

# Education and Wage Trends Among Ethiopian Israelis — Differences by Gender

**Hadas Fuchs and Tamar Friedman Wilson**

Policy Brief

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## Taub Center for Social Policy Studies in Israel

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Center address: 15 Ha'ari Street, Jerusalem, Israel  
Telephone: 02 5671818 Fax: 02 5671919  
Email: [info@taubcenter.org.il](mailto:info@taubcenter.org.il) Website: [www.taubcenter.org.il](http://www.taubcenter.org.il)

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# Education and Wage Trends Among Ethiopian Israelis – Differences by Gender

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## Introduction

In 2015, the Taub Center published a brief examining the developments in education and employment among the Ethiopian Israeli population between 1998 and 2011. The study found that the education level of those who came to Israel at an older age is low, while Ethiopian Israelis who grew up and were educated in Israel enjoy greater educational achievements.

This policy brief looks more into education and wages among Ethiopian Israelis and, in particular, explores differences between the genders. While Ethiopian Israeli women's educational achievements are getting closer to the rest of their Jewish peers, the gaps among the men remain large.

By the end of 2016, there were 144,100 Ethiopian Israelis in Israel, about 85,500 of whom were born in Ethiopia and about 58,600 of whom are children to parents born in Ethiopia. The net monthly income per household among Ethiopian Israelis stands at NIS 11,294, as compared with NIS 15,751 on average in all Israeli households (CBS 2017).

## 1. Bagrut Qualification

The share of Ethiopian Israelis who complete their high school education is very similar to the rest of the Jewish population (over 90%). However, in terms of qualifying for a bagrut (matriculation) certificate, there are discrepancies between the two groups, and the share of Ethiopian Israelis who qualify is lower than the share among other Jewish students.

Furthermore, there is quite a difference between male and female students within the Ethiopian Israeli population. The share of female Ethiopian Israelis who qualified for a bagrut certificate stood at 53% in 2013, as compared

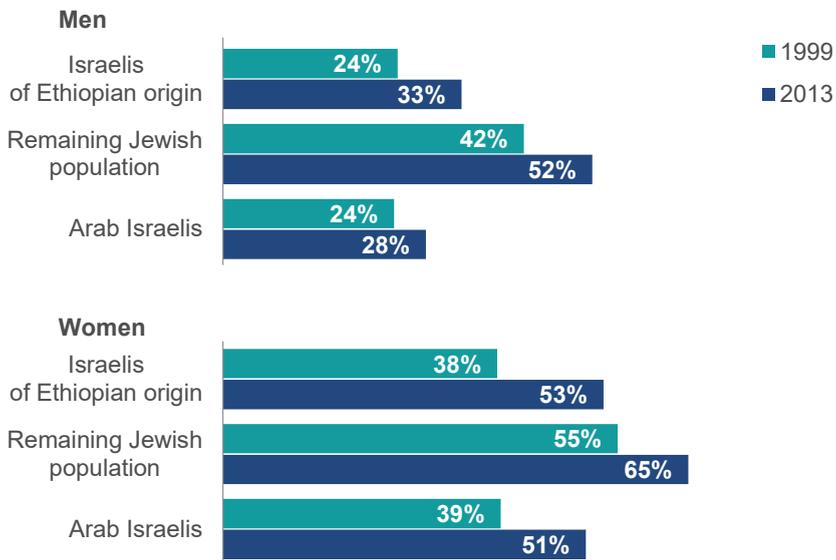
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<sup>1</sup> Hadas Fuchs, Researcher, Taub Center. Tamar Friedman Wilson, Content Manager, Taub Center.

with 65% among the rest of the Jewish female population (Figure 1).<sup>2</sup> In contrast, the gap between male Ethiopian Israelis and the rest of the male Jewish population is larger: 33% of male Ethiopian Israelis qualified for a bagrut certificate in 2013, as compared with 52% in the rest of the male Jewish population. Therefore, it seems that Ethiopian Israeli women qualify for a bagrut at rates more similar to the rest of their Jewish peers than do Ethiopian Israeli men.

**Figure 1. Percent qualified for a bagrut certificate**

Out of the age cohort



Source: Hadas Fuchs and Tamar Friedman Wilson, Taub Center | Data: CBS, Administrative Database

Between 1999 and 2013, there was a 15% increase in bagrut qualification among Ethiopian Israeli women, narrowing the gap between them and other Jewish women. Yet among the men, the gap hardly changed.

<sup>2</sup> All of the data in this policy brief were calculated using a database that was built by the Central Bureau of Statistics containing administrative data. For further details on the database, see Regev (2016). It is important to note that the percentage of those qualifying for a bagrut is out of all members of the age cohort, including those who dropped out of school and did not complete 12 years of study.

