

Children from birth to age 3 of mothers with higher education attend ECEC frameworks at higher rates than children of mothers without higher education, particularly in Arab society

The figure presents rates of enrollment in ECEC frameworks by the mother's education and sector. The graph shows that in Arab society the share of children of mothers with higher education who are enrolled in ECEC frameworks from birth to age 3 is almost double that of children of mothers without such an education (67% vs 36%). Also, among Jews, there is a difference in enrollment rates between children of mothers with an academic education and children of mothers without one, although it is small and the enrollment rates in both groups are very high — 93% and 88%, respectively. In the case of children ages 3 to 6, there does not appear to be any link between mother's education level and enrollment rates in either population group and children's enrollment is nearly universal.

Note: Data are based on the 2016 PIRLS exam measuring achievement in reading among Grade 4 students. In addition to measuring reading achievement, students' parents answered questionnaires regarding their children's participation in ECEC frameworks from birth to age 3 and from age 3 to 6.

Rates of preschool attendance according mother's education and sector

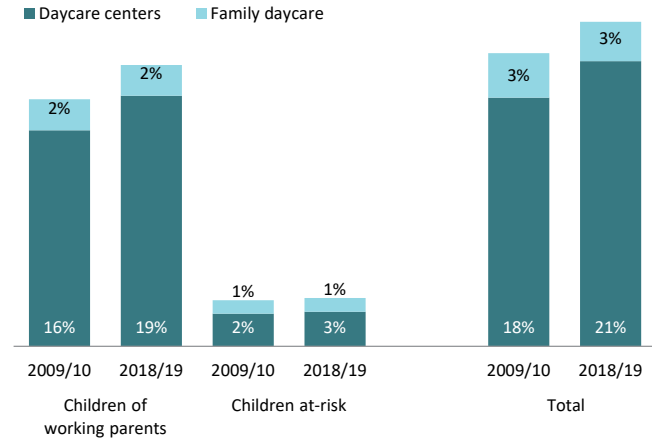


Source: Hai Vaknin and Yossi Shavit, Taub Center | Data: PIRLS 2016

In the past decade, there has been an increase in the share of children from birth to age 3 in supervised daycare centers

Over the past decade, the number of children attending supervised educational frameworks has grown by 34% (children of working parents and children who are eligible for daycare based on the Law for Young Children at-Risk — 5760-2000), from about 100,000 children in the 2009/2010 school year to about 130,000 in the 2018/2019 school year. Apart from the nominal growth due to the increase in the population of children in these age groups, there was also an increase in the percentage of children attending supervised frameworks: from about 21% of children in 2009/2010 to about 24% in 2018/2019. All of the increase can be attributed to enrollment in daycare centers: the share of children in supervised daycare grew by about 3 percentage points, while the share of children in family daycare remained unchanged.

Share of children in supervised frameworks in the birth to 3 age group



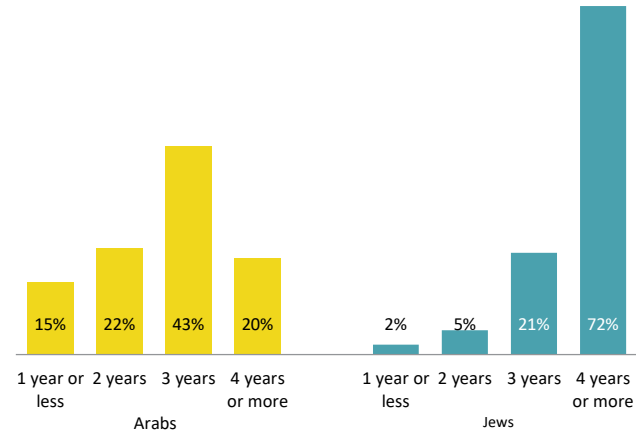
Source: Madhala et al., Taub Center | Data: Ministry of Welfare and Social Affairs; CBS; Fichtelberg-Barmatz & Harris-Olshek, 2013

Children in Arab society are enrolled in an ECEC framework for fewer years than Jewish children

The figure presents the number of years of enrollment in ECEC frameworks among Jews and Arabs. Most Jewish children (72%) attend ECEC frameworks for four years or more, which is a reflection of the high enrollment rates of Jews in frameworks for birth to age 3 and ages 3–6. In contrast, only a minority of Arab children (20%) are enrolled in ECEC frameworks for four years or more and most of them (43%) are enrolled for three years. The graph shows that the dispersion across the categories is greater among Arab children than among Jewish children. In other words, the vast majority of Jewish children enter an ECEC framework before age 3 while among Arab children the percentage is substantially lower.

Note: Data are based on the 2016 PIRLS exam measuring achievement in reading among Grade 4 students. In addition to measuring reading achievement, students' parents answered questionnaires regarding their children's participation in ECEC frameworks from birth to age 3 and from age 3 to 6.

The distribution of the number of years of preschool attendance, by sector



Source: Hai Vaknin and Yossi Shavit, Taub Center | Data: PIRLS 2016

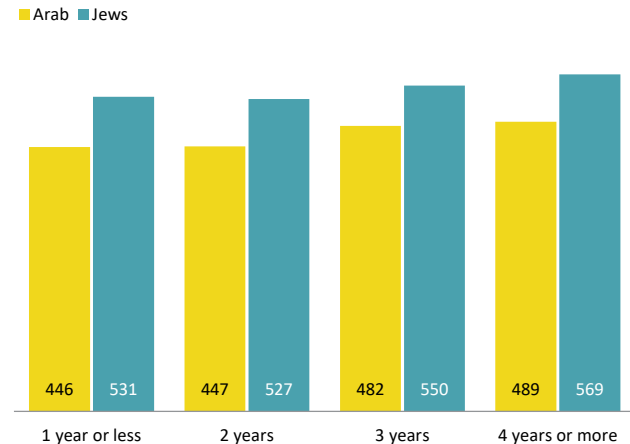
Enrollment in ECEC frameworks does not contribute to achievement in reading among Grade 4 students

The figure presents the average achievements in reading among Jewish and Arab children in Grade 4 by length of time spent in ECEC frameworks. Apart from the large gap overall between the achievements of Jews and Arabs in reading, it appears that average achievements do not improve greatly with more years spent in ECEC frameworks.

The quality of ECEC frameworks in Israel is fairly low relative to other developed countries (Vaknin, 2020). Low-quality ECEC frameworks do not contribute to the cognitive development of children and are even liable to hamper it. A study conducted by the Taub Center found that enrollment in an ECEC framework from birth to age 3 does not contribute to the reading achievements of children in primary school (Vaknin & Shavit, 2021), and this is likely due to their low quality.

Note: Data are based on the 2016 PIRLS exam measuring achievement in reading among Grade 4 students. In addition to measuring reading achievement, students' parents answered questionnaires regarding their children's participation in ECEC frameworks from birth to age 3 and from age 3 to 6.

Average achievement in reading according to number of years of preschool attendance and sector



Source: Hai Vaknin and Yossi Shavit, Taub Center | Data: PIRLS 2016

Taub Center Early Childhood Seminar participants comment



On a career and parenthood with young children

Dr. Naomi Moreno | Director of the Dialogue on Early Childhood; member of the Advisory Council to the Taub Center Initiative on Early Childhood; Taub seminar graduate 2021 and 2022

Public discourse in Israel deals with the importance of infancy and focuses primarily on early childhood care frameworks. In order to decrease inequalities that are already present in early childhood one must examine the Israeli reality in several circles simultaneously — parenting and family, the community, values, and perceptions.

Israel has the highest fertility rate among the OECD countries and its rate of employment is also among the highest. The gap is particularly visible among mothers of young children. Mothers return to work relatively quickly after birth and a large percentage of children participate in ECEC frameworks. Number of work hours is relatively high, maternity leave is relatively short, there is no designated maternity leave for fathers, and there is a lack of available supplementary services in the community. Moreover, studies of the return of parents to the labor market after birth indicate that mothers with higher education tend to return to work within a shorter period of time than mothers with lower levels of education, while among fathers, no significant difference was found. The combination of these factors creates structural challenges. The COVID-19 pandemic and the changes in the work world, which began even prior to the pandemic, make it clear that there are feasible alternatives in the form of hybrid working and a new type of balance. Nonetheless, the institutional solutions for children and their parents remain unchanged.

