

Personal Social Services

Introduction

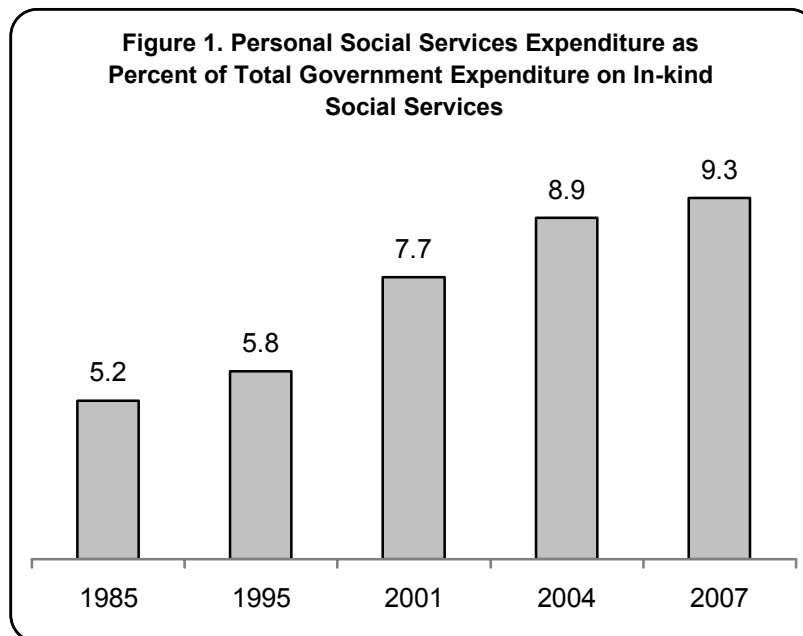
The personal social services are among the mainstays of Israel's social service system. They provide crucial responses to the problems and needs of individuals, families, groups, and communities that cannot cope easily, if at all, with issues that impact on their functioning, quality of life, and social integration. The Ministry of Social Affairs and Social Services and the local welfare departments are responsible for developing the services, determining their contents, and financing them. Responsibility for the delivery of most services, in contrast, has been transferred to nongovernmental organizations, including voluntary organizations (NPOs) and private businesses.

The personal social services provide various types of assistance for a wide range of population groups, including children and teens at risk, seniors, those with physical or mental disabilities, families in distress and crisis (including single-parent and immigrant households), alcoholics and drug addicts, and the homeless. Thus, these services focus on assisting the weakest and most vulnerable social groups.

The following review and examination of Israel's personal social services includes three main parts. Part 1 briefly describes developments in government expenditure for these services in recent years. Part 2 focuses on the main policy issues that impact on these services. Part 3 explores two of these issues at greater length: how the local welfare services are coping with the poverty problem; and geographic inequalities, especially between Jewish and Arab localities, in the provision of personal social services.

1. Government Expenditure on Personal Social Services

Government expenditure on personal social services, although minor within the totality of government spending for social services, has been rising considerably over the past two decades in terms of its share among in-kind social services – from 5 percent in 1985 to more than 9 percent in recent years.



In absolute terms, too, government expenditure on personal social services increased steadily and significantly over time. Much of the increase originates in expenditure on long-term care services for the disabled elderly within the framework of the Long-Term Care Insurance Law implemented in 1988. The share of expenditure for this purpose has grown steadily, from about one-fourth of total

personal service expenditure in 1990 to 44 percent in 2006. Other expenditure on services for the elderly under Ministry auspices has also expanded, but long-term care services, from which 125,000 seniors benefited in mid-2007, are central among total outlays for this population group.

Table 1. Government Expenditure on Personal Social Services, 1985-2008* (NIS billions, 2006 prices)

	Total	Long-term care	Total excl. long-term care	Physically/mentally disabled	Children/Youth	Elderly	Case-work	Central administration
1985	1,714	0	1,714	501	500	127	333	252
1990	2,558	639	1,919	641	474	206	332	266
1995	3,515	1,053	2,462	910	517	286	454	295
2000	4,830	1,879	2,951	1,185	655	283	509	319
2005	5,572	2,445	3,127	1,440	658	239	504	286
2006	5,704	2,537	3,167	1,460	673	231	501	302
2008	6,395	2,867	3,528	1,706	769	253	507	293

* 2008 – original budget expenditure, also in 2006 prices.

Source: Taub Center for Social Policy Studies in Israel.

Examination of the trend in expenditure on the various types of service shows differences between them: expenditure on persons with mental and other disabilities continued increasing at significant rates. Expenditure on services for children rose to some extent, especially from 2000 on, after many years of budgetary erosion or stability. Most of the latter increase went for the development and expansion of community services.

According to the 2008 budget program (translated into 2006 prices), long-term care services will continue to account for nearly half of total expenditure on personal social services and expenditure on children and youth, the mentally disabled, and persons with physical disabilities will continue to increase.

Despite the growth in recent years, government expenditure on social services has not kept up with the increase in the number of those in need. More than this, the scale of financial resources available for these services is a function not only of the level of government expenditure but also of the share of local co-financing.

As will be discussed, in many localities, especially Arab ones, local government financing has been hit hard in recent years. The reduction in funding has made the service system in these localities less able to respond adequately to the needs of their populations.