Although the share of Ethiopian Israelis qualifying for a bagrut has increased, the share of those who reach the minimum requirements for acceptance to college or university is less than half the share who reach that threshold among other Jewish Israelis. Nonetheless, there has been a notable improvement in Ethiopian Israelis reaching this threshold in recent years, with the share more than doubling between 1999 and 2013. The gaps in average bagrut score have not, however, narrowed over time – there continues to be a gap of about 9 points (an average of 81 among Ethiopian Israelis qualifying for a bagrut, compared to 90 among the rest of the Jewish population).

Interestingly, the percentage of those qualifying for a bagrut is very similar among Ethiopian Israelis and Arab Israelis, among both men and women (meaning a similar gap between the genders). The rates are not only similar between Ethiopian Israelis and Arab Israelis now; they were also similar in 1990.

## 2. Higher Education

In general, it appears that Ethiopian Israelis tend to approach higher education with lower achievements than their peers – not only on the bagrut, but also on the psychometric exams. An examination of psychometric exam scores, which serve as an indication of students' abilities, shows that Ethiopian Israelis score more than 100 points lower, on average, than the rest of the Jewish population. Nonetheless, there has been considerable improvement in this regard among Ethiopian Israelis and the gaps have narrowed in recent years.

The differences between male and female Ethiopian Israeli students are also stark when looking at those who have obtained an academic degree. While 29% of non-Ethiopian Jewish men aged 30-33 hold an academic degree, the share of Ethiopian Israeli men of the same age who hold a degree is less than a third of that figure – standing at only 8% (Figure 2).<sup>3</sup>

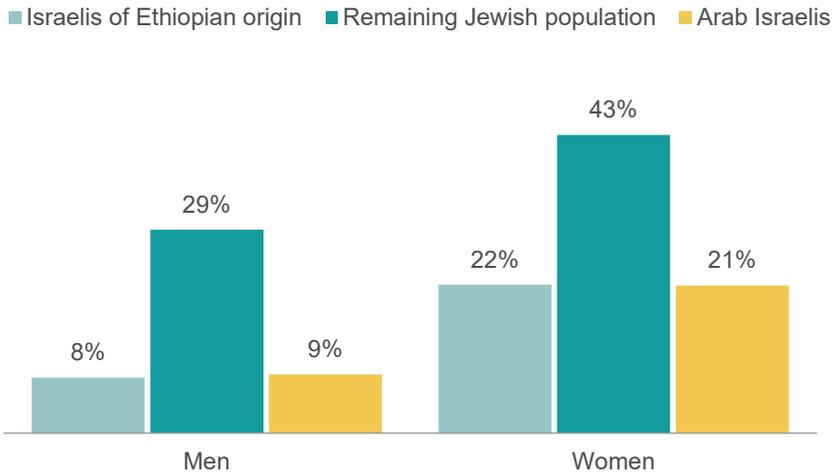
On the other hand, the share of Ethiopian Israeli women who hold an academic degree is relatively closer to the rest of Jewish women, though still standing at only about half – 22% among Ethiopian Israeli women as compared with 43% among other Jewish women. Both men and women who immigrated to Israel from Ethiopia later in their lives (after the age of 12) hold degrees at lower rates than those who either immigrated before the age of 12 or were born in Israel.

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<sup>3</sup> Degrees from Israeli academic institutions.

**Figure 2. Share of those with higher education out of the age group, 2014**

**Ages 30-33**



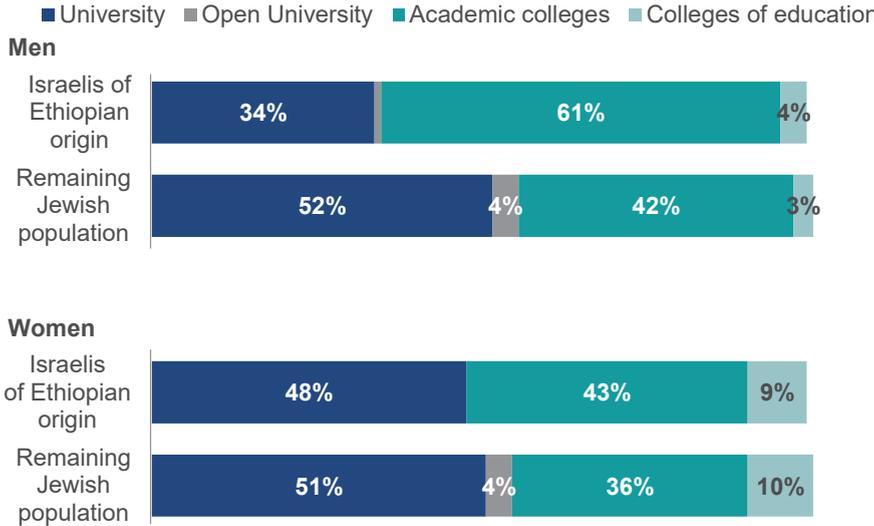
Source: Hadas Fuchs and Tamar Friedman Wilson, Taub Center | Data: CBS, Administrative Database