What conditions will allow parents with the tools to combine parenthood and work to flourish? The policy alternatives below, which propose frameworks and programs that consider the unique values and needs of each family, as well as the parents' employment constraints, will provide parents with additional quality time with their children:

- An information campaign on the importance of flexibility at work for parents of young children; encouragement of employers to implement flexible work arrangements and to allow for a flexible use of the maternity leave and their ranking according to that measure.
- The operation of a variety of frameworks that will provide flexibility in workhours and workdays and will offer solutions also to parents who are studying.
- The operation of ECEC frameworks within the workplace, with government support.
- Counselling for parents and greater access to tools and knowledge, including emotional preparation for first-time parents.
- Creating a supervised database of caregivers who will be certified for employment in the home.
- Lengthening of paid maternity leave for mothers and creating a designated leave for fathers.

In conclusion, a flexible and up-to-date socioeconomic policy for the employment of parents with young children will have an impact on children and their families, as well as on the economy and on society in general, and will narrow future disparities.

Taub Center Early Childhood Seminar participants comment



The reasons behind the low quality of ECEC frameworks for children from birth to age 3

Liat Eilam | Partnerships Director at 121 Engine for Social Change and a representative of In Good Hands, Headquarters for Investing in Early Childhood; Taub Seminar graduate 2022

We attribute the highest importance to an in-depth and systematic assessment of the effectiveness of ECEC for ages birth to 3 and its influence on children in the long run. We welcome the professional and important work of the Taub Center in this direction.

We agree with the hypothesis of the researchers, according to which participation in ECEC frameworks does not have a long-term effect on the achievements of students due to its low quality (Vaknin & Shavit, 2021, Table 3 and 4). The information we have gathered on the low level of training and the low level of guidance in the field supports this hypothesis, as do the insights of experts and professionals with whom we work on a regular basis.

In view of the importance of ECEC quality, we feel that it is essential to analyze the factors explaining its low level in a comprehensive and in-depth way. The study carried out by Vaknin and Shavit cites a lack of standards or their poor enforcement and it concludes with the hope that the implementation of the Daycare Supervision Law will improve the contribution of ECEC to the cognitive development of very young children and their future academic achievements.

However, setting standards and enforcing them will not contribute to the quality of the frameworks if those standards are too low. This is the situation with regard to the supervisory regulations adopted in early 2021. For example, the regulations establish a ratio of 11 children ages 2–3 for every staff member, which is almost double the level prevailing in other developed countries; the staff is required to have only 150 hours of training, which is not sufficient to acquire the skills they need; each framework is required to allocate only four monthly hours to staff training (about one-quarter of the minimum specified in the Rosenthal Report, 2009); and there is no requirement of training or education for instructors.

Such low standards — even if the supervisory mechanism is highly effective — will perpetuate the low level of quality that currently exists in the field. The ECEC frameworks will improve only when they are allocated the resources needed to increase the number of staff per child, improve training and instruction, and raise salaries to a level that will attract educators with the necessary knowledge and skills and will keep them in the profession.

The only realistic source of such resources is an increase in the government budgets for children ages birth to 3, which are currently very small. Thus, Israel invests about \$600 per year in each child, in contrast to an annual investment of \$10,200 in the OECD countries. Parents currently bear about 82% of the cost of their children's participation in ECEC frameworks, as opposed to 29% on average in the OECD countries. As long as the system continues to rely on parents' resources, the quality of the ECEC frameworks will not improve and only relatively well-off parents will be able to ensure a high-quality early education for their children.

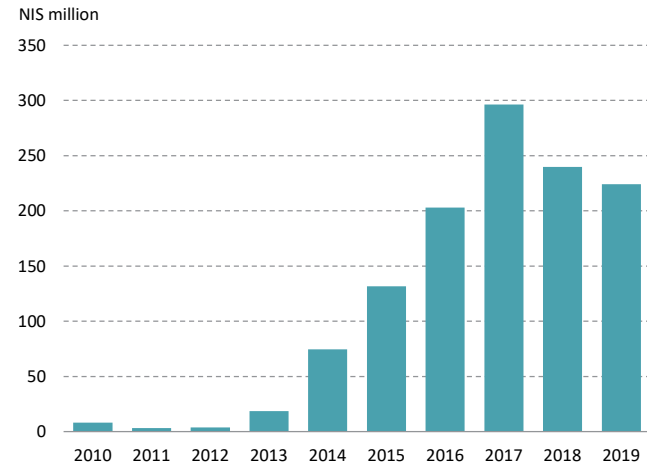
Section II

Early childhood education and care frameworks in Arab society

In recent years, there has been an upward trend in annual expenditure on the building of daycare centers in Israel

The Branch for Daycare Centers and Family Daycare is responsible for, among other things, the building of daycare centers. The size of the budget allocated to this activity exemplifies the significant increase in government involvement in this area since the social protests of 2011 and the establishment of the Trajtenberg Committee and the adoption of its recommendations. After years of minimal investment in the building of daycare centers, larger budgets began to be allocated beginning in 2014. Between 2014 and 2019, about NIS 1.17 billion was invested in this endeavor.

Expenditure on the construction of daycare settings
2019 prices

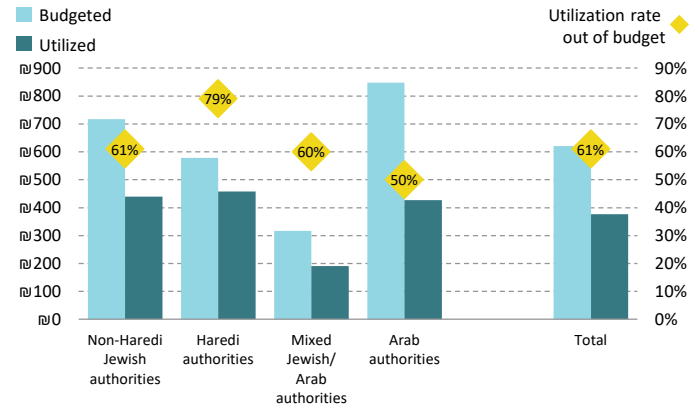


Source: Madhala et al., Taub Center | Data: Ministry of Finance

The utilization of budgets allocated to building daycare centers in the Arab local authorities is much lower than in the Haredi local authorities and non-Haredi Jewish local authorities

One-quarter of the total budget designated for the construction of daycare centers is reserved for the Arab sector. And indeed, the data show that the average allocation per child for this purpose is highest in the Arab local authorities. Nonetheless, the implementation rate of these budgets in the Arab sector is significantly lower (50% vs. 79% in the Haredi local authorities and 61% in the non-Haredi Jewish local authorities). As a result, the funding actually used to build Arab daycare centers is similar to that in Haredi local authorities and non-Haredi Jewish local authorities.

Average annual expenditure per child for the construction of daycare settings, by local authority, budget and utilization, 2014–2020

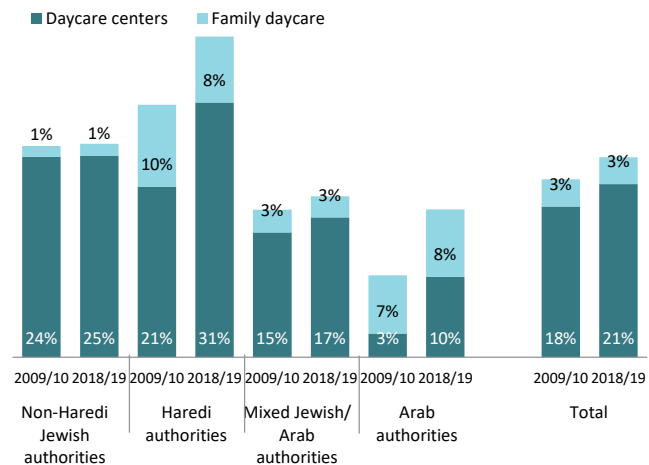


Source: Madhala et al., Taub Center | Data: Ministry of Welfare and Social Affairs; CBS

The enrollment rate of children from birth to age 3 in supervised ECEC frameworks in the Arab sector is particularly low

The steps taken by the government of Israel during the past decade to encourage enrollment in supervised ECEC frameworks in the Arab sector have contributed to increasing their enrollment rates. Nonetheless, the share of Arab children enrolled in supervised ECEC frameworks is still low relative to other sectors in Israeli society. Only 18% of children ages birth to 3 in Arab towns attend supervised ECEC frameworks (children of working parents and young children at-risk). This is a low rate not only relative to the Haredi sector, in which the rate of enrollment in supervised ECEC frameworks is 39%, but also relative to the non-Haredi Jewish sector in which the rate is 26%.

