



Center for Research on Employment
of Disadvantaged Populations

RESEARCH REPORT

Developing Methods for Improving the Work Conditions of Low-Wage Workers: Summary Evaluation Report of the Employment Advancement (Kidum) Program

Noam Fischman ♦ Abrham Wolde-Tsadick

The study was commissioned by JDC-TEVET Israel and funded with its assistance

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Executive Summary

1. Introduction

JDC Israel-Tevet develops programs to integrate into employment populations with low participation in the labor force (e.g., Ethiopian Israelis, ultra-Orthodox, members of the Arab population and of the general population). While many program participants have started working,¹ their wages are low. Low wages are not unique to the participants of Tevet programs. In the past decade, the "large scale entrance into the labor force"² of individuals from all population groups in Israel has included a corresponding increase in the number of low-wage workers.³ In 2012, the median monthly wage in Israel was NIS 6,000 (approximately \$1,500) with about a quarter of the workers (640,000 people) earning the minimum hourly wage or less.^{4,5} Furthermore, economic mobility in Israel is considered to be relatively low, particularly among low-wage workers.⁶

To contend with the large number of low-wage workers in Israel, policymakers have recently suggested an expansion of active labor policies. Thus, for instance, Bank of Israel Governor Karnit Flug noted the importance of providing up-to-date training in professional and basic skills, mentoring programs, incentives for the recruitment and hiring of individuals from disadvantaged populations, and subsidies for employment-support services.⁷

¹ In October 2012, Tevet integrated more than 40,000 participants into employment. The current figure approaches 70,000. The data are according to the Tevet database (SPOT) as of 17.5.2015.

² Flug, K. 2014. *Transcript of the address of the Governor of the Bank of Israel at the Eli Horowitz Conference for Economics and Society, 3.11.2014*, p. 5.

³ There is broad discussion in the international literature of the definition of "low wages." In this report, we will use the simplest definition, i.e., the minimum hourly wage which was NIS 23.12 at the end of 2012 and rose to NIS 25 in April 2014.

⁴ Bank of Israel (2015). *Report of the Bank of Israel 2014*: "Chapter 5: Employment Market." Bank of Israel, Jerusalem; Rosenberg, M. (2014). *Wages and Income from Work, by Locality, and Diverse Economic Variables 2012*. The National Insurance Institute, Jerusalem.

⁵ Many individuals report earning less than the minimum wage, indicating some non-compliance with the law and/or inaccurate reporting in CBS surveys on which this datum is based (see note 7, chapter 5, of the Bank of Israel report, 2015).

⁶ Ben Naim, N. and Belinsky, A., (2012). *Wage Divergence in Israel – the Analysis of Wage Mobility in the Economy in the Past Decade*; Brander, A., (2010). "The Impact of Savings Plans on the Retirement Age in Israel" – *The Israeli Quarterly for Taxes* No. 131, p. 7.

⁷ Bank of Israel, 2015. *Report of the Bank of Israel 2014*: "Chapter 5: Employment Market." Bank of Israel, Jerusalem. Flug, K. 2014. *Transcript of the Address of the Governor of the Bank of Israel at the Eli Horowitz Conference for Economics and Society, 3.11.2014*; Rosenberg, M. (2014). *Wages and Income from Work, by Locality, and Diverse Economic Variables 2012*. The National Insurance Institute, Jerusalem.

In this vein, in 2012, Tevet established an Employment Retention and Advancement Pilot (hereafter, the Kidum Program), to "create within the framework of existing programs, possible models to promote the retention and advancement of participants from different populations."⁸

At the request of Tevet, the program was accompanied by a follow-up study conducted by the Myers-JDC-Brookdale Institute (MJB) for two years. In 2014, an interim report was published focusing on the implementation of the program in its first year (Fischman and Wolde-Tsadick, 2014). The current report focuses on the findings after two years.

2. The Kidum Program

At the end of 2012, Tevet recruited a team of professionals (hereafter Kidum professionals) to coordinate the Kidum Program in six existing employment programs addressing different populations: Afikim, Eshet Hayil, Mafteah, Strive, Reshut Mekademet Taasuka and Riyan (hereafter, the partner programs). The Kidum professionals came from the partner programs, received intensive training from Tevet, and generally worked in another capacity as well within the partner programs (e.g. employment advisor, or employer-relations coordinator).

At the start of 2013, the Kidum professionals began to recruit participants from the partner programs, aged 20 to 45, who were already integrated into employment and who remained employed for most of the past two years.⁹ The Kidum professionals attempted to screen and recruit participants who were motivated and ready for the process of pursuing employment advancement.