The share of Ethiopian Israelis aged 30-33 who have a degree remains quite low. Yet given the low levels of education in their parents' generation (in which a large portion of the population had less than a high-school education), the progress among Ethiopian Israeli women, at the very least, is quite remarkable. There are several programs and scholarships, provided by both the state and private organizations, designed to encourage Ethiopian Israelis to pursue higher education and to support Ethiopian Israeli students during their studies. Still, while it seems that these types of programs have indeed advanced Ethiopian Israeli women and contributed to narrowing the gaps between them and other Jewish Israelis, the same cannot be said about Ethiopian Israeli men, where gaps remain large. It is very important to draw attention to these gaps and to try to understand what lies behind them.

Similar to the trends in bagrut qualification, the share of Ethiopian Israeli women aged 30-33 who hold a degree is nearly identical to the share of Arab Israeli women of the same age, as are the share of Ethiopian Israeli men and the share of Arab Israeli men. Thus, in both population groups the gap between the genders is notable.

Among those aged 25-33 who do have an academic degree, a similar percentage of women received their degree from a university among Ethiopian Israelis and among other Jewish students (Figure 3). Additionally, the share of women receiving a degree from a college and the share receiving a degree from an education college are also quite similar between Ethiopian Israelis and the rest of the Jewish population. In contrast, a much smaller percentage of Ethiopian Israeli men get their degree from a university than among the rest of the male Jewish population – 34% versus 52%, respectively. Conversely, a much larger portion of Ethiopian Israeli men attend academic colleges (61%) than among other Jewish males (42%). Thus, a relatively small portion of Ethiopian Israeli men receive an academic degree at all and, even among those who do earn a degree, they are more likely than their Jewish peers to receive that degree from less prestigious institutions. This, in turn, has implications for employment and wages.

**Figure 3. Distribution of institutions of higher learning, 2014**  
For students ages 25-32



Source: Hadas Fuchs and Tamar Friedman Wilson, Taub Center | Data: CBS, Administrative Database

It is possible that the high rates of Ethiopian Israelis attending academic colleges is connected to their educational achievements at younger ages: young Ethiopian Israeli students who received lower bagrut and psychometric scores are less likely to be accepted to the more competitive university programs (with higher admissions requirements), and more likely to attend academic colleges.

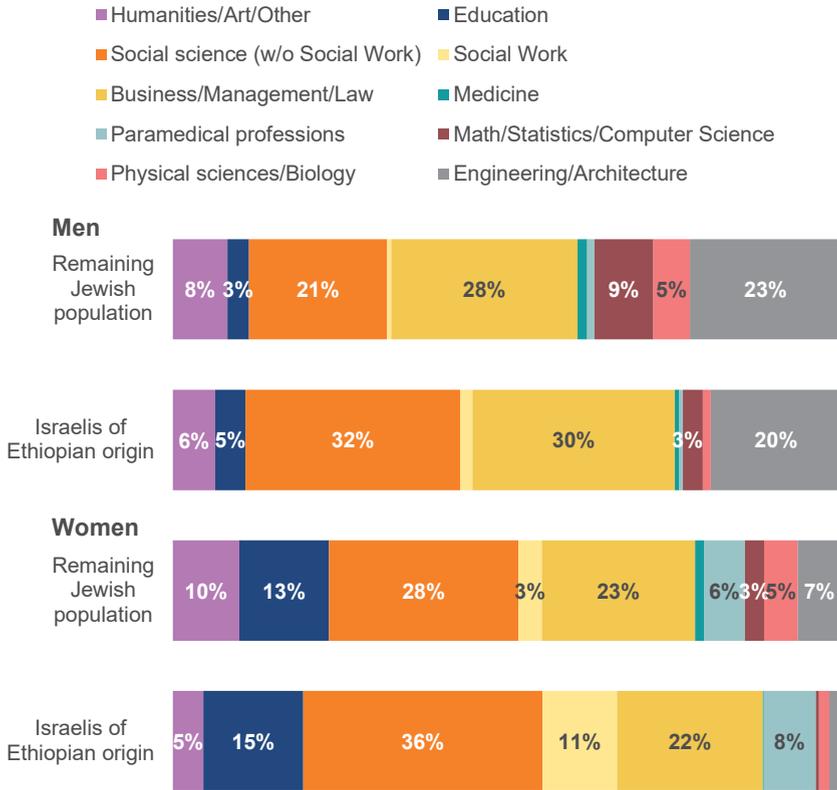
## Field of Study

What fields are Ethiopian Israelis studying in their academic careers and how does this compare with the rest of the Jewish population? Among both male and female Ethiopian Israelis who hold a degree (aged 25-33), a large portion have a degree in the social sciences (Figure 4). Among those currently enrolled in higher education, the share of students studying social sciences has declined, but remains high in comparison to the rest of the Jewish population.

