

Exploring the Topics of Arab Citizens and Jewish-Arab Relations in Israel

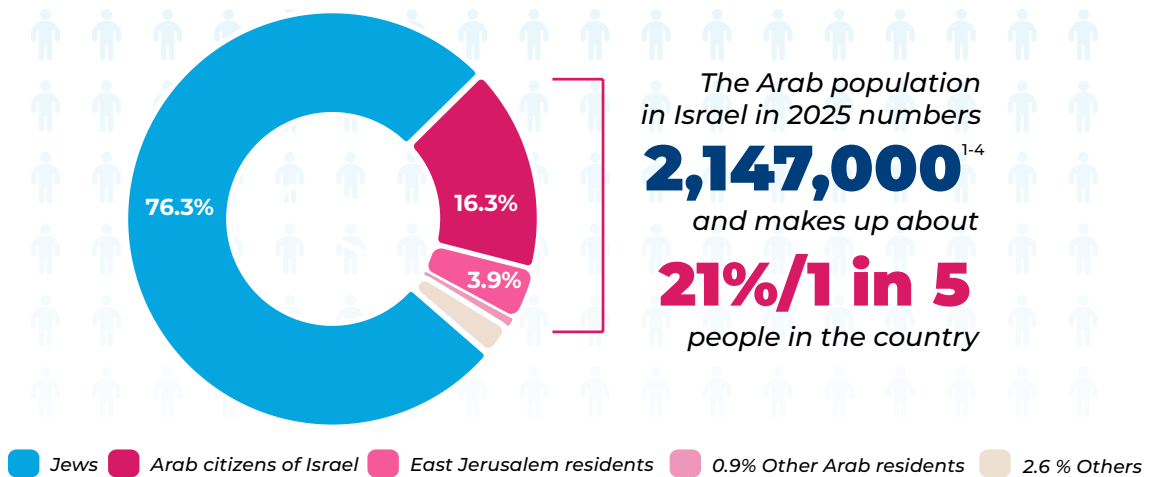
This resource provides useful terminology and snapshots of the daily lives of Arab citizens of Israel. We hope it will spark curiosity and a desire to learn more.

Refer to the Source Sheet Companion for a list of links used to compile this resource, as well as a selection of additional resources for further learning. Note that data on some of the issues explored herein often can be limited and confusing. This challenge reflects some of the complexities of Jewish-Arab relations in Israel.

SECTION 1: population

How can terms, categories, and identities shape how people understand and interact with each other?

Most estimates of Israel's Arab population combine citizens, East Jerusalem residents, and Golan Heights Druze residents.



key terms

- > Which of these terms have you heard, read, or used before? What was the context?
- > What might a person's choice of term say about their identity or outlook? What about the context they are in?

Encompassing language, culture, history, daily life, and official status, Arab citizens' identities are more nuanced than either "Israeli" or "Palestinian." Members of this population group describe themselves (and are described by others) with many terms. Some common terms include:

Arab-Israelis

Palestinian Citizens of Israel

Palestinian-Israelis

Israeli-Arabs

'48ers⁵

Arab Citizens of Israel

Note: In this resource, we use the term "Arab citizens of Israel" because it describes the language and ethnicity of this population (Arab) and their country of citizenship (Israel) while striving to avoid imposing one identity. Other terms apply to East Jerusalem residents.

SECTION 1: cont.

View the Task Force Introduction to the Bedouin Community in the Negev



View the Task Force Explainer on Druze Citizens of Israel.



SECTION 2: geography

Most Arab citizens live in entirely Arab communities in Israel's geographic periphery, far from the country's physical and economic center.¹¹⁻¹⁴

Like Israel's Jewish population, Arab society encompasses rich cultural, regional, religious, and historical diversity, reflecting a broad range of lifestyles, practices, and experiences.⁶⁻⁹

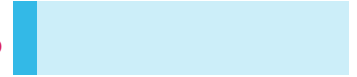
MUSLIM:

84%



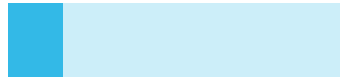
CHRISTIAN:

6.8%



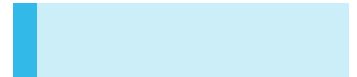
NEGEV BEDOUIN:

14%



DRUZE:

7.1%



Roughly 305,000 people, Negev Bedouin are Muslim Arabs with a historically semi-nomadic lifestyle who retain unique cultural traditions and heritage. The center of the Bedouin population in Israel is in the Negev Desert (Naqab in Arabic). Today, the communities live in 7 Bedouin municipalities, 12 recognized villages in two regional councils, and about 30 unrecognized villages that are not connected to Israel's infrastructure.¹⁰

A culturally and ethnically distinct Arabic-speaking population who practice the Druze faith. Israel has one of the largest Druze populations in the world, about 152,000 people, most live in entirely Druze communities in the North. Unlike Arab citizens of Israel, Druze men with Israeli citizenship are obligated to serve in the army.