2. Main Characteristics and Problems

The personal social services, at the central and local government levels, have several main characteristics. Some are revealed by examining the level and composition of expenditure and analyzing outlay trends; others come to light through the study of main problems and issues that arise in various types of service.

- *Inadequate resources.* Analysis of government expenditure for personal social services shows that the level of spending has risen in recent years, especially in services for the elderly (under the Long-Term Care Insurance Law), children, and the mentally disabled. The increase, however, has not entirely kept up with the growth of the population groups that need these services and has not matched their needs. Furthermore, the government allocation does not cover the entire budget for services that are delivered largely by local welfare departments; local authorities are supposed to cover one-fourth of the total outlay. Budget distress in some local authorities has meant that they are less able to pay their share of the social service budget. In some localities, especially those that are socioeconomically weak, the reduction of total resources has led to cutbacks in staff and downsizing of programs and services.
- *Partial coverage of needs.* One of the main results of the reduced level of resources available to many local welfare

departments is that they can reach only some, and in some cases few, of those in need. The Ministry of Social Affairs and Social Services estimates that only 30 percent of persons with disabilities, one-third of children and youth at risk, 60 percent of the elderly, 65 percent of delinquents, and 10 percent of homeless persons and drug and alcohol addicts receive a response to their needs.

Given their role and responsibilities, the personal social services contend with a wide variety of needs and problems of diverse population groups. Some of them require an immediate response and represent a significant burden on welfare departments which are already overburdened. Consequently, much of the social service departments' work focuses on "putting out fires" and fulfilling legal obligations, leaving little time, energy or resources for planning of activities, prevention, or tackling problems and needs thoroughly and systematically. There is also difficulty in establishing clear priorities to guide the allocation of professional and monetary resources among the various needs.

- *The social services have a varied legislative foundation that affects their nature.* In terms of legislation, there are three service types: those with no legal basis; those based on protective laws; and, those based on legislation defining specific services to be provided. The broadest legal infrastructure is that of protective laws whose aim is to protect the well-being and welfare of population groups such as children at risk, youth, and the elderly. In this case the exact services that are to be provided are not specified. The main prescriptive law in the personal social services is the Long-Term Care Insurance Law, which insures nursing services for disabled elderly in the community.

The staff at the local welfare departments devote much of their time to the implementation of laws and the provision of services stipulated by law. Much of the budget expenditure on social services is also earmarked for these services. Thus, staff involvement in non-legislated services is less than complete. Many

social services fall into this category even though they are no less vital than those set by law.

- *Insufficient attention to poverty related issues by welfare departments.* Many local welfare departments do not play a meaningful role in helping individuals and households rise from poverty, despite their declared goals and their social and professional obligations.
- *Limited initiatives and innovation.* The diverse population groups that are treated by personal social services and their varied and changing needs mean that a broad spectrum of responses and methods of intervention are required. The ability of the local welfare departments and the NGOs to offer a range of services that meet the population's needs, to initiate and develop new programs, or to adopt existing programs depends largely on the initiative, willingness, and innovativeness of the service staff and the resources available to them. As noted, these resources are limited and distributed in an unbalanced and unequal way among localities.
- *The existence of inequalities between localities in the scope and level of services.* These inequalities can be seen in the extent of human and financial resources available to the local services and in the range, level, and quality of these services. The inequality is reflected in several indicators, e.g., the ratio of welfare department staff to clients, the average per client expenditure on social services, the number of programs implemented and their scope, and the percentage of persons in need who are served in some way.

As a result of this inequality, the services that citizens receive are often more a function of where they live than of what they need. The inequality originates in differences between localities in resource allocation for social services from both central and local government, the extent of local initiative in the social service field, as well as the extent of involvement in local activities of private foundations, voluntary organizations, and businesses. The

inequality stands out especially in comparisons between Arab and Jewish localities, but it also exists within each sector.

- *Proliferation of social service organizations.* NGOs have been active in the social service arena for many years; some of them, mainly volunteer organizations, have been vanguards in the development of new services for special population groups such as persons with physical and mental disabilities, children, youth, and battered women. The extent of NGO activity in Israel has widened in recent years, mainly because the country's partial privatization policy has made NGOs responsible for the delivery of many important central government and local services. The multiplicity of organizations should increase the supply of services and give consumers a choice. But it also limits the roles and responsibilities of central and local government, causing difficulty in monitoring and controlling NGO activities. It also creates a complex service arena characterized by redundancies, competition, and lack of coordination.
- *Privatization of service delivery.* Today, most institutional and community social services are delivered by NGOs. This has transformed the functioning of local welfare departments and their staff: instead of engaging mainly in the planning and delivery of services, as in the past, they have assumed a largely administrative role. The transfer of direct care and assistance from welfare departments to NGOs has also harmed the direct relationship that used to exist between the departments and many of their clients.
- *Limited consumer involvement.* Consumers have a minimal role in shaping policy, activities, and the functioning patterns of the personal social services.
- *Lack of clarity in the division of labor and powers between the Ministry of Social Affairs and Social Services and local welfare departments.* The Ministry covers most of the budget for local welfare services and by means of various regulations and directives determines the pattern of service activity. The local authorities,

however, are responsible for funding part of the services and delivering them (directly or by means of other organizations). The resulting lack of clarity is reflected differently in different localities. Some localities, mainly those having a good socioeconomic status, fund a larger share of their welfare budgets through their own resources and thus have considerable autonomy in the development and delivery of services. Socioeconomically weaker localities are hard-pressed to come up with their share of the budget and, therefore, are more heavily dependent on central government funding.