Share of children from birth to age 3 in supervised frameworks, by framework and local authority, 2009/2010 and 2018/2019

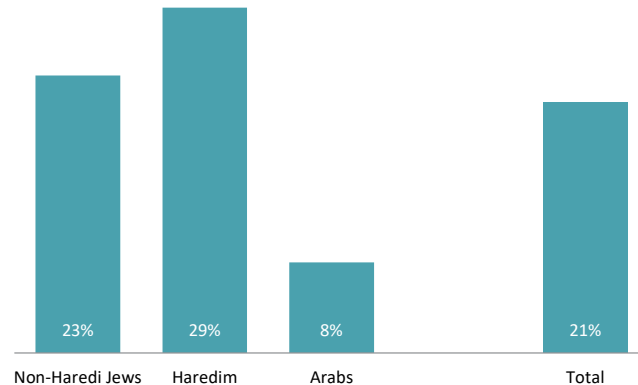


Source: Madhala et al., Taub Center | Data: Ministry of Welfare and Social Affairs; CBS; Fichtelberg-Barmatz & Harris-Oshek, 2013

The share of Arab children of working parents who attend supervised ECEC frameworks for children from birth to age 3 is even lower at only 8%

As noted, the enrollment rate in ECEC frameworks among children from birth to age 3 in Arab towns is relatively low at 18%. A study conducted by the Taub Center using a dataset of individual information on children of working parents who attend supervised ECEC frameworks found that in the 2019/2020 school year these gaps were even larger (Shavit et al., 2021). Of all children of working parents who attend supervised ECEC frameworks, the share of Arab children is only about 8%, while their share of the population is about 20%. In contrast, 23% of non-Haredi Jewish children and 29% of Haredi children in the relevant age groups are registered for supervised ECEC frameworks as children of working parents.

Share of children of working parents from birth to age 3 in the same population group

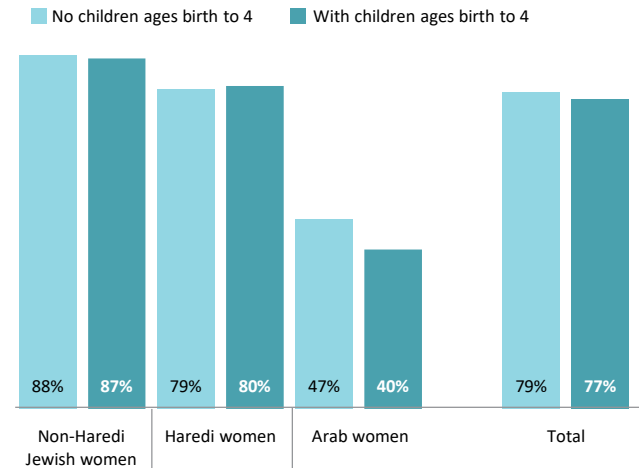


Source: Madhala et al., Taub Center | Data: Ministry of Welfare and Social Affairs; Ministry of Education

Arab women's low employment rates limit the possibility of their children enrolling in supervised ECEC frameworks since participation and subsidies are conditional on both parents working or studying

The low enrollment rate in ECEC frameworks in Arab society is the outcome of two main barriers. The first is the order of priority in accepting children to these frameworks, which gives priority to the children of working mothers. The second is that the tuition subsidies in supervised frameworks are conditional on both parents working or studying. The low rate of employment among women in Arab society and in particular among mothers of young children limits both the likelihood of Arab children being accepted to supervised frameworks and the share of Arab families who are eligible for subsidies.

Employment rates among women ages 25-44, with and without young children, by population group, 2019

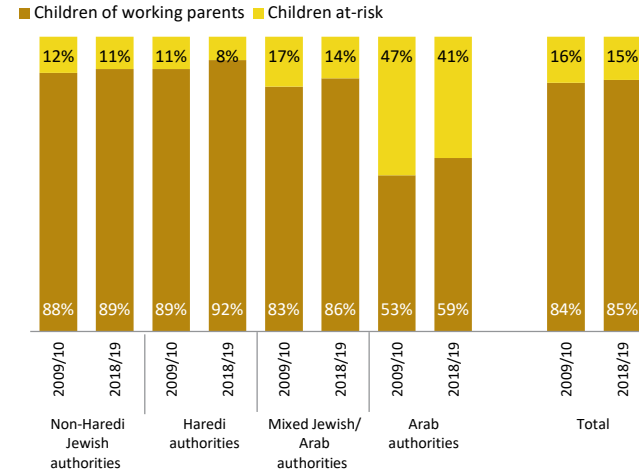


Source: Madhala et al., Taub Center | Data: CBS

Many children in Arab local authorities are accepted to supervised ECEC frameworks based on the Law for Young Children at-Risk

In addition to the low rate of participation in ECEC frameworks among children in Arab local authorities, many of the children in Arab towns are accepted to ECEC frameworks based on the Law for Young Children at-Risk, following a referral by the social services departments. The figure presents the share of children attending supervised ECEC frameworks in the various sectors, with a breakdown between children of working parents and young children designated as at-risk. Over the years, the share of children attending supervised ECEC frameworks based on the Law for Young Children at-Risk has declined somewhat in all of the groups examined. Nonetheless, it can be seen that their share is particularly high in Arab local authorities — about 41% vs 11% in the non-Haredi Jewish local authorities and 8% in the Haredi local authorities.

Breakdown of children from birth to age 3 in supervised frameworks, by local authority, in 2009/2010 and 2018/2019



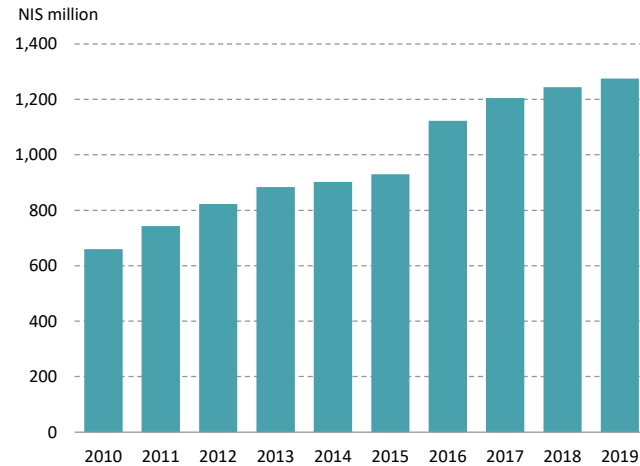
Source: Madhala et al., Taub Center | Data: Ministry of Welfare and Social Affairs; CBS

In recent years, expenditure has increased on subsidies for children of working parents in ECEC frameworks

The government expenditure on subsidies for children of working parents enrolling in ECEC frameworks has almost doubled during the past decade, from NIS 660 million in the 2009/2010 school year to about NIS 1.3 billion in the 2018/2019 school year. The average subsidy per child grew during this period from about NIS 7,750 per year in the 2010 budget to about NIS 11,280 per year in the 2019 budget.

Expenditure on subsidies for children of working parents in supervised frameworks

2019 prices



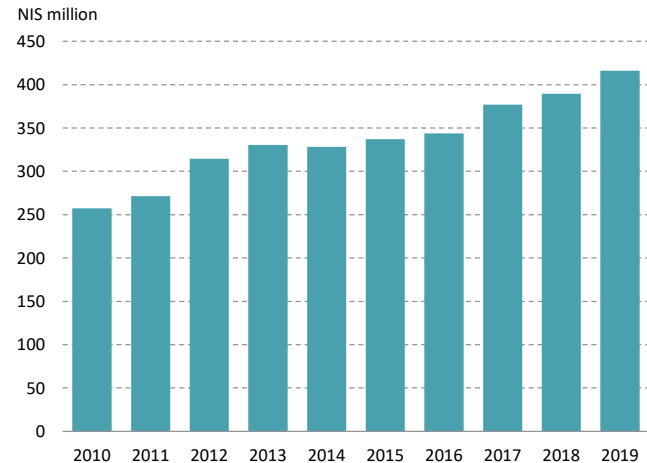
Source: Madhala et al., Taub Center | Data: Ministry of Finance

The expenditure on enrollment subsidies in ECEC frameworks based on the Law for Young Children at-Risk has also increased

Alongside the Branch for Daycare Centers and Family Daycare, the Child and Youth Service within the Directorate General of Labor is responsible for placing children at-risk in the ECEC frameworks and for tuition subsidies (Rabinowitz, 2019). In the 2018/2019 school year, the Service placed about 19,400 children at-risk in daycare centers and family daycare, which accounts for about 4% of all children from birth to age 3 in Israel and about 15% of all children of those ages in supervised ECEC frameworks. These children are eligible for a relatively large subsidy and their parents pay between NIS 464 and NIS 752 per month, in contrast to the full fee which ranges from NIS 1,964 to NIS 2,857 per month (as of the 2020/2021 school year). The Ministry's total expenditure on the enrollment of children in daycare centers and family daycare based on the Law for Young Children at-Risk was about NIS 416 million in 2019.