Note: The percentage above reflects the share of these communities in Arab society in Israel.

Where do Arab citizens live?



NORTH AND GALILEE

More than half—including Muslim, Christian, and Druze communities. The region includes Nazareth, which is a cultural epicenter and the second largest Arab city in Israel.



TRIANGLE REGION

Nearly 1 in 7—including Muslims and Christians. The “Triangle” is an informal term used to describe a cluster of Arab towns in central Israel along the Green Line.



NEGEV

About 1 in 5, almost all of whom are part of Negev Bedouin communities. The region includes Rahat, the largest Arab city.



MIXED CITIES

The state recognizes nine mixed localities, including five historically mixed cities. In addition, mixed localities “in the making” have steadily growing Arab populations. Mixed cities are the only localities in Israel where significant populations of Jews and Arabs live under one municipality. Just over 8% of Arab citizens and 16% of Jews live in these localities.

SECTION 3: Jewish-Arab relations

Most Jewish and Arab citizens have very limited opportunities to get to know one another. Today, there is more frequent casual interaction than there used to be, but opportunities for meaningful interactions remain rare. Building a more inclusive, equal, and shared society is the driving mission of more than 100 organizations and leaders promoting stronger Jewish-Arab relations in Israel.



SHARED SOCIETY

Shared society is a framework in which communities of different ethnic, national, and religious backgrounds live with mutual respect and equitable access to resources, opportunities, and decision-making. In the context of Jewish-Arab relations in Israel, it focuses on strengthening partnership, inclusion, and economic equality, moving beyond “coexistence” models centered primarily on dialogue and trust-building.¹⁵



LANGUAGE BARRIERS

Arabs and Jews are not exposed to, nor need to practice, each other’s language on a daily basis. Few Arab high school graduates are fluent enough in Hebrew. Jewish citizens rarely learn Arabic.

Arabic was an official language alongside Hebrew from 1948, but the 2018 Nation-State Law made Hebrew the sole official language and gave Arabic a “special status,” reducing its formal equality.¹⁶



SEPARATE SCHOOLS

Israeli schools are divided into four distinct systems: secular, national-religious, ultra-Orthodox, and Arab schools. Most Arab children attend Arabic public schools, studying in Arabic and learning Hebrew as a second language.¹⁷



HIGHER EDUCATION AND WORKPLACE

For most Arab and Jewish citizens, the first meaningful opportunities for interaction occur in adulthood, primarily in higher education or the workplace.

Relations between Jews and Arabs in Israel are shaped by historical context and current events, especially during periods of heightened tension. While trust can be strained in such moments, survey data shows that many citizens across both communities continue to express a strong willingness to engage with one another and support improved relations.^{18, 19}

Nearly two years into the war following October 7:

Jews

~**46%** were willing to work and study with Arabs

85% said they desire better inter-communal relations

65% believe it is possible

Arabs

~**68%** were willing to work and study with Jews

89% said they desire better inter-communal relations

91% believe it is possible

SECTION 4: education

Education is key to social mobility. Attending separate schools in elementary and high schools, many Jews and Arabs meet for the first time in higher education. Over the last decade, Israeli universities and colleges have made significant efforts to strengthen shared campus life.

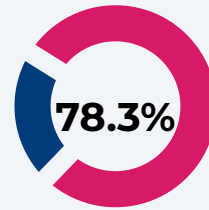
ELEMENTARY & HIGH SCHOOL

457,469

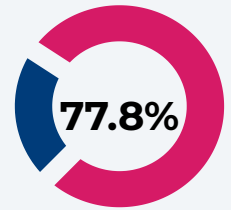


Arab students in elementary through high school in 2025.²⁰

A HISTORIC FIRST IN 2024: ARAB STUDENTS LEAD IN MATRICULATION* COMPLETION



Arab
12th graders



Jewish
12th graders

**This certificate is a prerequisite for higher education²¹*

HIGHER EDUCATION

Over the past two decades, Arab participation in higher education in Israel has increased significantly, reaching approximately **19% of all students in 2025**.²²

FROM 2015-2025

BA from...