Thus far, no explicit policy has been set forth that would define the relations between the ministry and local authorities, help to coordinate them appropriately, and tailor this coordination to localities that have differing social and economic profiles. Such coordination should establish an equilibrium between guidance from central government which would further the development of services, guarantee their quality and their equitable delivery while striving to strengthen the local community and promote local initiative and independent fund raising.

- *Incongruence between the structure and operating patterns of many welfare departments and the economic and political environment in which they operate.* The welfare departments and their staffs face many challenges that force them to operate under conditions of a shortage of resources, cope with a growing number of applicants for assistance, and contend with policies of central and local government that seek to privatize the delivery of most services. The departments have to maintain regular contact with many organizations that operate in the welfare arena and, in some cases, have to supervise their activities. Many of the departments are not able to cope adequately with these changing circumstances, to influence them, and to make the most of them. Furthermore, many social workers at the departments are forced to play new

roles, including various administrative ones, for which they lack appropriate training.

In sum, the personal social services, which are intended to help weaker population groups to meet their needs appropriately, to lift them out of their distress, and to integrate them into society, are only partially fulfilling their responsibilities. This situation demands change that will place them at a higher priority for both the government and local authorities. The following discussion focuses on two of the issues: the war on poverty and disparities at the local level; and the reduction of inequalities between localities, especially Jewish and Arab ones.

3. The Local Social Services and the War on Poverty

Lately, there has been an increasing awareness in Israel of the crucial need to deal with the issue of poverty and to develop and implement programs to reduce it. This is reflected in the involvement of various national level players including government ministries, the National Insurance Institute, the Bank of Israel, JDC-Israel, foundations, national voluntary organizations, and businesses. It is important to note that in the months preceding the writing of this report the government approved several initiatives such as a negative income tax for working people, increased allocations for the elderly, more active enforcement of labor laws, a reduction in the number of foreign workers, and subsidies for day-care centers for working families. These initiatives were incorporated into the multi-annual program of the National Economics Council, an agency of the Office of the Prime Minister, which stipulates the reduction of the incidence of poverty among households from 20 percent to 17 percent by 2010 (Office of the Prime Minister, 2007).

These programs are based on the assumption that encouraging people to join the labor market and, raising the income of poor

individuals and households will lead to a lessening of the prevalence of poverty. Even today, various organizations are running programs that encourage the unemployed to enter the labor force, such as projects partially modeled on the American "Wisconsin Plan", which target recipients of income maintenance benefits.

In parallel, the Ministry of Education has initiated several programs for the advancement of students who live in underprivileged areas, like introducing a long school day, various remedial programs, developing regional colleges that give residents of peripheral areas opportunities to pursue higher education, and nutrition programs for children in school. The Ministry of Industry, Trade, and Labor is running a variety of vocational training and basic education programs that seek to help the unemployed get back to work. Additional government bodies, such as the Ministry of Social Affairs and Social Services, the National Insurance Institute, and the Bank of Israel, have taken anti-poverty program initiatives of their own as well.

The dominant approach that directs these programs stresses the role of central government and other national level players and does not take into consideration the crucial role that local authorities and other actors on the local scene, such as voluntary organizations and businesses, may play.

The focus of the following discussion is on the importance of the involvement of local authorities and, principally, the local welfare departments and other community organizations in initiating, developing, and implementing anti-poverty programs, and to propose ways to make this involvement a reality. Local involvement, while crucial, should neither replace central government nor diminish its responsibilities; instead, it should complement central government activity. What is more, the government should help to fight and reduce poverty not only by taking national level initiatives that derive from its obligations,

powers, and authority, e.g., by passing laws, increasing allocations, and pledging resources to the development of various social and economic programs but also through initiating activities to encourage and motivate local authorities to develop and implement anti-poverty programs at the local level.

The following discussion will address three aspects: Part A examines the motives, advantages, and disadvantages of focusing on central government and local involvement in dealing with poverty. Part B describes conditions that may advance the war on poverty at the local level. Part C offers recommendations for dealing with poverty at the local level.

a. Parallel Local and Central Government Involvement in Fighting Poverty

There are several rationales in favor of involving local actors in the war on poverty:

- *Local welfare departments are legally and professionally responsible for helping populations in distress.* Local welfare departments are the main actors in direct contact with the poor, and are naturally seen as the address for the provision of these services. Under the Welfare Services Law (1958), every local authority must establish a welfare department that aids those in need. Thus, the extent and quality of the department's services and its level of initiative may have a significant effect on the situation of the poor local residents.
- *Local actors are more familiar with local residents' needs and difficulties.* Local actors have a better idea than national bodies of local residents' needs and difficulties. In many cases, too, poverty and other forms of social distress have distinctly local characteristics due to factors such as the geographic location, economic infrastructure, and social, cultural, and ethnic characteristics. Local actors, being aware of these characteristics,

are better able to play a central role in initiating and implementing interventions that meet specific needs.