Expenditure on subsidies for daycare centers and family daycare for young children at-risk

2019 prices

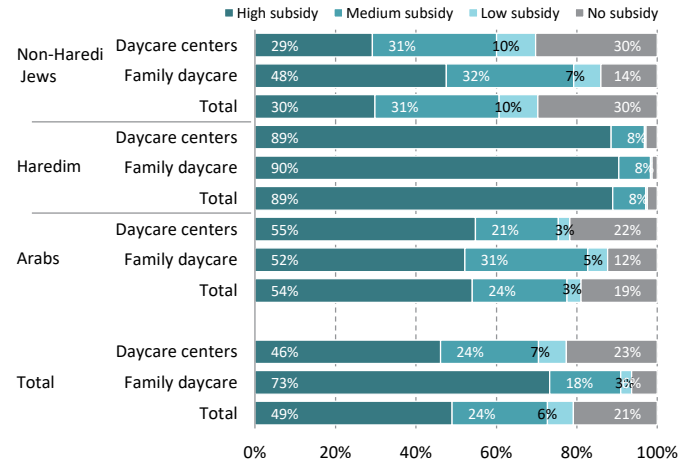


Source: Madhala et al., Taub Center | Data: Ministry of Finance

One-half of the children of working parents In Arab society are eligible for high rates of subsidies for children from birth to age 3 in supervised ECEC frameworks

The data presented in the figure shows the variation across sectors in subsidy levels for children of working parents. About 54% of children of working parents in Arab society are eligible for high levels subsidies (over one-half of the fee). Among the Haredim, the rate is even higher (89%), while among non-Haredi Jews the share is only 30%. About 80% of children of working parents were eligible for some level of subsidy in the 2019/2020 school year and they numbered about 89,000. Of those, almost 50,000 (56%) were non-Haredi Jewish children, about 32,000 (36%) were Haredi children, and 7,200 (8%) were Arab children. It is important to mention that this is after the extra subsidy provided specifically to mothers in Arab society where a lower threshold of weekly workhours is used to offer more subsidies according to income per capita, i.e., 24 weekly hours instead of 36).

The breakdown of children from birth to age 3 of working parents in supervised frameworks, by subsidy level, type of framework, and sector, 2019/2020

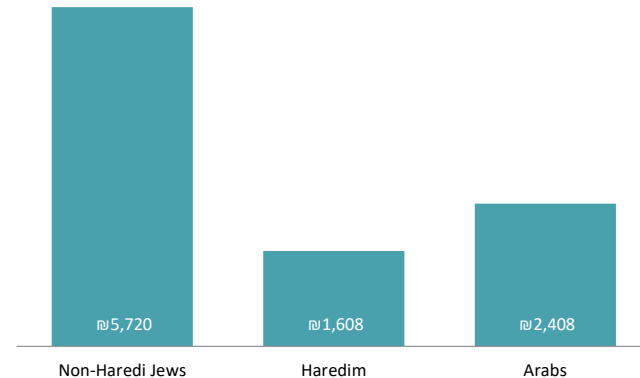


Source: Madhala et al., Taub Center | Data: Ministry of Welfare and Social Affairs

Subsidy eligibility is determined primarily according to household income, which is significantly lower among Arabs and the Haredim

The level of subsidy eligibility is determined primarily on the basis of household income per capita. An examination of average income per capita among households with young children (as calculated in order to determine eligibility for subsidies (Labor Division, 2019)) indicates that average household income per capita in Arab society, and even more so that of Haredi households, is significantly lower than among non-Haredi Jewish households. The gap between the Haredim and the Arabs is largely the result of the fact that Haredi families have more children on average. These gaps explain at least part of the variation observed in subsidies.

Average per capita income in households with children from birth to age 4, by population sector, 2018



Note: Per capita income is calculated according to the accepted method for determining the level of subsidy eligibility, namely as the total labor income of the head of the household and their spouse divided by the number of household members up to the age of 18 and another two individuals.

Source: Madhala et al., Taub Center | Data: CBS



Policy Alternatives

The findings in this section lead to important conclusions regarding policy for young children in Israel. In this section, we propose policy options of three types: creation of ECEC infrastructure in Arab towns and the utilization of budgets allocated for that purpose; the removal of barriers blocking access to supervised ECEC frameworks; and reduction of fees for ECEC frameworks. Although there is a need for a cost-benefit analysis and a comprehensive assessment of potential implications before any policy alternative is chosen, we have nonetheless decided to describe the potential policy directions that are indicated by the findings of early childhood studies conducted by the Taub Center.

Creation of infrastructure for ECEC frameworks in Arab towns and the utilization of budgets allocated for that purpose

Following are some possible policy trajectories for increasing the utilization of budgets allocated for building daycare centers in Arab society:

- *Modification of planning rules to accommodate the complex reality in Arab society.* Providing an opportunity for non-government entities to initiate projects to build daycare centers; finding planning solutions for building in the dense neighborhoods that characterize Arab towns; and acceleration and support of processes in the planning committees to approve plans for daycare centers on private land.
- *Increasing the resources allocated to Arab local authorities for the planning and approval processes for construction of daycare centers.* The severe shortage of resources in many of the Arab local authorities encumbers the financing of the planning and approval stages of daycare center construction and the acquisition of furniture and equipment for them. Therefore, it would be worthwhile to consider a significantly larger allocation of government resources

Note: The proposals below are taken from *Enrollment of Arab Children in Supervised Daycare* (Madhala et al., 2021)

to these needs and providing greater flexibility to the local authorities in financing the planning and building of daycare centers in their jurisdiction.

- *Additional positions and the hiring and training of professional manpower in the Arab local authorities for the development of ECEC frameworks.* The existing planning, budgeting, and bureaucratic complexity in place to expand daycare center infrastructure requires the local authorities have professional manpower with expertise in this area. The lack of such manpower due to budget constraints makes it very difficult to include Arab towns in plans for the development of ECEC frameworks. Therefore, a designated program is proposed for the training of professionals and the financing of their employment in Arab towns. This plan can be implemented as a government project in partnership with other non-governmental agencies.

Removal of barriers blocking access to supervised ECEC frameworks

There are physical and bureaucratic barriers that make supervised ECEC frameworks less accessible to parents of young children. The former are related to the location of the centers and access to public transportation. Bureaucratic obstacles are related to the eligibility and subsidy requirements which are conditional on the mother's employment, while others are related to the registration process for the frameworks, like the taking-up of subsidies. Due to language barriers and a lack of access to computers, Arab parents have an even harder time navigating these processes. Following are several proposals that are worth considering in this context:

- *Running a pilot program in a number of towns in order to assess the repeal of the employment condition for eligibility and subsidies for ECEC placement.* Finland, for example, adopted a universal model that provides financing for early childhood care to all parents, regardless of their employment status. It even offers them the choice of type of framework. The adoption of such a universal model, particularly in Arab society, will expand

access to supervised frameworks for many families. Furthermore, it may also contribute to increasing the labor force participation rate among Arab women, as was seen when the Free Compulsory Education Law was extended to 3- and 4-year-olds (Schlosser, 2006).

- *A comprehensive assessment of the registration process and uptake of subsidy rights.* The process of registering for ECEC frameworks is complex and involves the completion and submission of numerous documents. Furthermore, the time to complete the process is limited and starting this school year can only be done online. In addition, there is only partial access to information in Arabic. In order to deal with these barriers, an in-depth assessment of the registration process is recommended and an effort should be made to provide parents with easier alternatives for completing the process. The cost of implementing this proposal is negligible.
- *Adoption of a more flexible public transportation system and the wider dispersion of supervised frameworks in Arab towns.* Public transportation should adopt flexible routes that will make it possible to overcome the infrastructure problems in many Arab towns; small buses be used to navigate the narrow streets. This is in addition to continuing to prioritize budgets for Arab local authorities for investment in infrastructure and advancement of public transportation. Location and accessibility should be taken into account in the planning and building process for new daycare centers.

