

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

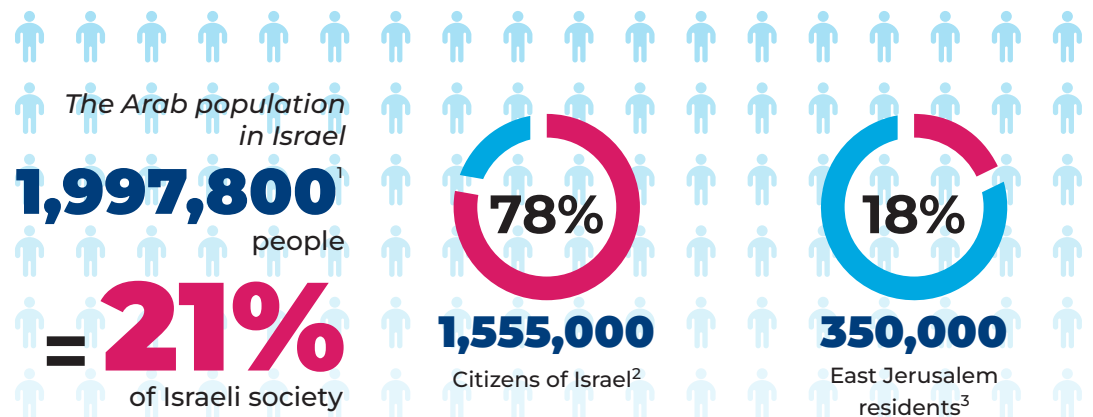
This resource provides useful terminology and snapshots of the daily lives of Arab citizens of Israel. We hope it will spark curiosity and a desire to learn more.

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: key terms

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

Most estimates of Israel's Arab population combine citizens and East Jerusalem residents. For more on these distinctions see this chart.



Due to a lack of consistent data, and the exclusion of about 24,000 Golan Druze, these numbers do not add up to 100%.

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

- > 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**

**'48ers<sup>4</sup>**

**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: key terms

cont.

Like Israel's Jewish population, Arab society is diverse and encompasses rich culture, history, and a broad range of lifestyles, practices, and experiences.

### MUSLIM:

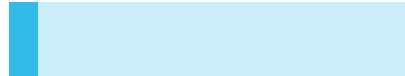
85%<sup>5</sup>



Represented in Arab society

### CHRISTIAN:

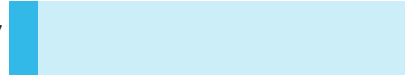
7%<sup>6</sup>



Represented in Arab society

### DRUZE:

7.6%<sup>7</sup>



A culturally and ethnically distinct Arabic-speaking population who practice the Druze faith. Israel hosts the third-largest Druze population in the world, about 149,000 people, almost all of whom live in the North. Druze men who are citizens of Israel serve in the Israeli Defense Forces, unlike most other Arab citizens of Israel.

### NEGEV BEDOUIN:

14%<sup>8</sup>



Roughly 300,000 people, Negev Bedouin are Muslim Arabs with a historically semi-nomadic lifestyle who retain unique cultural traditions and heritage. The epicenter of the Bedouin population and culture in Israel is in the Negev. Today, Bedouin live in 7 municipalities, two regional councils, and about 35<sup>9</sup> unrecognized villages that exist outside of Israel's infrastructure.

## 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.

## Where do Arab citizens live?



### NEGEV

About 1 in 5, almost all of whom are part of Negev Bedouin communities.<sup>11</sup> The region includes Rahat, the largest Bedouin city, and one of Israel's largest Arab cities.



### TRIANGLE REGION

Nearly 1 in 6—including Muslims and Christians.<sup>10</sup>



### NORTH AND GALILEE

More than half—including Muslim, Christian, and Druze communities. The region includes Nazareth, which is a cultural epicenter and one of Israel's largest Arab cities.<sup>12</sup>



### MIXED CITIES

Most Jewish and Arab citizens live in separate municipalities. The term "mixed cities" refers to 7 cities that have historically been the only places with significant Arab and Jewish populations. Just under 10% of Arab society live in these mixed cities, comprising between 4.5-29% of their cities' populations.<sup>13</sup>

## 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.



### SHARED SOCIETY

The shared society field works to build mutual partnership and respect between Arabs and Jews while advancing inclusion, economic equality, and integration. Previously, the field employed the term “coexistence,” which focused on bringing people together to get to know each other and build trust. Today, there are over 100 organizations working on aspects of shared society in Israel.<sup>14</sup>



### SEPARATE SCHOOLS

Israeli schools are divided into four distinct systems: religious and non-religious schools in the Jewish sector, independent ultra-Orthodox Jewish schools, and Arab schools. Most Arab citizens attend Arabic public schools, studying in Arabic and learning Hebrew as a second language.



### HIGHER EDUCATION AND WORKPLACE

The first opportunities Arab and Jewish citizens have for meaningful interactions is through higher education or the workplace, when they are already adults. However, many people never find themselves in these environments.



### LANGUAGE BARRIERS

The geographic separation and distinct school systems mean 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.<sup>15</sup>



### ATTITUDES AND TENSIONS

Attitudes and tensions among Arabs and Jews in Israel fluctuate, affected by current events. For example, following the violence of May 2021, an October 2021 survey displayed a notable decline in trust, showing<sup>16</sup>:

#### Jews

**60%** said they feared Arabs  
**32%** expressed interest in closer ties with Arabs

#### Arabs

**39%** said they feared Jews  
**66%** expressed interest in closer ties with Jews

## REFLECTION QUESTION:

> Have you ever encountered any shared society or coexistence organizations in Israel? What was your experience? What did you learn?