- *Certain characteristics of poverty are suited to local action.*

Poverty is a multi-dimensional phenomenon that includes not only the lack of financial resources, housing, and essential household needs but also poor self-image, a sense of helplessness and social marginality, difficulties in integrating into school and employment, and exclusion from meaningful social, political, and economic settings. To deal with shortages of income, jobs, and housing central government involvement is needed. However, professional interventions that deal with personal and family problems that impede educational and occupational integration and career development, feelings of helplessness and social marginality, and empowerment of the poor can be done mainly by local actors, foremost the local welfare departments.

- *Local actors can utilize and reinforce community potential.*

Many local communities have the potential to help people cope with states of poverty and distress, and this potential can be developed and cultivated at the levels of local government, local leadership, local volunteer organizations, informal aid networks, local businesses, and volunteers. The local community is also the main arena in which local residents' "social capital" can be developed and maximized. Such capital may help to reinforce social solidarity in the community, encourage residents to help each other, and enhance residents' willingness to contribute to the community and aid its impoverished members. The channeling of community potential, insofar as it exists, to anti-poverty action may make the war on poverty more effective. In localities where the community's potential is weak, efforts to develop and reinforce it should be made.

- *Local involvement makes it possible to encourage resident participation.* Local involvement may contribute to the meaningful participation of residents, including the poor themselves, in

planning anti-poverty programs and determining their characteristics. It is crucial to allow the poor to participate and to learn from their experience, because this gives policy makers a better understanding of their problems and needs and their attitudes toward possible solutions. This understanding may help them to develop programs and services that are appropriate and effective in meeting the needs of the poor.

- *Lowering the poverty rate is a vital local interest.* The existence of a poor population is accompanied by negative phenomena such as violence and crime, social tension, and physical neglect. This is likely to impair the self-confidence and quality of life of local inhabitants, induce strong population groups to relocate, act as a deterrent to attracting stronger populations to the area, and impede investment and the development of a local economic infrastructure. Thus, community leaders have an obvious interest in seeing local poverty as a challenge that requires attention and appropriate measures towards its reduction.
- *Local involvement has enjoyed proven success.* There is much evidence of positive outcomes of local initiatives for change in the socioeconomic profile of weak localities and the advancement of their residents' welfare, and their pupils' achievements. The change is credited mainly to local government leadership, which initiated programs that led to local advancement and improved the local image. However, no head of a local authority has so far decided to concentrate on initiating and implementing programs that would reduce local poverty. Therefore, local involvement designed to address social problems, such as poverty, is essential and has the potential to deliver meaningful results.

The approach that favors local involvement in anti-poverty action has also met opposition on several grounds:

- *Central government is viewed as the only body able to cope meaningfully with the poverty problem.* Given the many

dimensions of the poverty issue and of systematic action against it, massive resources must be invested and large-scale programs must be initiated and implemented. Only central government, it is argued, has the power and the authority to mobilize the required resources and pledge them to the implementation of national level programs (e.g., increasing social benefits, expanding the employment infrastructure, and developing education programs).

- *Local authorities are weak.* Quite a few local authorities, especially those that are socioeconomically weak with large concentrations of poor population, encounter frequent economic crises that impair their overall functioning and, *a fortiori*, their ability to allocate resources for a war on poverty. This is reflected in the level and quality of the functioning of their welfare departments.

- *The community's abilities are limited.* In many cases, the weakness of the local authorities is exacerbated by the limited abilities of other community actors that might be helpful in a war on poverty, e.g., local community organizations and informal assistance networks. The community's weakness may stem from various factors, such as the lack of an appropriate economic infrastructure, a low level of social capital, and/or the absence or inadequacy of volunteers and relief networks.

- *Local leadership is reluctant to tackle the poverty issue.* Local involvement in fighting poverty hinges on the willingness of the local leadership to deal with the matter. There is evidence that many heads of local authorities prefer to avoid this field for various reasons and prefer to focus on other areas, such as education, sanitation, infrastructure, and landscaping, which are perceived as more prestigious.

- *Many welfare departments are not intensively involved in extricating people from poverty.* Only a portion of the local welfare departments initiate and implement programs that focus on poor individuals and families with the aim of reducing poverty. This

stems from overwork and a shortage of resources that do not enable systematic attention to the problem. Furthermore, many staff members lack confidence in their ability to change the situation and lack access to the poor population; this makes it difficult to work out a coherent approach toward the problem.

- *Local action absolves the state of its responsibility for dealing with social problems.* It is feared that the decentralization of anti-poverty action will absolve central government of its obligation to treat social issues including poverty in a comprehensive and systematic way.

There are advantages and drawbacks in handing sole responsibility for the war on poverty to central government or, alternatively, focusing action at the local level. To realize the advantages and minimize the drawbacks, it is necessary for the national and the local levels to act in parallel and to coordinate their efforts.

Awareness of the need to integrate local authorities and other local players into anti-poverty action has gained acceptance in many countries in recent years. A prominent expression of this trend is found in the European Union's outlook on the principles of war on poverty and social exclusion, and in EU members' reports about actions taken in this regard. In the United States, too, policymakers have for years been injecting federal anti-poverty aid into local programs that, in most counties, are run by local community organizations. Thus, decentralization is steadily assuming an important role in social action against poverty. The methods behind this local action, however, vary from country to country depending on specific local conditions, the array of social and local forces, and the institutional structure of the social service system.

b. Factors that Promote Anti-Poverty Action at the Local Level

To help raise the awareness of the importance of local anti-poverty action, conditions that are favorable to this outcome have to be created, strengthened, and encouraged. The first and crucial factor is that the local leadership and, above all, the head of the local authority and the members of the local council, must support the goal of reducing the local poverty rate. This support should be expressed in an official statement by the main local political institution – the local council – stating that reducing poverty is one of its prime objectives and that this goal must be expressed in practical steps.