Reducing tuition fees for supervised ECEC frameworks

The high level of tuition for supervised frameworks is liable to discourage families — and in particular Arab families — from registering their children for these frameworks. In order to overcome this barrier, it is possible to reduce the fees for supervised frameworks or to increase the resources available to Arab families to pay for them. Following are a number of measures that can be adopted to address this issue:

- *Increasing the subsidies of ECEC frameworks such that the tuition fees do not exceed NIS 1,000 per month.* A concrete proposal of this nature was made by Prof. Trajtenberg and his colleagues who recommended that monthly tuition in supervised ECEC frameworks not exceed NIS 1,000, which is similar to the tuition in higher education (Trajtenberg et al., 2019). Within Arab society, this would mean that fees in subsidized frameworks would be similar to those in non-supervised frameworks in the Arab sector or even lower.
- *Providing the possibility of a short school day in supervised frameworks.* This will better accommodate the needs of mothers in Arab society. It is recommended that a pilot project be carried out in a number of Arab towns in order to assess the effects of this policy and the cost of its implementation.
- *Changing the way in which the tax benefit is provided to parents of young children and the full utilization of the tax benefit in order to reduce the fees for supervised frameworks.* The tax benefit for parents of children up to the age of 5 is a tool for lightening the financial burden of ECEC fees. Since many working women in Arab society do not receive this benefit because their income does not reach the tax threshold, the way in which this tax benefit is structured should be changed. The total value of the credits currently provided to parents is estimated to be about NIS 2.5 billion per year (Ministry of Finance, 2017). An amount equal to the unutilized portion of this tax benefit can be allocated in order to expand the direct subsidy of fees for working mothers who are below the tax threshold.
- *Tax benefits for employers who finance their workers' childcare.* Providing tax benefits to employers who finance their workers' childcare services, as is the practice in countries such as Austria, France, and Poland, can encourage labor force participation among women. The expected drop in tax revenues due to this tax benefit may be partly offset by the expected increase in women's labor force participation rate.

→ Spotlight from a study by Northern Goals (Yeadim Latzafon)

Main findings from a study by the Halakat Project in the Arab local authorities in the North



Ola Moana
Director of Steps,
Northern Goals



Maha Nujeidat
Director of Halakat
(Circles) Project,
Northern Goals



Michal Belikoff
Knowledge
Management
Coordinator,
Northern Goals

In this section, the main findings of research by the **تاق لاج Halakat (Circles)** Project are presented (Northern Goals, 2021). This initiative focuses its efforts into the development of models for training, professional support and enrichment of caregivers primarily in unsupervised daycare centers in Arab local authorities in Haifa and the North. The term “primary caregiver” refers to that person who cares for the young child for a number of hours per day on a regular basis.

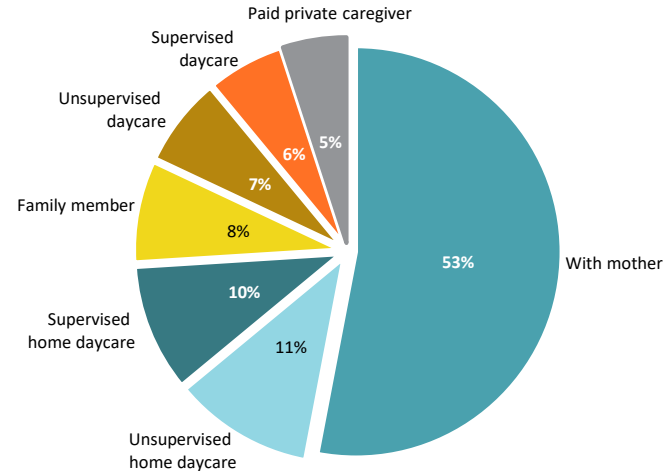
The study is based on the findings of a telephone survey conducted by Geocartography Knowledge Group in two stages in April and July 2021 among 591 mothers of children aged three months to three years in Bedouin, Druze, and Circassian towns and in four large Arab towns: Tamra, Sakhnin, Arabah, and Shefaram. These towns were selected for the survey as part of the activities of the Northern Goals organization (Yeadim Latzafon) organization in ECEC frameworks; the study over-represents the Bedouin and Druze communities in the North. A random sample of 30–40 mothers of children in the relevant age group were selected and focus groups and interviews were also carried out with mothers, caregivers, grandmothers, and other relatives, as well as key figures in the local authorities.

66% of children aged three months to three years in the Arab local authorities in the North are not enrolled in any educational framework

The mothers of children aged three months to three years who participated in the survey were asked in which framework their children are enrolled. According to the responses, 53% are cared for at home by their mothers, 8% are cared for by a different family member, and 5% are cared for by a paid private caregiver. In other words, 66% of the children are not enrolled in any early education and care framework. Thus, only 34% of the children are enrolled in some sort of educational framework: 16% in supervised daycare or family daycare and 18% in unsupervised frameworks.

Distribution of children aged 3 months to 3 years, by type of framework

A sample of 591 mothers in Arab local authorities in Haifa and the North

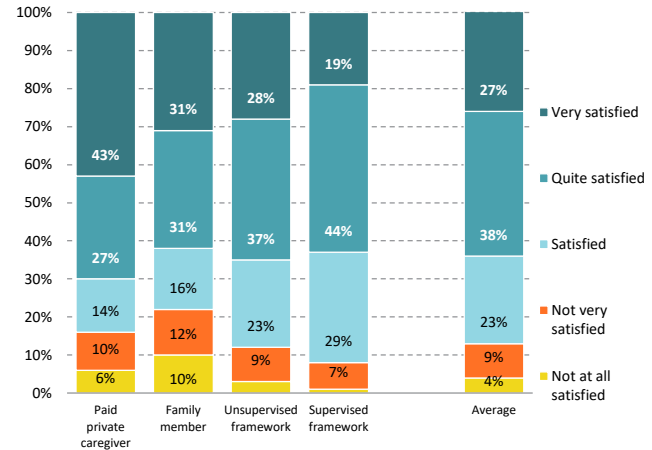


Source: Halakat Project حلقات, Northern Goals

Nonetheless, mothers in the Arab local authorities are not very satisfied with the care provided by a family member

In response to a question regarding their satisfaction with their childcare arrangement, 70% of mothers whose children are cared for by a paid private caregiver answered that they are satisfied or very satisfied; 65% of the mothers who send their children to an unsupervised framework, 62% of the mothers whose children are cared for by a family member, and 63% of the mothers who send their children to a supervised framework were also satisfied or very satisfied. In contrast, 22% of mothers whose children are cared for by a family member responded that they are not very satisfied or not at all satisfied while 16% of the mothers who employ a paid private caregiver, 12% of the mothers whose children are in an unsupervised framework, and 7% of the mothers whose children are in a supervised framework gave similar responses.

Mother's satisfaction with ECEC framework in Arab local authorities in Haifa and the North, by framework type



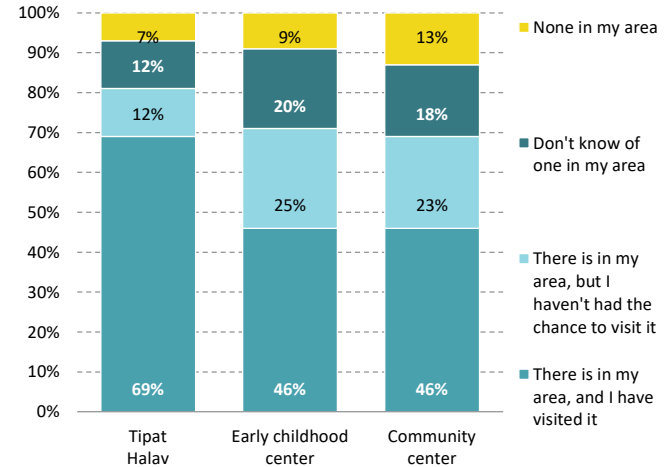
Source: Halakat Project حلقات, Northern Goals

One-third of the mothers of children aged three or under in the Arab local authorities in the North reported that they do not use the services of Tipat Halav

In a telephone survey conducted by the Halakat Project, Arab mothers were asked if, to the best of their knowledge, services for infants and their mothers are offered in their area, and if so, do they use those services. Some 69% of the mothers answered that they use the Tipat Halav services (Baby Health Clinics), while 46% said they use the services of the Early Childhood Centers and the community centers. In contrast, 31% of Arab mothers do not use the Tipat Halav services, whether because there is no branch in their area or they are unaware of the existence of one in their area or because they simply do not have the opportunity to use their services. Furthermore, 54% of the Arab mothers do not use the Early Childhood Centers or the community centers.