Within the social sciences, a much higher percentage of Ethiopian Israeli women study social work than among other female Jewish students. On the other hand, the share of Ethiopian Israeli students, both male and female, studying fields like engineering and architecture, physics and biology, and math, statistics and computer science, is low relative to other Jewish students. Among women, the gap is even larger, and only a very small percentage of Ethiopian Israeli women study engineering or computers. Even among those who do study engineering and computer science, 74% of Ethiopian Israeli men study in colleges, compared to only 41% of other Jewish, male students. Once again, this is an indication that even Ethiopian Israelis studying high-demand fields like engineering, tend to do so in less prestigious institutions.

**Figure 4. Distribution of study majors in higher education, 2014**

For students ages 25-33



Source: Hadas Fuchs and Tamar Friedman Wilson, Taub Center | Data: CBS, Administrative Database

### 3. Wages

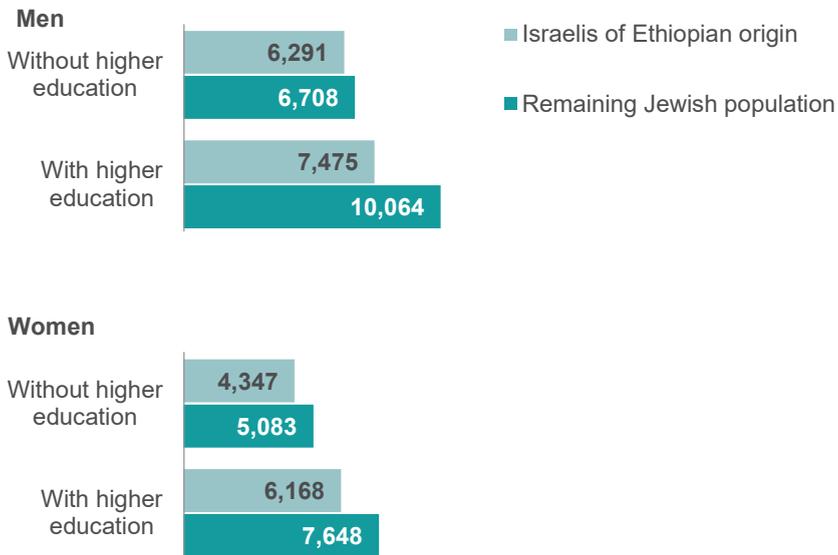
As explained above, the level of education of Ethiopian Israelis is lower than the level of education of the rest of the Jewish population. Since level of education has a notable impact on wages, this would seem to indicate that incomes among Ethiopian Israelis are also lower. However, even in

comparison to those with a similar level of education (academics vs. non-academics), Ethiopian Israelis have still lower wages (Figure 5). The gaps between Ethiopian Israelis and the rest of the Jewish population among non-academics are lower (2.5% among men and 10% among women, in log points), but among academics the gap is relatively high (22% and 18% among men and women, respectively, in log points).

The relatively limited number of Ethiopian Israeli academics makes it difficult to analyze accurately the factors responsible for this gap, for which there are many potential causes. However, a basic analysis reveals that the gaps remain large even after controlling for field of study; that is, even when comparing Ethiopian Israeli workers and the rest of the Jewish population within the same study major, large wage gaps remain. These gaps can result from differences in the quality of academic degrees, differences in managerial levels, or working in the private sector versus the public sector. As stated, determining the reasons for these gaps would require a more detailed examination of the data, but the findings in this study suggest that Ethiopian Israeli academics are still unable to achieve optimal integration into the Israeli labor market.

### Figure 5. Average monthly wage, 2013

By level of education, ages 25-33, employed individuals



Source: Hadas Fuchs and Tamar Friedman Wilson, Taub Center | Data: CBS, Administrative Database

## Conclusion

The study previously published by the Taub Center found that the younger generation of Ethiopian Israelis who either grew up or were born in Israel have attained significantly better academic achievements than their parents' generation. This study further examines education among Ethiopian Israelis and finds that even though educational gaps are still present and Ethiopian Israelis attain lower achievements on the bagrut and psychometric exams, the gap is narrowing.

In addition, the study finds that there are large gender differences among Ethiopian Israeli students. While the gaps between female Ethiopian Israeli students and other Jewish female students still exist, they are, for the most part, much smaller than the gaps between male students. It is important to pay attention to these academic trends among Ethiopian Israelis because the trends we see today in bagrut qualification and higher education are key indicators of the trends we are likely to see (and are already beginning to see) in the labor market and wages in the coming years.

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