To lead the way, a local team should be established for the planning and implementation of anti-poverty programs. It should operate under the auspices of the welfare department and its activity should be supervised by a steering committee including representatives of relevant local actors such as the head of the local authority and its departments, and local volunteer organizations and businesses.

Local welfare departments need to be strengthened because, due to their location, powers, legal responsibilities, professional knowledge, and the social commitment of their staff, they should be the main actors in the local war on poverty. Today, many welfare departments focus on responding to clients' urgent practical needs and referring them to outside sources for assistance. This situation has to be changed; welfare departments must become more involved in preventing and thoroughly and systematically treating the poverty problem, and in initiating and implementing anti-poverty programs.

Therefore, welfare departments need to undergo a dramatic change with regard to the issue of poverty. This should be reflected in several kinds of action: the establishment of a special unit to focus on poverty; significant strengthening of the departments by

adding financial resources and staff; enhancement of staff awareness of the role that they must play in reducing poverty; training staff in matters related to the nature and implications of poverty and in working with people who are living in poverty; development and implementation of anti-poverty programs that improve the financial situation, quality of life, and empowerment of the poor and that enhance the contact and partnership of staff and clients.

It is a fact that some welfare departments are implementing successful anti-poverty programs that were developed by themselves or by others. This proves that the departments can take action in this field and that this ability should be developed and maximized.

Another measure that may further the war on poverty is the involving of poor residents in developing and implementing programs for themselves. Their involvement will add to the legitimacy of action and will better equip those who deal with the matter to identify the most critical needs and problems in the functioning of the social services. This can be accomplished in several ways: by encouraging leadership among the poor population; holding discussions with organizations that represent the poor (including discussions in which individual residents may express their views); establishing a local entity with power and authority to which residents may appeal decisions of the welfare department or other local departments in regard to the type and level of assistance they may receive; involving representatives of the poor in local organizations that deal with anti-poverty action; involving the poor as workers (paid and volunteer) in anti-poverty programs; and performing research, in conjunction with the poor, about program efficacy.

To help such local activity, the support of government ministries (Social Affairs and Social Services; Education; Health; Industry, Trade and Labor, etc.) should be marshaled. These ministries

should adopt a policy that recognizes local communities' ability to play a vital role in contending with poverty and should help to maximize and strengthen that role. To further this cause, local authorities should cooperate at several levels, for instance in the exchange of information about successful local programs and their implementation, professional consulting, and initiation as well as the implementation of joint programs between nearby localities. The Union for Local Authorities can and should play a role in initiating, encouraging, and assisting in these cooperative arrangements.

The partnership between local authorities and third-sector organizations and businesses may also help the localities' comprehensive anti-poverty efforts. These organizations have knowledge, experience, financial, and human resources that may help reduce poverty; therefore, systematic action to integrate them is worthwhile.

C. Anti-Poverty Action Plans at the Local Level

The following recommendations for specific action plans for the war on poverty are based on three main assumptions: recognition of the central role of the government and its ministries in this field; awareness of the advantages of local authorities and organizations in certain areas of action; and the need to initiate, develop, and implement programs that do not merely help the poor to survive but that aim to raise them out of poverty. Some of these programs are already being implemented by several local authorities:

1) Social care at the personal, family, and group levels. Poverty, as stated, is accompanied by poor self-image, life under conditions of personal and family stress, a sense of helplessness and hopelessness, and social exclusion. All these circumstances demand attention and response by means of personal, family, and group care that can be administered by local welfare departments (in conjunction with others) in several ways:

- *Case management.* Social workers should serve as case managers for people who are living in poverty. The role includes evaluation of clients' overall needs in various fields, determining the responses that should be given, ensuring that these responses are delivered by the department itself and additional organizations, and monitoring changes in clients' situation – all of which require constant communication and involvement of clients in the process.

- *Modification of behavior patterns.* Development and implementation of programs that aim to strengthen the ability of the poor to cope with their situation and that equip them with problem solving skills – i.e., programs in the fields of empowerment, reinforcement of self-efficacy, parenting, family planning, household budget management, and other life skills.

- *Close personal counseling* of poor individuals and households, helping them to cope with various difficulties such as joining the labor force cycle, obtaining services, and settling debts.

The government should help welfare departments to fulfill these functions by providing adequate financing, establishing a “basket” of personal social services for those in need, legislating the basket of services, assuring adequate funding, and helping to develop and fund specific local anti-poverty programs.

2) Community work. Welfare departments should be motivated to take anti-poverty action, enhance community awareness of the need to deal with the issue, encourage the poor to take part in initiating, planning, and implementing community programs that

are tailored to local conditions and aim to improve the situation. They should also promote self-organization by the poor, reinforce local voluntary organizations that provide services and perform advocacy roles, and encourage communities that do not have such organizations to establish them. Additional aspects of community work involve developing local leadership and intensifying its involvement in reducing poverty, reinforcing and developing “social capital” and volunteer activity within the community, enhancing coordination and cooperation between the local authority and other social service organizations, and being involved in developing and implementing programs for the improvement of physical infrastructure and local social services in disadvantaged neighborhoods.