All of the participants completed a unique intake interview and after three sessions with the Kidum professionals, defined their goals of advancement. These included a raise in wages, advancement to a more senior position and/or receipt of additional employment benefits, such as more vacation days. In these sessions, the participants and Kidum professionals developed a work plan to help the participants achieve their personal advancement goals. Subsequently, the participants received ongoing, personal support and guidance from the Kidum professionals and/or from other staff members from the partner programs. In addition, suitable participants wishing to register for studies were able to receive financial assistance from the program (about NIS 4,000 or \$1,000) towards their studies.

The work of the Kidum professionals, including the recruitment of participants and the provision of employment-advancement support services, was generally not funded by Tevet. Instead, each of the six partner programs was obliged to allocate a half-time position for this purpose.¹⁰ Moreover, while the implementation of the Kidum Program depended on cooperation between the Kidum staff at Tevet and the directors of the partner programs, the Kidum professionals were largely responsible for the

⁸ Public appeal for employment programs to participate in the Retention and Advancement Pilot Program (2013).

⁹ A criterion of acceptance to the program was employment for at least 18 months during the two years preceding the date of recruitment to the Kidum Program.

¹⁰ Fischman, N.; Wolde-Tsadick, A. (2014). Evaluation Study of the Implementation of the Kidum Pilot: Interim Report. JDC-MJB: Jerusalem.

coordination of the work with the participants. The essential components of the Kidum Program were the training of the Kidum professionals, the screening and selection of suitable participants, and financial assistance for qualifying study programs.

3. Study Goals and Study Population

3.1 Study Goals

The main goals of the study were:

1. To track the implementation of the program and document its models and components (such as intake, individual support, and a personal work program for participants).
2. To track the outcomes from the perspective of participants two years after the start of the program, in various areas such as the acquisition of skills that are relevant to employment advancement, and actual employment advancement.
3. To examine the impact of the program on the employment of participants. The impact was estimated by comparing the Kidum participants with a comparison group of individuals who met the criteria of acceptance to the Kidum Program but did not participate in it.

3.2 Study Population

The participants were chosen from the partner programs, which addressed various populations: Arab-Israelis, ultra-Orthodox, Ethiopian Israelis, Israelis from the Caucasus and Bukhara, and from the general population. Initially, the goal was to recruit 180 participants, but since some of the partner programs found it difficult to allocate funds to the Kidum Program, only 114 participants were recruited. For those selected, the Kidum Program was the second stage of their career development; the first stage had been integrating into and retaining employment. More than 70% of the participants were women, the average age was 36, and the participants hailed from all over Israel.

4. Study Methods and Sources of Data

The study accompanied the program from the beginning, tracking its implementation as well as the participants, including the outcomes after two years.

The study was based on three main sources of data:

1. 20 semi-structured interviews with the program directors, operators implementers and partners
2. The Tevet database (SPOT)
3. Telephone interviews with 75 out of the 114 participants, most of whom had joined the program at the start of 2013. The interviewees were very similar to the study population, indicating that the sample was representative of the population.

The advancement of participants was examined according to four measures defined by Tevet:

1. Financial improvement: a raise in monthly wages of at least 10%

2. Professional improvement: transfer to a more professional position or expansion of areas of responsibility
3. Improvement in working conditions: e.g., transferring to direct employment, to work that is closer to home, or from shift work to non-shift work, or better social benefits
4. A subjective assessment by participants that their employment situation had improved.

Furthermore, in order to estimate the extent to which any improvements in their employment situation could be attributed to the program, all the participants were matched with individuals who met the criteria of acceptance to the program but did not participate in it. The comparison group consisted of 95 people who were interviewed by telephone. We compared all of the survey respondents from the participant group with all of the respondents from the comparison group.

The comparison group was found to be similar to the participants except that the latter group had more women. In assessing the impact of the program, some of the analyses were done separately for men and women to control for this difference. The difference between the participants and the comparison group represents the estimated program impact. However, the results of this comparison should be interpreted with caution as the groups may have differed in level of motivation or in other ways.

5. Findings on Program Implementation

The Kidum Program was generally implemented according to the planned model:

- ◆ The program provided in-depth training to Kidum professionals.
- ◆ At the stage of recruitment of participants, the Kidum professionals employed innovative methods that stressed the prestige of the program, and demanded that the participants demonstrate a readiness to invest in it.
- ◆ The process of work of the Kidum professionals with the participants was very structured. It included a customized intake interview and at least three individual sessions to define the goals of advancement and to develop a personal work plan. Some of the work plans were highly structured and included specific goals and customized tasks to facilitate the achievement of these goals while others were less structured, and more flexible.
- ◆ The participants received intensive, ongoing support from the Kidum professionals and/or other staff. All of the Kidum professionals maintained personal contact with the participants although some received assistance from other people such as a local coordinator or a volunteer/mentor.