14% → 22.4%

MA from...

10% → 16%

PhD from...

5.7% → 9%

Represented as a percentage of total enrollment

The share of Arab citizens with an academic degree rose **from 10.9% in 2008 to 18.8% in 2023**, still below the 39.1% rate among Jewish citizens.²³

SECTION 5: socio- economic status

Economic disparities are among the most influential factors in the quality of life of Arab citizens. Gaps in housing, employment, education, infrastructure are barriers to social mobility. Some of the most innovative and dynamic work on a governmental and civil society level in Israel today relates to addressing these challenges.

LOCAL ECONOMY

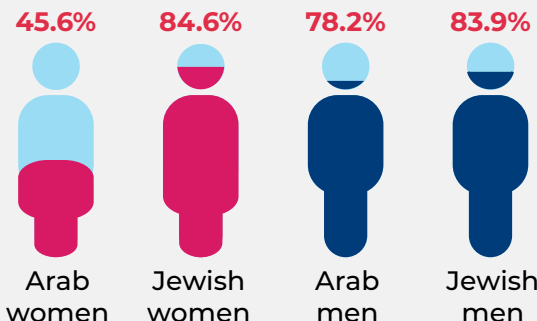


There are **134 Arab cities, towns, and villages** in Israel. Most of them fall into the four lowest socioeconomic clusters out of ten.²⁴

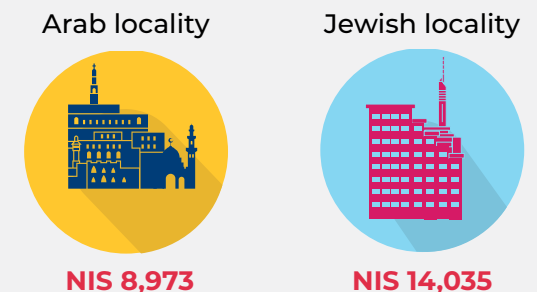
POVERTY IN 2023



EMPLOYMENT IN 2023²⁶

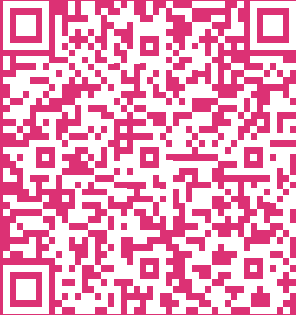


AVERAGE WAGE IN 2023²⁷

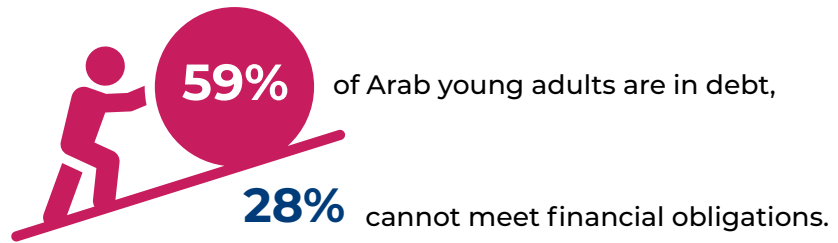
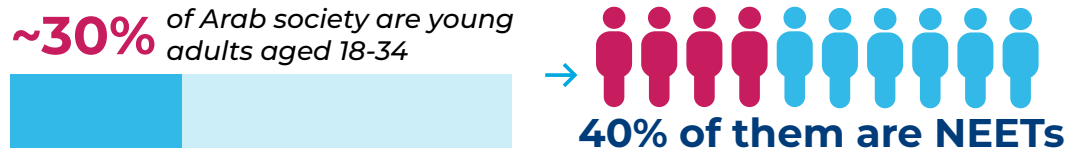


SECTION 5:
cont.

View the Task Force Explainer on Organized Crime in Arab Society in Israel.