Note: According to the 2017 Social Survey of the Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS), 95% of parents of children from birth to age 17 in Arab society reported that they fully vaccinate their children at the prescribed age (Ministry of Health, 2019). Vaccinations up to the age of 6 are done at the Tipat Halav clinics. It is possible that in the towns included in the survey, Tipat Halav services are given through local Health Funds, which would lead to the disparity in the data.

Use of child care facilities among mothers in Arab local authorities in Haifa and the North



Source: Halakat Project *حلفات*, Northern Goals

→ Taub Center Early Childhood Seminar participants comment



ECEC frameworks in Arab society: The current situation and directions for the future

Maha Nujeidat | Director, Halakat Project **تأقلا**;
Taub seminar graduate 2021

In a preliminary study conducted by the Northern Goals organization as part of the Halakat (Circles) Project to develop models to improve the quality of education and childcare for children from birth to age 3 in Arab society in the North, it was found that more than 80% of nursing children in Arab society are in unsupervised frameworks, i.e., unsupervised daycare or family daycare, a private caregiver, a family member (grandmother, aunt, etc.) or at home with their mother.

The parents had a mix of opinions regarding placing their very young children in an ECEC framework. In one of the focus groups, one mother asked: “Why do I have to send my child to a nursery school if I don’t work?” According to her, the very fact that she doesn’t work or that she works unofficially or irregularly prevents her from sending her child to an educational framework. Another participant explained that a family framework is preferable over an official framework: “When my child is with his grandmother I am more at ease. A caregiver who is not a relative cannot provide the same warmth and love as a grandmother can.” Nonetheless, a grandmother is not generally perceived as someone who can provide a child with the variety of games and activities that are essential to child

development, as well as a space that is perceived as more structured and which allows for the normal development of the child.

Arab society is in transition from a traditional to a more modern lifestyle. With the increase in education levels in general and among women in particular, there is an upward trend in the rate of labor force participation among women and correspondingly there is also an increase in the need for early education and care frameworks. However, beyond solution that will be implemented only in the intermediate and long terms — i.e., continued budgeting of daycare center planning and construction in Arab society — there is an immediate need to create a mechanism for improving the quality of education and care provided to young children. Such a mechanism should include programs for training and instruction, both for staff in the unsupervised daycare centers and family daycare and for private caregivers, family members and mothers. However, the first priority is to identify the children of nursing age in each local authority and to draw up a list of programs and frameworks that are relevant to the various target populations according to their needs — and that is what the Halakat Project endeavors to do.

→ Taub Center Early Childhood Seminar participants comment



Barriers to the participation of children in Arab society in supervised ECEC frameworks

Ola Fahraddin-Abu Rish | Director General of the Yanbua Association – umbrella organization of recognized daycare centers in Arab society; Taub seminar graduate 2022

Early childhood is a critical period in the life of a child, during which the developmental foundations are laid for development are laid down. The role of supervised daycare centers is to provide children with a high-quality education that will ensure their optimal development. In Arab society, the supervised daycare centers are even more important, because they also serve as tools for strengthening social resilience and advancing equality. A developed network of early childhood education will also serve as a mechanism to support employment among many Arab women, which will lead to larger incomes for Arab families and combat poverty.

The system of daycare centers and family daycares in the Arab towns is a source of income and employment for many women who suffer from a shortage of jobs due to structural and cultural barriers in Arab society. Currently there are about 138,000 children aged from birth to 3 in the Arab sector, of whom about 120,000 (87%) are in unrecognized frameworks or are cared for by their mother or some other family member. Only 18,000 infants in Arab society are enrolled in subsidized and supervised frameworks — about 175 daycare centers and another 1,200 family daycares. Of the children attending recognized daycare, only one-quarter are eligible for subsidies since most mothers in the Arab sector do not work enough hours to qualify. However, even families that are eligible

have trouble paying the fees, since after the subsidy the fees remain high relative to the average Arab family's income. Thus, only children from the upper class obtain a supervised education.

The high fees that parents are required to pay for daycare, the shortage of jobs for women and their low wages, all constitute barriers that prevent children from participating in supervised frameworks. Therefore, many parents seek out private frameworks. These are accessible in every neighborhood and their fees range from NIS 1,000 to NIS 1,700 per month, which is lower than the fees in supervised frameworks even after subsidies at some of the eligibility levels. The supervised frameworks are forced to lower their prices in order to compete with the private frameworks and they prefer to accept children whose parents are eligible for a high level of subsidy in order to obtain greater support from the State. Thus, daycare centers in Arab society are currently in a deficit situation and operate at a loss are unable to provide children with a high-quality education.

The high fees are not the only problem for recognized ECEC frameworks in Arab society. The cost of establishing a daycare center with three classrooms ranges from NIS 2.5–3 million, to which is added the cost of rental. In the Jewish sector, the local authority builds a daycare center and transfers it to an organization to operate; in the Arab sector, the situation is different due to structural barriers and a shortage of public space. More than 70% of the daycare centers are built or converted — in accordance with the program of the Ministry of Housing for the planning and equipping of early childhood daycare centers — using private funds of organizations — funds which could have been used towards other social ends.

In order to remove the barriers that prevent parents from enrolling their children in supervised daycare centers, a number of steps need to be taken: expanding eligibility requirements and adjusting them to the employment characteristics of women in Arab society; determining a maximum level of fees not exceeding NIS 1,000 per month; increasing the number of daycare centers built by the local authorities; encouraging organizations to build new daycare centers and converting existing buildings into daycare centers by means of annual grants for the financing of construction or conversion (designated funds allocated by the State which the local authorities have not been able to use to build daycare centers for various reasons).

Section III

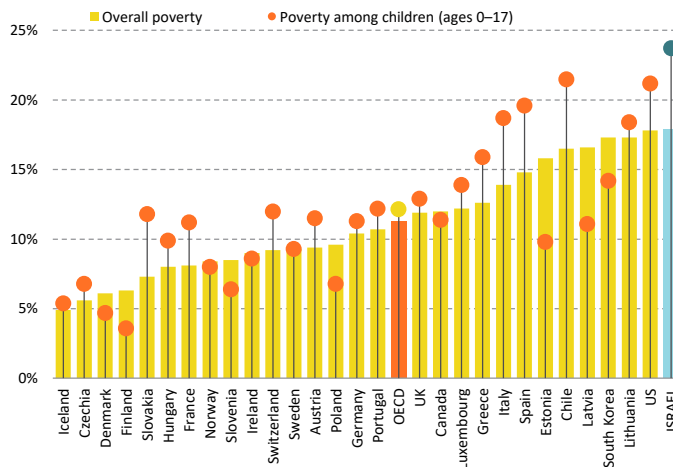
Young children living in poverty

Poverty rates in Israel are higher than average in development countries, particularly among children

The share of households living under the poverty line in Israel is higher than in almost every other developed country. In 2019, the overall poverty rate in Israel was about 17%, which is significantly higher than the OECD average of about 12% (OECD, 2022). Moreover, the incidence of poverty in Israel is particularly high among children. As can be seen in the figure, the rate of poverty in birth to age 17 group was 22% in 2019 compared to an OECD average of 13%.

Overall poverty rate and poverty among children from birth to age 17, 2019

After taxes and transfer allowances, OECD countries



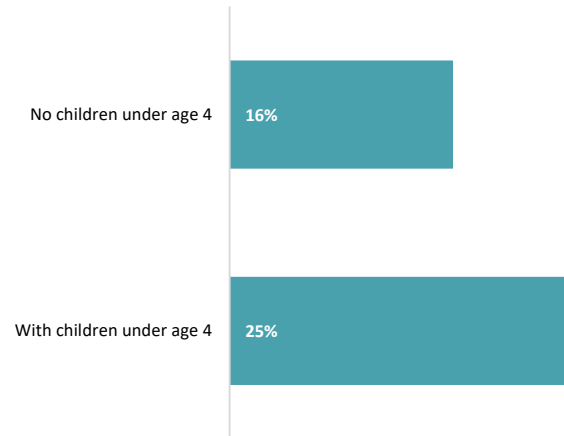
Source: Vaknin et al., 2019 (updated), Taub Center | Data: OECD, 2022

A higher share of households in Israel with children from birth to age 4 live under the poverty line than households without children of those ages

In 2018, according to the National Insurance Institute's Report on Poverty (Endewald, 2019), the incidence of poverty among families was 18% while poverty rates among families with children under the age of 18 was about 21%. The figure shows that the incidence of poverty among households with children from birth to age 4 is even higher — in 2018, 25% of those households lived under the poverty line as opposed to 16% of households without children in that age group.