In addition, the Kidum staff at Tevet developed a series of advancement-support tools including the recruitment and training of a group of volunteer mentors for selected ultra-Orthodox, Arab and other Israelis from the partner programs.

6. Difficulties of Implementation and Contending with Them

The Kidum Program began operating at the end of 2012. In this period according to JDC-Tevet policy, several programs were to be integrated into government agencies. At this time, the partner programs were at the start of this process and, as a result, many faced budget cuts. Several other difficulties emerged during this process:

- ◆ Tevet did not offer to fund the work of the Kidum professionals with the participants. Kidum staff made it clear in writing that all the partner programs taking part in the Kidum Program should be ready to fund a half-time position for the work of the Kidum professionals. However, budget cutbacks often made this difficult.
- ◆ There was considerable turnover among the Kidum professionals. Some of it stemmed from the budget cuts, some from more conventional circumstances such as maternity leave or advancement to a more senior position. A more reliable source of funding for the work of the Kidum professionals would likely reduce the turnover.
- ◆ Some of the difficulties stemmed from opposition to changing the models of the partner programs. For example, government agencies taking over the partner programs often set new targets for job placements, but no formal advancement targets were set. Thus, the Kidum professionals were pressured to help meet the placement targets, often at the cost of allocating less time and resources towards coordinating the Kidum Program.

Additional difficulties of implementation were associated with the structure and model of the program:

- ◆ It was difficult for the Kidum professionals to combine their main work in the partner programs with the coordination in the Kidum program.
- ◆ Several partner programs implemented the Kidum track in more than one locality (or branch). Initially, local directors and/or staff of the partner programs were often resistant to offering assistance in coordinating the Kidum Program. In general, however, the initial opposition gave way to cooperation once the program was presented to staff members at the different branches.
- ◆ Difficulty in initiating contact with employers and community leaders in ways that would benefit the participants, due to a lack of knowledge and resources among the Kidum professionals in these areas.

To contend with these problems, Kidum staff maintained ongoing contact with most of the directors of the partner programs. Moreover, they used the training framework to assist the Kidum professionals in dealing with the expected difficulties and with other problems that arose during the implementation. Most of the Kidum professionals reported that the training had indeed helped them resolve a range of problems and dilemmas.

7. Update and Ongoing Activity

Two years after implementation, the partner programs were integrated into the new government agencies, and were operating according to the guidelines received from these agencies. About half of the partner programs that participated in the Kidum Program continue to develop services to advance

their participants, while the other half no longer does. The partner programs have adopted two methods for continuing in the Kidum Program:

1. By continuing to employ Kidum professionals who receive training for the position and are the only staff members to support suitable candidates in the process of advancement.
2. By training all staff, and allocating work time to Kidum services for suitable participants.

The Kidum Program has expanded and is currently operating at all Mafteah employment centers (which serves the ultra-Orthodox). Furthermore, seven coordinators at Hakhven Centers (which serves Arab Israelis), and three coordinators of programs for people with disabilities, are currently in training. There are also plans to train all the coordinators of Eshet Hayil to enable them to provide advancement services to their participants in a more structured format.

8. Outcomes Two Years after Joining the Program

In this section we will present the outcomes for participants in the Kidum Program. We will describe their socio-demographic characteristics and the services they received, as well as the percentage of participants who began studying as part of the program. In addition, we will focus on the outcomes in the area of employment, including various measures of advancement.

8.1 Interim Outcomes: Acquisition of Soft Skills and Post-Secondary Studies

Encouraging participants to begin post-secondary studies was an essential part of the Kidum Program. In addition, the program attempted to improve the soft skills and employability of the participants to help them realize their advancement potential. Some participants were also encouraged to initiate conversations with their employers about advancement possibilities.

◆ *54% of the participants entered some framework of study during the program*

- A little more than half of the participants who started studying took a professional training course (such as bookkeeping or interior design) and about a quarter began studying at a college or university in various fields (such as public administration or education). A few attended pre-academic preparatory courses or other courses to improve their command of English, Hebrew or computers.
- 71% of those who began studying after joining the program, and are no longer studying, completed their coursework successfully; 86% of those studying today feel confident that they will complete their studies successfully.

