

Executive Summary

Arab Israeli Women Entering the Labor Market: Higher Education, Employment, and Wages

Hadas Fuchs and Tamar Friedman Wilson*

[Full research study published in March 2018](#)

Usually, socioeconomic discussions about the Arab Israeli sector focus on the gaps that still exist between this sector and Jewish Israelis, and do not emphasize the areas where substantial improvements have been made. However, large strides have been made by Arab Israeli women in educational achievements as well as improvements, though more limited, in employment. Academic achievements are important to the discussion of employment as well given that Arab Israeli women with an academic degree are employed at much higher rates than those without one. At the same time, there are still opportunities for further improvement among this segment of the population.

High school and qualifying for higher education

In high school, the percentage of Arab Israeli women qualifying for a bagrut (matriculation exam) surpasses that of Arab Israeli men and is approaching the qualification rate of non-Haredi Jewish women. When controlling for socioeconomic background, the matriculation rates among all sub-groups of Arab Israeli women are higher than those among Jewish women.

* Hadas Fuchs, Researcher, Taub Center. Writing and editorial assistance by Tamar Friedman Wilson, Content Manager, Taub Center.

The original study was generously supported by The Diane P. and Guilford Glazer Fund of the Jewish Community Foundation of Los Angeles.

Trends in higher education

There has been a notable rise in the share of Arab Israeli women enrolling in higher education — particularly notable is an increase of nearly 50 percent among Bedouin and Druze women between 2008 and 2013 — while there has been almost no change in the enrollment rates of Arab Israeli men. Despite these advances, a smaller share of Arab Israeli women hold a degree than Jewish women. In 2014, about half of Jewish and Arab Christian women ages 30-33 held an academic degree, whereas the percentage of degree-holders was only 23 percent among Muslim women, 19 percent among Druze, and 16 percent among the Bedouin.

Despite the fact that over 70 percent of Arab Israeli women who qualify for a bagrut certificate study science and engineering majors in high school (compared with only 39 percent of Jewish women) — subjects associated with a potential for high future wages — in academia they study science and engineering at relatively low rates. Rather, a large percentage of Arab Israeli women pursue degrees in education: 42 percent among Muslim women and 46 percent among Bedouin women, compared to only 16 percent among Jewish women.

Employment and wages

Among Muslims, Druze, and Bedouin, over 50 percent of employed female degree-holders work in education, including many women who did not major in education in their academic studies. This share is nearly three times higher than the share among Jewish women.

The story of Arab Israeli women in the field of education is a complex one. On the one hand, the average number of working hours of Arab Israeli teachers (men and women) has risen in recent years and the share of women employed part-time decreased, meaning that many women are able to find work and with a large number of hours. On the other hand, the data show that, in the past few years, Arab Israelis who studied education are having trouble finding jobs in the field. While the percentage of Jews who received training in education and have since entered the field of teaching has remained relatively stable over the past decade or so, among Arab Israelis there has been a notable decline.

Figure 1. Percentage of teacher-training graduates working as teachers, by year of graduation

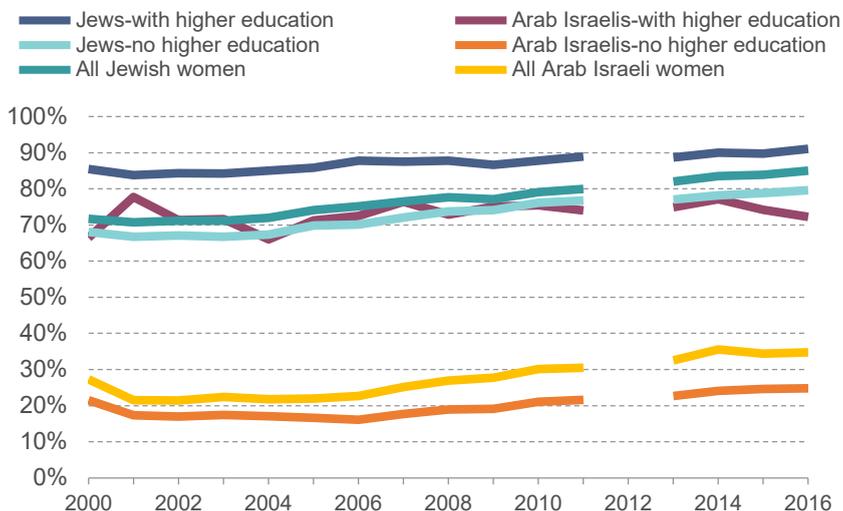


Source: Hadas Fuchs, Taub Center | Data: CBS, *Teaching Staff in Schools*

In addition, demand for Arab Israeli teachers is not expected to grow because Arab Israeli fertility rates are declining, the Arab education system has reached near full enrollment, and the trend of reducing class size has stabilized. Thus, there are indications of an excess of women in the field, which is likely to increase further in the future.

In general, employment rates among Arab Israeli women have increased since the early 2000s, but the increase was similar to the increase among Jewish women, such that the gap between them hardly narrowed. While the employment rate of those with a degree has remained stable at around 75 percent, a particularly notable increase occurred among non-academic Arab Israeli women ages 45-54. Nonetheless, the 34 percent employment rate among those ages 25-64 in 2017 is still far from the target rate set by the government for 2020 – 41 percent.

Wage gaps between Jews and Arab Israelis are low among graduates with degrees in the fields of health and education (occupations in which most jobs are part of the public sector), but are large among those who studied engineering, computer science, business administration and management.

Figure 2. Employment rate, women ages 25-54

Note: In 2012, the CBS survey methodology changed, resulting in a break in the data series. Data have been concatenated to their level after the series break.

Source: Hadas Fuchs, Taub Center | Data: CBS, *Labor Force Survey*

What are the implications?

These data reveal that gaps between Arab Israeli and Jewish women still remain. However, given that Arab Israeli women with an academic degree are employed at much higher rates than those without, there is reason to hope that the strides made in education will be accompanied by improvements in employment in the coming years. This could advance Arab Israeli women and could also be a source of growth for the larger Israeli economy.

In order to confront the challenges that remain and promote this population group, it is possible to consider a number of options, including: improving the Arab education system, advising students to increase awareness of “in demand” professions and providing guidance as they navigate academic studies and enter the labor market, and increasing employment opportunities for workers in Arab Israeli localities and the surrounding areas.