Note: Calculations for the figure were made by Dr. Yael Navon, Taub Center Initiative on Early Childhood Development and Inequality. The data are based on the CBS Household Expenditure and Income Survey for 2018. The poverty line is defined according to the CBS definitions: net monetary income divided by number of standard individuals < NIS 2,875. The estimates relate to poverty after transfer payments. The estimation used the weights in the Survey file.

Share of households living under the poverty line, with and without children under the age of 4, 2018

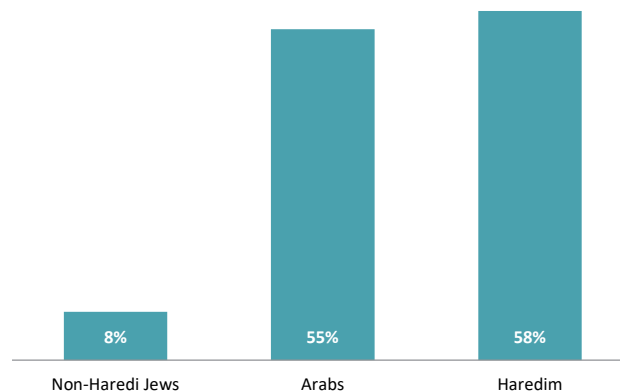


Source: Taub Center staff | Data: CBS, Household Expenditure and Income Survey, 2018

The share of households with children aged birth to 4 who live under the poverty line among the Arabs and the Haredim is much higher than that among non-Haredi Jews

Among the Arabs and Haredim, the share of households with young children (from birth to age 4) who live under the poverty line is much higher than among non-Haredi Jews: 58% among Haredim and 55% among Arabs. In other words, in 2018 more than half of these households lived under the poverty line, as compared to only 8% of non-Haredi Jewish households.

Share of households with children from birth to age 4 living under the poverty line, by population group, 2018



Note: Calculations for the figure were made by Dr. Yael Navon, Taub Center Initiative on Early Childhood Development and Inequality. The data are based on the CBS Household Expenditure and Income Survey for 2018. The poverty line is defined according to the CBS definitions: net monetary income divided by number of standard individuals < NIS 2,875. The estimates relate to poverty after transfer payments. The estimation used the weights in the survey file.

Source: Taub Center staff | Data: CBS, Household Expenditure and Income Survey, 2018

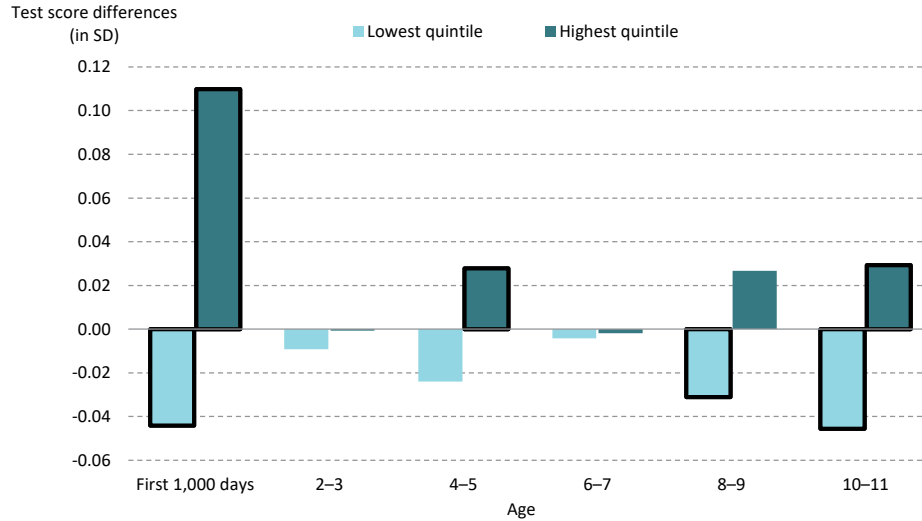
There is a strong and statistically significant correlation between family income during the first thousand days of a child's life and achievement in primary school

The figure shows that Grade 5 students whose families were in the lowest income quintile during the first thousand days of their lives (from the year prior to birth until they reach the age of two) score lower on the Meitzav exam in mathematics. This result is arrived at while controlling for cumulative family income from the first thousand days until the exam and for other sociodemographic variables such as parents' education, number of siblings, gender, birth weight, and population group. Similar findings were found for achievement in science, English (as a second language), and language arts (Hebrew as mother tongue). As expected, students whose families were in the lowest income quintile near the time of the exams (at age 10–11) showed lower achievements. At ages 2–9, on the other hand, the effect of poverty is not in general statistically significant.

Alternatively, high family income during the first thousand days of a child's life is positively related to achievement in primary school. In other words, the gaps in cognitive and

academic development between students in Israel can be seen not only between children who grew up in a family under the poverty line and children who grew up in a middle class family, but also between children who grew up in a rich family and children who grew up in a middle class family. In comparison to other OECD countries, there are significant income gaps between socioeconomic groups in the population, primarily between high income earners and earners at the bottom of the distribution. In other words, there is a high-income group in Israel whose children show higher academic achievements. This group has the ability to nurture their children using their more abundant resources, which can be used to obtain a better nutrition levels for the mother and her newborn, higher quality medical care and diagnosis, participation in higher quality ECEC frameworks, etc. It may be that this explains the major disparities in academic achievement between the various socioeconomic levels in Israel.

Test score differences on the Meitzav exams in mathematics in Grade 5 and family income in the highest or lowest SES quintile (relative to the middle SES income level)



Note: Columns outlined in grey represent statistically significant differences in scores between children growing up in households with low or high family income and those from middle income families.

Source: Dana Shay and Yossi Shavit, Taub Center | Data: CBS



Policy Alternatives

The findings presented in this section clearly show that disparities in academic achievement in Israel are related to economic inequality and poverty. The gaps in academic achievement between children in families living under the poverty line and those from stronger socioeconomic backgrounds indicate that dealing more successfully with the effects of poverty on early childhood development will require broad and comprehensive intervention by the State. Thus, the State needs to take steps that will help families with young children living in poverty to increase their income, with the goal of enabling them to provide for their basic needs, i.e. food, health services, and reasonable housing. Below are a number of policy alternatives that focus on reducing the incidence of poverty and mitigating its effect on families with young children:

- Increasing income by encouraging labor force participation. In recent years, the government of Israel has attributed great importance to encouraging participation in the labor force, primarily among Arab women and Haredi men. This can be achieved by, among other things, a larger earned income tax credit (EITC, or work grants as they are termed in Israel), primarily for working parents with young children.
- Increasing the guaranteed income supplement and greater uptake of this benefit by poor families. The use of “conditional transfer payments” (payments to families that are conditional on their participation in vocational training programs or a parenthood course) is becoming increasingly popular in the OECD countries as a way of incentivizing desired behavior, in addition to monetary assistance for poor families.

- Shifting of part of the child allowance from the teenage years to infancy. This would help young parents, particularly those with low incomes, to improve the quality of their childcare during the ages that are critical to a child's development. Currently, the child allowance is universal and is paid from birth until the age of 18, without any major change in the amount during the eligibility period. It is worth considering a different system for payment of the child allowance in Israel — for example, increasing the child allowance for families with younger children and reducing it for families with older children.
- Vouchers for supplemental nutritional programs and to help provide a healthy food basket for young children in low-income families. Since the 1970s, the US has operated the Women, Infants and Children (WIC) program which provides supplemental nutrition to women (about 25%) and to babies and children up to the age of 5 (about 75%). Data gathered since the program began show an improvement in birth weight and in the health of the baby, as well as a positive effect on future cognitive and academic achievement due to the children's improved diet. Such a program would be highly relevant for Israel.

Taub Center Early Childhood Seminar participants comment



The relationship between nutrition, poverty, and child development

Ya'ara Shilo | Expert on infancy, Efrata College; PhD student at Bar-Ilan University; founder of the Social Coalition for Education from Birth; Taub seminar graduate 2021

The waves of price rises in recent years in Israel has widened socioeconomic gaps among families and has emphasized the need to assist parents who earn the minimum wage and are collapsing under their financial burden. Their distress is exacerbated when they have a baby who is in need of formula they are unable to afford due to its high price. In recent months, the media has reported a jump in the theft of baby formula and the measures taken by the producers to prevent it. This provides an indication of the distress parents are experiencing due to their inability to provide their children with basic nutrition. Many parents report that when they are unable to obtain enough baby formula they dilute it, even though they are harming the development of their baby by doing so.