◆ *62% of the participants pursuing studies received financial assistance*

- 60% of the recipients of financial assistance received the assistance from the Kidum Program, and 40% received from other sources (e.g., a voucher or grant from the Ministry of the Economy or from the employer) or did not know who had financed them.
- On average, almost half of the study fees were covered by financial assistance from the program, and the remainder was covered by the students.

- ◆ *Most of the participants reported improvement in employment efficacy after joining the program*
 - 54% noted that the program had enhanced their self-confidence in the area of employment; 50% – that it had improved their ability to market themselves to an employer; 47% reported showing initiative at work; 47% – confidence in approaching an employer on the question of advancement; 46% – the ability to stand up for their themselves at work; and 41% – improvement in time management.
 - 65% reported improvement on at least one of the above measures.
- ◆ *35% noted that they had initiated a conversation about advancement opportunities with their employer*
 - Of these, 35% noted that the conversation had already contributed to their advancement. Another 27% noted that it would contribute to their advancement in the future. On the other hand, 31% said that it would not contribute to their advancement.
 - Note that some participants said that they saw no opportunities for advancement at their current workplace.

8.2 Employment Retention, Wage Change and Advancement

This section will focus on the participants who were working when they joined the Kidum Program. We will present the percentage of participants who remained employed (employment retention), and the changes in their wages from the time that they joined the program at the start of 2013 until the time of the interviews at the start of 2015. We will also present the percentage of participants whose wages increased in this period by at least 10%, and the percentage of participants who reported other modes of advancement, including better working conditions, professional advancement, and greater work satisfaction.

- ◆ *Employment retention was high*
 - Nearly all the participants (91%) were working at the time of the interview
 - Most of the participants who were working when they joined the program continued to work at the same place, but about a third had started at new jobs.
- ◆ In general, the *changes in wages and work hours were small*, but participants who completed their studies received relatively large increases in their wages. Therefore, the percentage increasing their wages should rise in the longer term after all of the participants complete their studies.
 - The average monthly wage of all employees rose from NIS 4,600 to NIS 4,800, and the average hourly wage, from NIS 27 to NIS 28.
 - The largest raise in wages (NIS 1,000/ month) was among participants who had pursued studies in the framework of the program and were no longer studying. In contrast, no change was found in the monthly wages of participants who had not studied as part of the program. A modest drop (of some NIS 200/ month) was found in the wages of participants studying at the time of the interview as a considerable portion of them reduced the number of hours they worked while studying.

- ◆ **39% improved their monthly or hourly wage by at least 10%**
 - Of these, 55% increased their hourly wage and 27% increased the number of hours they worked. For 18%, the source of their wage increase is not known.
 - The average increase in wages among these participants was NIS 1,450/ month and about NIS 4 / hour.
 - Note that slightly more than 25% of the program participants are currently studying and a considerable portion of them may improve their wages once they complete their studies.
- ◆ **64% reported improvement in their working conditions in at least one domain**
 - The most common improvements in working conditions were more convenient work hours (38%), more convenient travel (38%), more vacation days (34%), and/or more sick leave (27%).
 - 22% began to benefit from *savings plans* with significant employer contributions (Keren Hishtalmut), marking a significant improvement in their working conditions. In comparison, some 8% stopped receiving this benefit in this period.
- ◆ **About half of the participants believed that professionally, their work had improved after they joined the program, and a somewhat smaller percentage reported improved satisfaction with their work.**
 - 47% said that they had been granted *more authority or responsibility* (e.g., money management) than in the past, and a similar percentage said that their work was more professional (e.g., they were promoted to a more senior position).
 - Presumably, many participants perceived professional improvements in their jobs even when there was no formal evidence of these gains (i.e., they reported professional improvement when there was no change in job title or official promotion).
 - 42% said that they were more satisfied with their work than they had been when they joined the program.

8.3 Assessment by Participants of the Program and the Services they Received

- ◆ Participants expressed high satisfaction with the program and most (78%) said they would recommend it to others in a similar situation.
- ◆ They said that the most important services they received were personal support, guidance counseling for studies, and financial aid to pursue studies.
- ◆ Many participants who were not studying said they would like to do so though they would need guidance counseling to select a field of study.

9. Assessing the Impact of the Program

The following are estimates of the program impact on the employment advancement of participants who were working when they joined the Kidum Program. We will also present the impact on the participants of Eshet Hayil; as we shall see below, the Eshet Hayil program had a stronger impact on its participants than did the other programs.

9.1 Examining Interim Outcomes: Studies

- ◆ The program had a positive impact on the percentage of participants who enrolled in studies. This impact was true for all of the participants, including participants from Eshet Hayil.