3) Responsibility for exercise of rights and provision of information about services. Data from Israel and other countries point to the existence of a serious problem of non-exercise of rights among people living in poverty: people who qualify for services such as financial benefits and housing assistance often do not receive them. The local social services can help to correct this by informing population groups that need assistance about the services that they are entitled to and where they can receive them, and by undertaking advocacy and mediation activities.

4) Social advancement of poor families through education. The government has a central role to play in funding and directing the education system and in initiating and implementing programs that enhance the education of members of poor families. Here again, local authorities can play a crucial role (as has been proven in several localities) in operating local programs for the advancement of youngsters, through afternoon care centers in disadvantaged areas, where children can spend after-school hours and receive various kinds of assistance (help with homework, personal counseling, and social activity), personal and group support for

students who are likely to drop out, and special assistance for students in preparing for matriculation exams. The local authority may also play a role in motivating the government to develop educational advancement programs for poor families and implement them at the local level.

5) Job placement. The occupational placement and, especially, employment advancement of those able to work make a great contribution to reducing poverty. Admittedly, it is mainly the responsibility of central government to fund the range of actions that serve these goals, from encouraging economic growth to creating jobs to wage subsidies, vocational training, and development of work supportive services. Nevertheless, the local authority, the local welfare services, and other local organizations can play an important role in helping residents join the labor force in several ways: encouraging the development of sources of employment; providing residents with up-to-date information about possibilities of vocational training, basic education, and job placement; training in matters such as preparing a resumé, looking for work, and having a job interview; workshops on strengthening self-image and self-competence; continued follow-up after job placement; and ensuring appropriate working conditions.

These functions should be assigned to an employment development team that would operate under the head of the local authority or as part of the welfare department. (Several localities, such as Jerusalem, Tel-Aviv, Haifa, and Ma'alot-Tarshiha already have such teams.) The team should be supervised by a steering committee made up of representatives of relevant community organizations, e.g., the Employment Service, voluntary organizations that are involved in the field of employment, local and other businesses.

Another way to encourage labor force participation, especially among women, is by local authority support for the expansion of preschool education. This will allow parents of preschoolers to

work and will help to enhance the children's human capital and potential social mobility.

6) Assistance in covering special expenses. A local fund, run by the local welfare department, should be set up to cover special needs and help individuals pay back debts. Eligibility for aid from this fund should be determined on the basis of clear and transparent criteria. The fund would be allowed to issue low interest loans for various needs and even to issue grants where necessary.

In sum, to tackle the problem of poverty and social disparities in Israel, various actors at the national and local levels must be involved and a range of measures should be taken. The discussion here focused on the roles that local authorities and, especially, local welfare departments should play in this regard. An appropriate partnership among national and local players may do much to narrow the incidence of poverty.

4. Disparities between Arab and Jewish Localities in Personal Social Services

One of the main characteristics of Israel's personal social services is inequality among localities in the extent and quality of the services that their residents receive. The gaps stand out especially between Jewish and Arab localities, although they also exist among localities in each sector. The following discussion on inter-sectoral disparities includes three parts: description and examination of several main features of the Jewish and Arab populations; description of several main characteristics of the personal social services in the Arab sector that affect their ability to respond adequately to the population's needs; and recommendations for change.

a. Populations of Arab and Jewish Localities – Main Features

The economic, social, and demographic features of a population group may illuminate important needs for social services. Below are several indicators that are generally accepted for mapping different population groups and comparing their socioeconomic situations: the socioeconomic ranking of the locality, the incidence of poverty, the proportion of large families, the share of disabled elderly, and the rate of disabilities among children.

- *Socioeconomic ranking of localities in Israel.* The socioeconomic scale, calculated and published by the Central Bureau of Statistics, is based on a combination of several indicators: percent of unemployed, percent of employees earning up to minimum wage, percent of unemployment compensation and income maintenance recipients, percent of households that have at least one member with an academic degree, number of years of education of those in the 26-50 age cohort, percent of those aged 17-20 who have a matriculation certificate, and the proportion of families with four children or more. Table 2 shows the ranking of Israel's localities in 2001 (only those having local authorities of their own and excluding those governed under regional councils).

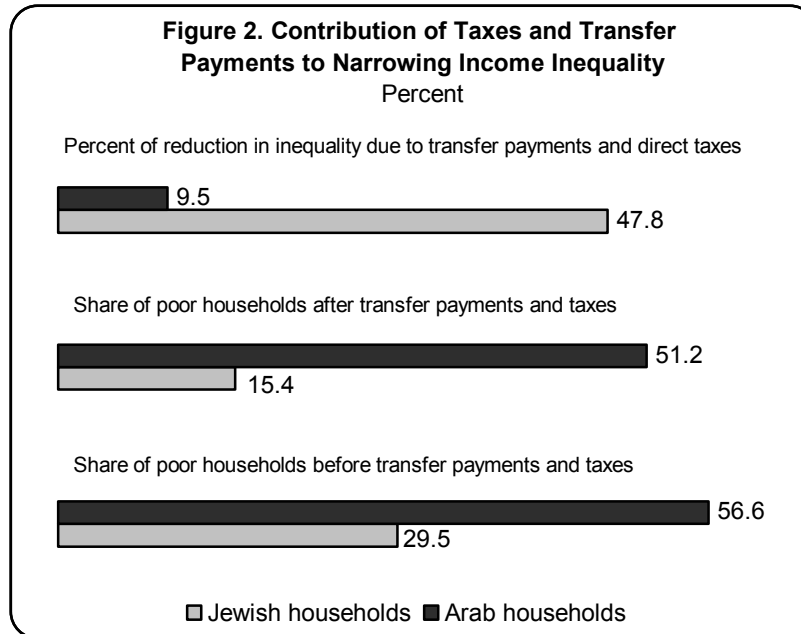
Table 2. Ranking of Jewish and Arab Localities in Israel, by Clusters, 2001 (N)