The price of baby formula in Israel is among the highest in the Western world. Data presented to the Knesset shows that the level of concentration in the baby formula market in Israel is higher than 80%. In other words, the lion's share of the market is controlled by a small number of companies, and, in the absence of competition, the price of baby formula rises. A comparison to other countries, shows that the price of a kilogram of baby formula (not including VAT) is about 12% higher in Israel than the average prices in France, New Zealand, the Netherlands, Romania, Germany, Czechia, Portugal, and the UK and is lower than the price in only Greece, Denmark, and Bulgaria.

Studies show a direct connection between good nutrition and brain function throughout an individual's lifetime. The food we give to a baby constitutes the building blocks for their development. Advances in brain research have shown that the brain grows and develops during the initial years of life. These years are the most important for cognitive, emotional, and social development and they constitute a one-time opportunity to provide the child with what it needs for optimal development. Good nutrition for mothers during pregnancy and nursing contributes to the normal development of the embryo and the baby. Good nutrition has the same effect throughout the course of the child's growth. The effect of baby formula on a child's health was made clear during the tragedy in 2003 in which a lack of vitamin B in Remedia baby formula caused irreparable developmental damage and even death among children who were fed with it.

Social gaps are discussed a great deal in the education system; however, these gaps begin to develop at a much earlier stage. Thus, a situation in which some parents can afford baby formula for their children while others cannot creates cognitive disparities and leads to irreversible damage. While educational gaps can be narrowed, it is almost impossible to narrow cognitive gaps. These gaps widen not only due to the limited ability of parents with a low socioeconomic status to nurture their children but also because they form at a very young age, well before entering the education system, as indicated by many studies that look at the connection between poverty in infancy and achievement at a later age (see, for example, Vaknin et al, 2019; Shavit et al., 2018).

In order to narrow gaps that are the result of poor nutrition in infancy and the high price of baby formula, measures are needed on several fronts: the price of baby formula needs to be controlled and subsidized; vouchers should be provided to low-income families for the purchase of baby formula; and daycare centers should be built close to workplaces in order to enable nursing mothers to work during the day. Investment in infants bears fruit only in the subsequent generation not just for those who directly benefit but for society as a whole. In the long run, it reduces the level of crime and the need for social services and increases GDP per capita. Investing in infants may seem expensive but the lack of this investment is even more costly.

Section IV

Impressions from the Taub Center conference on early childhood

On July 20th, the Taub Center Initiative on Early Childhood Development and Inequality held a conference entitled *Dilemmas and Developments in Early Childhood Care in Israel*, which was supported by the Beracha Foundation, the Bernard van Leer Foundation and Yad Hanadiv, whose generosity makes the initiative's work possible. Participating in the conference were academics, representatives of civil society and third sector organizations, representatives of the local authorities, senior

officials from government ministries and other leaders in the area of education and social welfare.

The conference dealt with a variety of topics related to early childhood and social inequality. These included poverty in infancy and its effect on the development of an infant's brain and future academic achievement and the severe shortage of manpower in this area, which is a major obstacle to providing an optimal education to the next generation and narrowing gaps in society. Also briefly presented were local initiatives and endeavors that provide hope for advancing education and care in early childhood.

The conference opened with a [welcome](#) from Suzie Patt Benvenisti, the Director General of the Taub Center; Prof. Avi Weiss, Taub Center President; and Prof. Yossi Shavit, Principal Researcher and head of the Taub Center Initiative on Early Childhood Development and Inequality. Prof. Weiss and Prof. Shavit briefly described the main activities of the Initiative and stressed the importance of the program. Many studies have shown that inequality begins at a very early age and that



environmental factors can affect an infant's future. Therefore, it is important to understand what those factors are and to work determinedly to reduce inequality.

In the first session, entitled *Early Childhood, Poverty, and Social Benefits, and the Formation of Inequality in Achievements*, Dana Shay, a Taub Center researcher, presented the results of two studies that examined the relationship between poverty and success on the Meitzav exams. The findings show that children from large families who experience poverty from age 0 to 3 achieve lower scores on the Meitzav exams in Grade 5. Prof. John Gal, Principal Researcher and chair of the Taub Center Social Welfare Policy Program, provided support for these findings and presented policy alternatives to deal with poverty and its effect on early childhood. Prof. Gal also proposed creative solutions, such as differential child allowances according to age.

The second session, entitled *Manpower in Early Childhood*, was moderated by Prof. Yossi Shavit and was attended by Prof. Meir Yaish from Haifa University; Ms. Sima Shahino, the Director of Pedagogy in the Early Childhood Department in the Jerusalem Municipality; Ms. Fahraldin-Abu Rish, the Director of the Yanbua organizations and of the "Puzzle" project; and Ms. Noa Tsur Brosh, a senior project manager in the area of daycare centers at the Ministry of Education. Prof. Yaish claimed that the phenomenon of the Great Resignation has not been observed in

Israel; rather there is a shift from certain types of jobs to other types. Ms. Shahino then presented data for Jerusalem and said that the shortage of manpower in the area of early childhood education is in fact primarily in the Jewish sector — both among Haredim and non-Haredi Jews — and in many cases classes are closed as a result. However, according to her there is no such shortage in Arab society, due to, among other things, the high status of jobs related to early childhood relative to other jobs. Ms. Fahraldin provided support for Ms. Shahino's observations on Arab society and added that despite the problems and the challenges involved in early childhood care and education, Arab women remain in the profession not only because of its social status but also because they view it as a calling. The last speaker in the session, Ms. Noa Tsur Brosh from the Ministry of Education



shed light on the problem from the government's perspective, which recognizes the shortage of manpower in early childhood care, and presented the Ministry of Education's plans for dealing with the problem.

The third session, which was entitled *Voices from the Field: Programs to Advance Early Childhood Education and Care at the Local Level*, was opened by the chairman of the session, Dr. Tali Yariv Mishoal, the Director of the Beracha Foundation. She emphasized that the local authorities are a key player in this domain, since they possess most of the knowledge and data on infants. She was followed by Ms. Maha Nujeidat, the Director of the Halakat (Circles) project from the Northern Goals Organization. This project, which focuses on unsupervised

frameworks and is currently active in three Arab local authorities in the North, is working toward the creation of a strategic plan in education and early childhood care that will take into account the unique characteristics of each town. Ms. Helen Jacobsohn, the Director of the Early Childhood Center of the Peshar-Association for the Development of Welfare and Education Services in Lod, described the activity of the Shahar Initiative (first years of life), a municipal development unit created as part of a joint effort between the Ministry of Health, JDC-Ashalim, and the Lod local authority. The project has set itself the goal of preventing a situation in which a child is referred for developmental care but does not receive it. Ms. Yehudit Hadad, assistant to the mayor of Beit Shemesh on infrastructure and engineering, presented the Urban 95 city initiative, which operates in conjunction with the van Leer Foundation and the Council for Green Construction. The idea underlying the project is that the urban environment is not always friendly to infants and one needs to think like a toddler who is 95 centimeters tall in order to create a suitable, child-friendly environment. To this end, the project's directors communicated with mothers in order to understand what their children need in their neighborhood. Ms. Tal Ohana, the Mayor of Yeruham, was the final speaker. She addressed the challenges facing Yeruham in education and early childhood care and some proposed solutions. In the discussion that followed, it appears that all of them agree that the local authorities potentially have



the greatest effect on early childhood, but in order to realize that potential and encourage local activity there is a need for government resources.

In the [final session](#) moderated by Ms. Liora Bowers, Taub Center Chief Financial and Operating Officer and a researcher in the Initiative, Prof. Katherine Magnuson from the University of Wisconsin-Madison delivered the keynote lecture on *Unconditional Cash Transfers and Family Processes: Findings from the Baby's First Years Study*. Prof. Magnuson described the project, which began in 2018 in the US, which examined the connection between poverty and brain activity related to child development. The interim findings show that children living in

poverty whose families received relatively generous economic assistance (about \$4,000 per year) as part of the research were found to have enhanced brain activity with respect to attention and awareness. Meanwhile, children whose families received only a symbolic level of assistance (\$240 per year) showed less brain activity of this type. The final speaker was Prof. Tzipi Horowitz-Kraus, head of the Educational Neuroimaging Group in the Faculty of Education in Science and Technology in the Technion. Her research, which focuses on the connection between environment and brain development in children, found that, among other things, the correct amount of stimulation can improve children's language abilities.



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