All Participants

- ◆ The percentage of participants who enrolled in studies was 24 percentage points higher than the percentage in the comparison group (56% vs. 32%).

Eshet Hayil Participants

Among Eshet Hayil participants, the program impact was greater as there was a 37 percentage point difference between the groups.

9.2 Examining the Impact on Change in Wages

The current impact estimates of the program on employment advancement are likely to be low. This is because a relatively high percentage of Kidum participants are still studying and many reduced their work hours while studying. It is therefore likely that in the longer term, after all of the Kidum participants complete their studies, the impact estimates will be larger.

All Participants

- ◆ 39% of the Kidum participants increased their wages by 10% or more compared with 34% in the comparison group. This 5-percentage point difference was not statistically significant.
- ◆ There was no significant difference between the groups in the change in monthly income from work.¹¹

Participants of Eshet Hayil

- ◆ The percentage of Eshet Hayil participants who improved their monthly or hourly wage by at least 10% was 22 percentage points higher than in the comparison group (52% vs. 30%). This difference was not statistically significant due to the small size of the sample.
- ◆ Eshet Hayil participants increased their monthly income from work by an average of NIS 862/month, an increase of 22% from the time they joined the program. In contrast, in the comparison group, there was a small decrease in the average monthly income (NIS -19).
- ◆ The difference in the change of income from work in the two groups (the difference in differences) was NIS 881 / month, and was statistically significant.

On the whole, the program did not have a positive impact on nearly all of the other measures of advancement that were examined.

- ◆ On some of the measures, the percentage of Kidum participants reporting improvement was higher than in the comparison group (e.g., receipt of more paid vacation days); in others, the percentage among the comparison group was higher (e.g., more convenient working hours). The

¹¹ The calculation of average income from work included people who had not been employed at the time of the interview, i.e., their income from work dropped to zero.

only statistically significant difference was that a higher percentage of Kidum participants reported that they started a savings plans with significant contributions from their employers (Keren Hishtalmut).

10. Discussion

The above findings indicate that while the Kidum Program encouraged participants to enroll in studies, overall, there was not a significant impact on employment advancement. Note, however, that most of the participants were satisfied with the program and with the Kidum professionals. According to the participants, the most important components of the program were the individual support from a Kidum professional, the guidance counseling directed at studies, and the financial assistance to pursue studies.

Among Eshet Hayil participants, on the other hand, positive significant impacts were found on both enrollment in studies and employment advancement. No such impacts were found in the other partner programs. We propose two possible explanations for this finding. One is that the partner program of Eshet Hayil received funding directly from Tevet for 10 hours a week of work for the Kidum professional to coordinate the Kidum program. Perhaps, this factor explains why the Eshet Hayil Kidum professional was the only Kidum professional who continued coordinating the program for the planned two years. Moreover, her caseload was larger as she worked with 40 participants while the Kidum professionals in other programs worked with only 5-20 participants. The failure to allocate resources and work time to the Kidum program in the other partner programs impeded the ability of the Kidum professionals to work with the participants.

The other possible explanation concerns the target population of Eshet Hayil. A large portion of the participants in Eshet Hayil were Ethiopian Israelis, the rest were mainly Caucasian Israelis, Bukhara Israelis or veteran Israelis in low-paying jobs. Eshet Hayil participants were less educated than the participants in other partner programs, and their monthly income was lower (NIS 3,900 vs. NIS 5,200/month). Some of the women had immigrated to Israel at a relatively advanced age; their command of Hebrew was poor, and they were still learning to speak, read and write. It may be that the Kidum Program was better able to help the participants in the lowest-paying jobs who were facing serious barriers to advancement, much like many of the participants from Eshet Hayil, and that it was more difficult for the program to help the participants with more resources and greater human capital.

These findings are based on a relatively small sample and should be interpreted with caution. In addition, a considerable portion of the program participants and comparison group refused to be interviewed or could not be located. The small sample may be responsible for the fact that some of the modest differences between the Kidum participants and the comparison group were not statistically significant. These factors also raise doubts as to the reliability of the estimated positive, significant impacts found in the study.

11. The Next Stage of the Study

This report presents findings from implementation the Kidum Program and reports outcomes for the participants some two years after they joined. In the next stage, the study will focus on the implementation of the Kidum Program as it is being expanded to additional employment programs around the country. We will track the outcomes among the new Kidum participants from these programs and attempt to estimate the impact on their employment advancement. In addition, we will assess the satisfaction of the Kidum participants in the expansion to learn what they perceived as the most important services. The findings from this part of the study will be published in a summary evaluation report.

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