## SECTION 4: socio- economic status

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

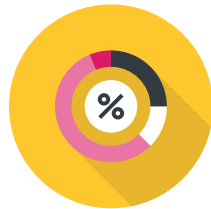
### REFLECTION QUESTION:

> What questions come up as you explore this section?



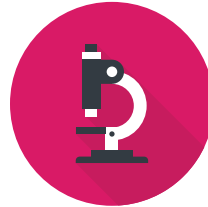
#### LOCAL ECONOMY

There are 134 Arab cities, towns, and villages in Israel; 95% of them fall into the four lowest socioeconomic deciles.<sup>17</sup>



#### EMPLOYMENT

In spring 2020, 72.8% of Arab men and 39.5% of Arab women were employed or actively seeking employment, compared to 84.4% of Jewish men and 77% of Jewish women.<sup>19</sup>



#### COVID-19

54% of Arabs reported that their financial situation became worse during COVID-19 compared to 42% of Jews. 26% of Arabs reported they had to decrease their food consumption during the pandemic compared to 14% of Jews.<sup>20</sup>



#### POVERTY

In 2019, approximately 35% of Arabs lived below the poverty line compared to 18% of Jews.<sup>18</sup>



#### SALARIES

In 2018, the average monthly salary for Arab men was NIS 8,828 while the average for all working men was NIS 14,206. For Arab women, the average monthly salary was NIS 6,296 while the average for all working women was NIS 9,679.<sup>21</sup>

### SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

In recent years, the Government of Israel has invested considerable resources into reducing these socio-economic gaps, recognizing that stronger Arab communities benefit the entire country.

In 2015, the government launched Resolution 922, then the largest-ever economic development plan for Arab society in Israel, which allocated budgets of NIS 12-15 billion (\$3.8-\$4.8 billion) over five years.

In 2021, the government adopted Resolution 550, allocating NIS 30 billion (\$9.6 billion) over the next five years. This plan is larger and broader in scope, with more budgets for social needs and programs.<sup>22</sup>

## SECTION 5: education

Education and higher education are 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 AND HIGH SCHOOL

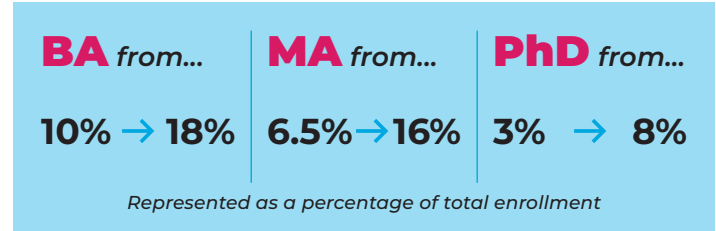


**441,502**

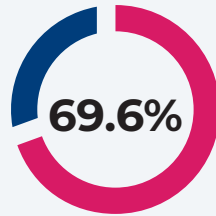
Arab students in elementary through high school in 2020.<sup>23</sup>

### HIGHER EDUCATION

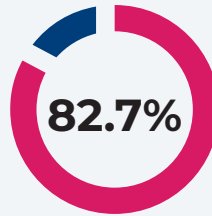
Between 2009 and 2021, Arab participation in higher education increased significantly. Despite these gains, they remain under-represented at all degree levels.<sup>24</sup>



### ACHIEVEMENT GAPS: MATRICULATION CERTIFICATE\*



Arab 12<sup>th</sup> graders completed in 2020 (79% of Arab girls and 53.3% of Arab boys)



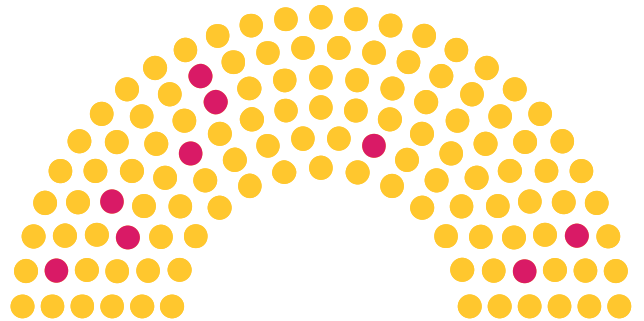
Jewish 12<sup>th</sup> graders completed in 2020 (82.8% of Jewish girls and 82.6% of Jewish boys)



*\*This certificate is a prerequisite for higher education<sup>25</sup>*

*In the 25<sup>th</sup> Knesset*

Out of **120** Members of Knesset there are **9** Arab MKs and **1** Druze MK, from three political parties.<sup>26</sup>



## SECTION 6: political parties

All Israeli citizens enjoy voting rights; Arab citizens participate in Israeli political life on a local and national level. While most vote for Arab-majority parties, like any other constituency, Arab citizens have diverse political perspectives and discourse.

*In 2015, three Arab parties and one Arab-Jewish party ran together as the Joint List, which gained 15 seats and became the third-largest party in the Knesset. This achievement strengthened the Arab electorate's pursuit of national political influence. In 2021, the Islamist Ra'am party split from the Joint List and became the first Arab party to sit in a governing coalition.<sup>27</sup> The move sparked debate in Arab society about the best strategy to pursue sectoral interests and within Jewish society over inclusion and partnership with Arab parties.*