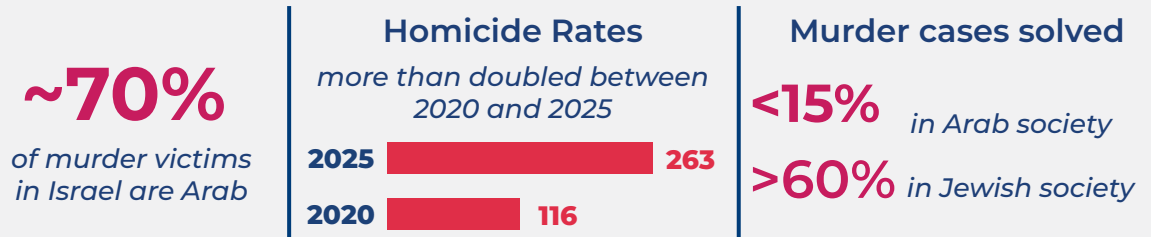


NEETS: NOT IN EMPLOYMENT, EDUCATION, OR TRAINING ²⁸



A CRISIS OF PERSONAL SECURITY: CRIME

Crime and personal security remain among the most urgent issues facing Arab society today. In recent years, escalating violence, organized crime, and illegal weapons have deeply affected daily life in Arab communities. High homicide rates, low trust in law enforcement, and growing public frustration continue to deepen the crisis. ²⁹



Surveys show that **80% of Arab citizens fear they or their family member will be harmed by serious violence or gunfire**. Across the country, communities are speaking out through protests, public appeals, and local leadership, calling for safety and protection for all citizens.

SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

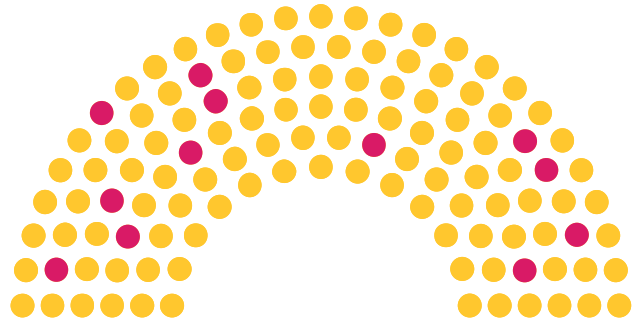
Over the last decade, the Government of Israel has invested considerable resources into reducing socio-economic gaps in Arab society. In 2021, the government adopted Resolution 550 (GR-550), a five-year plan allocating NIS 30 billion (\$9.6 billion), building on GR-922 from 2015-2020 (NIS 12-15 billion). In 2024-2025, proposals to divert the budgets have raised deep concerns. ³⁰



SECTION 6: political representation

IN THE 25TH KNESSET

Out of **120** Members of Knesset there are **12** Arab MKs (including **3** Druze MKs), from five political parties.³¹



In 2015, three Arab parties and one Arab-Jewish party ran together as the Joint List, winning 15 seats to become the third-largest party in the Knesset. In 2021, the Ra'am party split from the Joint List and became the first Arab party to sit in a governing coalition.³² The move sparked debate in Arab society over how best to advance sectoral interests, and within Jewish society over inclusion and partnership with Arabs. The Arab electorate continues to express support for unified representation in pursuit of national political influence.

While turnout in national elections has fluctuated, Arab citizens have generally shown stronger participation in local elections, where leadership is seen as more directly tied to daily community needs.

SECTION 7: october 7 & ensuing wars

The events of October 7, 2023, and the wars that followed deeply affected all communities in Israel, including Arab society. Arab citizens faced the trauma of violence and loss, while also navigating heightened social tensions, economic disruption, and complex questions of identity and belonging.

View the Task Force Resource Library on Jewish-Arab relations following October 7.



SHARED TRAUMA



October 7th marked a profound tragedy in Israel's history. **Arab citizens were among those killed, injured and taken hostage**, and soldiers lost their lives in the line of duty.

Alongside these losses, Arab medical teams, volunteers, and emergency responders participated in national relief efforts.³³

SAFETY INFRASTRUCTURE GAPS

The broader war period included unprecedented regional escalations across Israel's borders and with Iran, bringing with it ongoing rocket fire and military operations. These intensified fear and uncertainty, and exposed longstanding disparities in civil protection:³⁴

46% of Arab society



**LACK ACCESS
TO SHELTER**

26% of general population



JEWISH-ARAB RELATIONS UNDER STRAIN

The war period also strained relations between Jewish and Arab citizens, deepening mistrust and polarization in shared spaces such as workplaces, campuses, and social media. For many Arab citizens, it also sharpened the challenge of being citizens of a state at war while identifying with the Palestinian people. Many described the experience as "silencing," marked by fear of consequences for expressing grief or concern about these wars in an increasingly tense public climate.