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# **“Migration Without a Passport”: Young People Leaving the Haredi Community: Analysis of Needs and Recommendations for Developing Services**

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# Abstract

## Background

In recent years, a growing body of evidence has documented the experiences of ex-Haredim in Israel: men and women who leave the Haredi (ultra-Orthodox) community and seek to build new lives within non-Haredi society. This transition is often accompanied by an identity crisis, distancing from family and community, and significant emotional and financial challenges. Leaving the Haredi community does not necessarily mean abandoning religious belief, but it generally involves separation from the social and communal structures that define Haredi life, and entry into an unfamiliar environment—often without preparation or support.

To develop evidence-based services for ex-Haredim, the Shalem (Rehabilitation, Guidance, and Prevention) Administration at the Ministry of Welfare and Social Affairs and the Special Initiatives Fund of the National Insurance Institute commissioned the Myers-JDC-Brookdale Institute to conduct this study.

## Objective

To examine the characteristics of young men and women who have left the Haredi community, the challenges they face, and the existing and lacking services in the areas of education, employment, housing, welfare, and mental health.

## Method

The study included a comprehensive literature review on individuals who leave the Haredi community, as well as a qualitative component based on in-depth interviews with ex-Haredim and with professionals and representatives of organizations that are active in this field.

## Key Findings

The findings indicate that the process of leaving the Haredi community is commonly marked by a profound identity crisis, loss of family and community support, and a sense of alienation and loneliness. Many ex-Haredim must reconstruct their identities and rebuild their lives while confronting significant gaps in education, employment, and basic life skills:

- Most ex-Haredim experience temporary or long-term estrangement from their families and former communities, although renewed communication and reconciliation sometimes emerge over time.
- Men who complete their education within the Haredi school system typically lack core subjects - such as English and mathematics - required for entry into higher education and the job market. Women generally face fewer formal educational barriers but often encounter substantial emotional and economic challenges.
- Many ex-Haredim report emotional distress, anxiety, and loneliness, and require culturally sensitive professional support.

## **Main Recommendations**

- Strengthening the connections between the state, NGOs working with ex-Haredim, and organizations and communities within the Haredi sector, to create channels of communication, mediation, and cooperation that can reduce alienation and support both the process of leaving and the maintenance of family ties.
- Investing in developing professional expertise among social workers who specialize in working with ex-Haredim, integrating academic knowledge with deep experiential and cultural insight into the process of leaving the Haredi community. Such expertise can serve as a bridge between the welfare system and the ex-Haredi population, improving the effectiveness and impact of support services.
- Continue working through established and experienced NGOs which serve ex-Haredi men and women while also developing innovative services tailored to the diverse population, including support for those who wish to enlist in the military, pursue higher education, and/or build career paths that will enable them to integrate into broader Israeli.