Cluster*	Jewish	Arab	Mixed	Total
1-3	9	66	–	75
4-5	39	16	5	60
6-7	36	1	–	37
8-10	35	–	–	35
Total	119	83	5	207

* Cluster 1 is the lowest in socioeconomic terms; Cluster 10 is the highest.
Source: Central Bureau of Statistics, 2002.

The table points to considerable disparities between Jewish and Arab localities. 88 percent of localities in the lowest clusters (1-3) are Arab and 80 percent of Arab localities belong to these clusters. Only one Arab locality belongs to the highest clusters (6-10); it is in Cluster 6. No Arab locality belongs to clusters 7-10. Arab localities are characterized by a higher rate of low-income earners, unemployed, the poorly educated and large families.

- *Incidence of poverty.* According to National Insurance Institute reports for the last half of 2005 and the first half of 2006, more than half (51.2 percent) of Arab households are under the poverty line as against 15 percent of Jewish households (Achdut et al., 2006) and about one-third of poor households (not including single-parent households) are Arab.



National Insurance benefits are among the most important mechanisms for combating poverty. In 2005-2006, they lowered the poverty rate of Jewish households by 50 percent but had a similar impact on only 10 percent of Arab households. The poverty rate before benefits was 57 percent among Arab households as against 30 percent among Jewish households. These data point to a substantial discrepancy in the incidence of poverty between Jewish and Arab households.

- *Rate of large households (4+ children).* In 2006, 32 percent of the Jewish population was aged 0-18 as against 49 percent of the Arab population. The rates of large families were 27 percent and 57 percent, respectively.
- *Disability rates among the elderly.* The Arab population has a much smaller share of elderly (aged 65+) than the Jewish population. In 2004, 3.2 percent of the Arab population was elderly, as against 11.5 percent of the Jewish population. However, the share of persons with disabilities in activities of daily living was twice as high (30.7 percent) among Arab elderly as among Jewish elderly (15.3 percent) in the same year.
- *Disability rates among children.* Various data suggest that the Arab population has a higher rate of mentally disabled persons. This is customarily attributed to the frequency of marriages within the family in this population group. Furthermore, data recently released by the Ministry of Health on birth defects in 2000-2005 point to an increase of 10-20 percent in instances of defects among Arab newborns relative to Jewish newborns.

Thus, there are significant differences between Israel's two population groups. It should be noted, though, that there are also disparities **within** these groups that also deserve attention.

b. Main Characteristics of Personal Social Services in Arab Localities

The socioeconomic characteristics of Arab localities suggest that the services of local welfare departments should be in high demand. The question is whether the departments in Arab localities are able to identify those in need, reach out to them, and respond to their needs appropriately. The ability of the welfare departments to function adequately depends on various factors. One of the main factors is the extent of financial resources available to them. These resources come from three sources: central government participation, local government participation, and assistance from funds, businesses, etc.

The 2006 Sikkuy Report (Sikkuy, 2007) compared social service spending in eleven Jewish localities and eleven Arab localities in the same parts of Israel and found rather large disparities. Between 2000 and 2005, average per capita government expenditure on social services was 54 percent greater in the Jewish localities than in the Arab localities (NIS 378 vs. NIS 246). Average per capita local expenditure during those years was 40 percent greater in the Jewish localities than in the Arab ones (NIS 115 vs. NIS 82). The total per capita expenditure on social services (central government and local) was 50 percent higher in the Jewish localities than in the Arab ones. Discrepancies in total spending between Jewish and Arab localities were also found in expenditure on specific population groups, e.g., families and children, and on community work.

Thus the Arab population's greater need for social services is not manifested in larger expenditure on social services in these localities, as one would expect. The findings point to gaps not only in local expenditure, often due to the dire economic circumstances of many Arab local authorities, but also in central government expenditure. Furthermore, there are disparities between Jewish and Arab localities even in the activities of philanthropic foundations

and businesses and their support for the development of local social services.

The discrepancies between Jewish and Arab localities in financial resources for social services are reflected in the extent of service activity. Recently published data from the Ministry of Social Affairs and Social Services relating to all localities in Israel show that only about one-third of children and adolescents who need assistance, one-third of all persons with mental and other disabilities, 60 percent of the elderly, and 10 percent of homeless persons and alcoholics receive a response and then, sometimes only partially to their needs. Although the data make no specific reference to the Arab sector, there is a great deal of evidence of considerable gaps between localities in the coverage rate of various population groups' needs, with an especially low rate in Arab localities. Another comparison by Sikkuy, between ten Arab local authorities and ten Jewish ones of similar size and geographic proximity but different in socioeconomic ranking, shows that in 2004 the Jewish authorities' welfare departments treated a higher share of families and children than the Arab localities' services did, even though one would expect Arab localities to have more comprehensive levels of coverage due to the higher level of need.

