

# The Take-up of Socioeconomic Rights and Benefits in the Arab Population in Israel

## A Preliminary Examination

A working paper submitted to the Authority for the Economic Development of the Minority Sectors, Ministry of Social Equality and Advancement of the Status of Women, as part of the research program of Taqadum – the government plan for reducing gaps in the Arab society by 2026

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## Abstract

In 2021, the State of Israel adopted Government Resolution 550 – The Economic Plan for Reducing Gaps in the Arab Society by 2026 (hereinafter, Taqadum). The plan is designed to promote the socioeconomic mobility of the Arab population and increase its integration in Israeli society. As part of the research program associated with Taqadum, the Authority for the Economic Development of the Minority Sectors commissioned the Arab Population Team at the Myers-JDC-Brookdale Institute to examine the phenomenon of incomplete take-up of rights and benefits in the Arab population and propose ways of addressing it. This phenomenon is very broad, with implications for a variety of life areas, and is therefore relevant to most of the sections of Government Resolution 550.

However, studying this issue is complicated, as the practical meaning of rights utilization or take-up is unclear. To what extent and how has this issue been studied in Israel? What are the proper boundaries that define its applicability to the target population? Accordingly, a preliminary study was first conducted on the take-up of rights in the general population, with a particular focus on the Arab population. The invaluable information collected in the preliminary study provides a solid foundation for designing the main study, which will evaluate the scope of rights take-up and examine rights utilization processes in the Arab population in three life areas: social security, healthcare, and employment.

The findings of the preliminary study presented in this working paper rely on a concise review of selected articles and reports and in-depth interviews with professionals knowledgeable in the take-up of rights in the Arab population. The literature review indicates that non-utilization of socioeconomic rights is common in the general population in Israel, and even more so among marginalized minorities such as the Arab population. The main causes of this state of affairs are lack of reliable information on the very existence of the right in question, entitlement conditions and take-up procedures; geographic and physical difficulties in arriving at the service provision centers; insufficient digital literacy when rights are to be exercised online; bureaucratic burdens imposed on citizens in interfaces with state authorities responsible for providing the allowance, program or service for which the citizen is entitled, as well as administrative fragmentation and deficiencies in the coordination mechanisms between the authorities in charge; an array of perceptual, psychological and cultural barriers, such as the fear of privacy infringement, personal and social stigma (particularly in sensitive situations such as financial distress), and the feeling that public officials belonging to the majority group fail to understand the circumstances and behavioral norms of clients from minority groups.

Empirical findings point to several areas where Arabs utilize their rights to a lesser extent than do Jews. For example, the rates of filing a claim for an employment grant from the Tax Authority and receiving it in the Arab population are lower than in the general population. In other cases, take-up mechanisms are comparatively less available and accessible in Arab local authorities than in Jewish ones. For example, the Ministry of Welfare and Social Affairs' counseling service stations, used to assist citizens in utilizing their rights with local authorities, are located mainly in strong Jewish municipalities, less so in weaker Jewish municipalities, and are completely absent in Arab municipalities. Moreover, in Israel's mixed cities, which serve as a potential space for shared society and are required to provide equal services for all residents, it was found that on several indicators of municipal performance – such as allocation of municipal assets, provision of financial support, and property tax collection – Arab residents are placed in a disadvantageous position for utilizing their rights.

In addition to the literature review, seven semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with professionals in the central and local government and third-sector organizations whose work focuses on rights utilization in the Arab population. They included representatives of the Employment Service, Ministry of Health, Commission for Equal Rights of Persons with Disabilities at the Ministry of Justice, the management of the KolZchut ("Every Right") website (an online database containing information about all the rights to which Israeli citizens are entitled; in its Arabic version), the Itach-Ma'aki ("With You") NGO for promoting women's rights, and the "Rights-Promoting City" program operated jointly by the Ministry of Welfare and Social Affairs, JDC-Israel and the Rashi Foundation. The interviews provided rich information about how members of the Arab population seek to utilize their rights in various life areas, about state-driven activities carried out in the field aiming to promote rights take-up, and about barriers to rights utilization on the individual and system levels.

An integrative analysis of the interviews indicates that the main barriers to rights take-up in the Arab population, on top of those facing the general population, cut across the various life domains examined. These barriers include: language-cultural difficulty, exacerbated by the convoluted legal terminology in informative documents and forms that need to be filled; lack in digital resources – both municipal infrastructures and individual IT skills – in order to take up rights online; limited mobility and inadequate public transportation to the service provision centers (particularly problematic among the Bedouin population in the Negev); substantial administrative burden given the linguistic and digital gaps and the limited ability of citizens from Israel's periphery to arrive in service centers; distrust in state authorities and unwillingness to cooperate with their representatives; the stigmatic view that rights utilization reflects inappropriate behavior on the part of the poor and socially excluded who rely too much on national security allowances for a living; the absence of a well-organized and well-coordinated working model in the local authorities, which are the "frontline" in rights utilization, mediating between the citizens and the central government; lack of proactive steps by government agencies and service providers working to promote rights take-up to reach out to citizens, publicize their services and make them accessible, including underdeveloped interfaces with local authorities.

The information collected in the literature review and interviews with professionals was used to design an outline for the main study, which will evaluate the scope of rights take-up and examine rights utilization processes in the Arab population in three life areas: social security, healthcare, and employment. These areas are related to the core goals of the Taqadum plan, and the preliminary study suggested that in these areas, significant gaps exist between needs and responses. The proposed study will delve into mechanisms, programs and services to promote proactive rights take-up in the Arab population, focusing on the local authority arena. At the time of publication of this working paper, the research team is already working on the main study, whose findings will be published by the end of 2025.