The data on community-based services for the elderly also point to disparities between Jewish and Arab localities in the coverage rate of seniors' needs. The higher rates of need of the elderly in Arab localities, are not reflected in the data on the rates of eligibility for community-based nursing services under the Long-Term Care Insurance Law in urban localities. In only 10 percent of Arab localities did the eligibility rate exceed one-fourth of the senior population in 2005. The eligibility rate was 20-25 percent in 15 percent of localities, 15-20 percent in 27 percent of localities, and was under 15 percent in 48 percent of localities. Thus, the rate of persons eligible for long-term care services in the Arab population is significantly lower than the rate of disability among

this population. In the Jewish population, in contrast, the eligibility rate resembles the proportion of persons with disabilities. It is worth noting, however, that there are also substantial disparities in eligibility rates among Arab localities themselves (including, for example, Bedouin localities that neighbor each other) and the eligibility rate approaches the disability rate in a few localities.

Disparities between Jewish and Arab localities recur in additional areas of community-based services for the elderly. In 2005, most Jewish urban localities (roughly 70) and a few Arab localities (16) had day centers for the elderly. The discrepancy was even greater in the number of "Supportive Communities" – in 2005, 59 Jewish localities and only five Arab ones had them.

It is noteworthy that the disparities in eligibility rates for long-term care services provided by law do not necessarily originate in unequal resource allocations for the Jewish and the Arab population groups. Evidence of this is the existence of rather large gaps among localities within the Arab sector. These gaps suggest that the extent of financial resources available to welfare departments is critical, but not the only factor in explaining disparities in the scope and quality of the services that localities provide their populations. Other possible factors are the welfare departments' organizational structure, the caliber and initiative of the staff, the level of functioning of other local social service organizations, the quality of information for residents about the availability of services, and the extent of residents' willingness to apply for help.

The problematic state of the personal social services in Arab localities and their inability to respond adequately to the needs of their client population definitely demands urgent change.

c. Recommendations for Change

Below are several recommendations that, if applied, may strengthen the local welfare departments in Arab localities, make

them better able to respond appropriately to the needs of client population groups, and narrow the gaps between them and Jewish localities, and among themselves.

1) Advancement and strengthening of the welfare departments in Arab localities as a principal goal of the government. The Ministry of Social Affairs and Social Services should place the advancement and strengthening of Arab localities' welfare departments as one of its top priorities. The fulfillment of this goal should be manifested in practical measures, such as a significant budget increase that would allow the departments to hire more staff and develop additional programs, provide close counseling and supervision in professional and organizational aspects, and enhance the status and importance of the welfare departments in the eyes of local leadership, in order to elevate the welfare issue to a higher rung on the local scale of priorities.

2) Expansion of the legal infrastructure of the welfare services. A "basket" of services for various population groups (children, households, persons with mental or physical disabilities, etc.) should be established and its provision should be mandated by law. The government should be responsible for funding these services (much as it is for long-term care services). Given the large expenditure that the implementation of this recommendation would entail, it could be carried out gradually.

3) Introducing differential government participation in local welfare budgets. The formula used today in which the government covers 75 percent of local welfare budgets and the local authority covers the rest can be changed. Affirmative action should be introduced so that the rate of government participation in localities in the low socioeconomic clusters (1-4 in the CBS typology) would rise to 90 percent and local funding would fall to only 10 percent. Furthermore, the criteria used to determine government

participation in local welfare budgets, some of which are detrimental to Arab localities, should be changed.

4) Funding for specific local programs. The Ministry of Social Affairs and Social Services should encourage welfare departments in weak localities, most of which are Arab (clusters 1-4), to initiate the development of programs that would meet specific local needs. These programs should be submitted to the ministry and receive funding after the ministry approves them. (The ministry should offer assistance to interested localities in designing and drawing up the programs.)

The promotion of local program development may strengthen local enterprise and initiative and funding for the resulting programs may make more resources available to the welfare departments. The development of local anti-poverty programs should be encouraged. Notably, such programs, mainly related to putting the unemployed to work, are under way in several Arab localities with funding from outside entities such as JDC-Israel.

5) Enhancing cooperation and strengthening relations between welfare departments in Arab and Jewish localities. Such relations may help both sides to learn from each other and to develop joint programs. Cooperation should be established by means of regular meetings between professional staff, round tables, and reciprocal visits.

6) Strengthening relations with NGOs (foundations, volunteer organizations, and businesses). These relations may expand the departments' potential resources and make various welfare programs easier to fund. The possibility of appointing a full- or part-time staff member at the Arab authorities' welfare departments to be in charge of liaison with NGOs and developing an infrastructure of local volunteer foundations should be considered.

In sum, the existing situation, in which welfare departments in Arab localities meet only some of the needs of client population groups, demands urgent change. Such change depends on two adjustments: in central government policy and in treatment of the provision of personal social services as a central goal of the Arab local authorities. Implementation of the recommendations as reviewed may help to elevate the issue to the national social agenda and bring about meaningful improvements in the state of the welfare departments in Arab localities.

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