

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

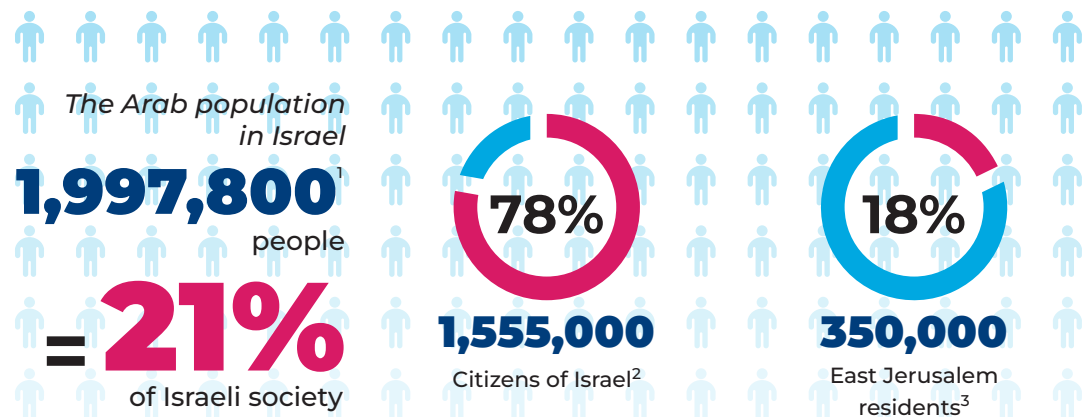
This resource provides useful terminology and snapshots of the daily lives of Arab citizens of Israel. We hope it will spark curiosity and a desire to learn more.

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**

'48ers⁴

**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:

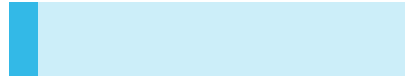
85%⁵



Represented in Arab society

CHRISTIAN:

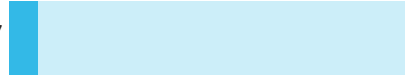
7%⁶



Represented in Arab society

DRUZE:

7.6%⁷



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%⁸



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 35⁹ 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.¹¹ 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.¹⁰



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.¹²



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.¹³

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.

REFLECTION QUESTION:

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



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.¹⁴



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.¹⁵



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, showing¹⁶:

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

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.

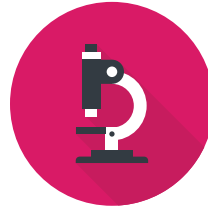
REFLECTION QUESTION:

> What questions come up as you explore this section?



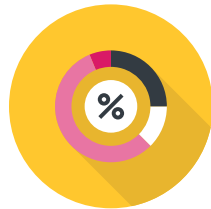
LOCAL ECONOMY

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



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.²⁰



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.¹⁹



POVERTY

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



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 9,679.²¹

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.²²

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

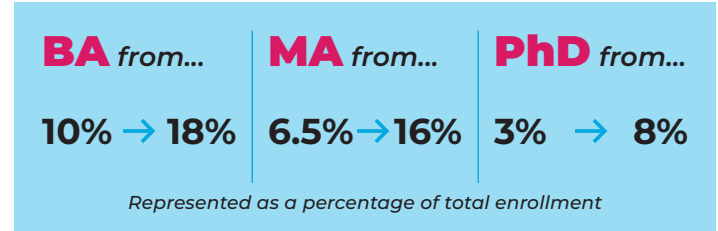


441,502

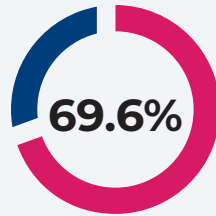
Arab students in elementary through high school in 2020.²³

HIGHER EDUCATION

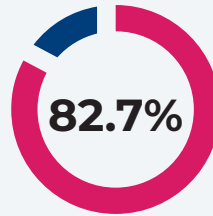
Between 2009 and 2021, Arab participation in higher education increased significantly. Despite these gains, they remain under-represented at all degree levels.²⁴



ACHIEVEMENT GAPS: MATRICULATION CERTIFICATE*



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



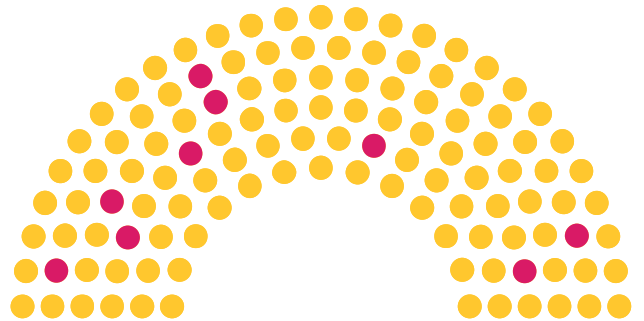
Jewish 12th graders completed in 2020 (82.8% of Jewish girls and 82.6% of Jewish boys)



**This certificate is a prerequisite for higher education²⁵*

In the 25th Knesset

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



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.²⁷ 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.

Source Sheet Companion

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

This source sheet companion lists the sources utilized in the Fact Sheet, offers resources for further learning, and shares additional information. We hope you take advantage of these sources to learn more about Arab citizens of Israel and to support your efforts to educate others.

It is important to share some notes on the numbers and sources we used to create the Fact Sheet. Most of the statistics come from [the Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics \(CBS\)](#). The CBS does not offer a clear description of which people are included in its “Arab” category in reports. In many instances, in addition to Arab citizens of Israel, it likely includes Druze Golan Heights Residents and East Jerusalem Residents. For more information on these distinctions, please see the Basic Distinctions Between Legal Statuses of Arabic Speaking Populations in Israel and the Palestinian Territories resource. Due to these discrepancies, and the broad challenges to quality data collection and analyses related to Arab society in Israel, the numbers in the resource should be taken as approximations. It is possible you will see another resource from a reputable source with different numbers. These issues on their own are revealing of the challenges related to planning effectively for Israel’s Arab minority and understanding the complexities of Arab citizens’ experiences.

SECTION 1: KEY TERMS

A. Population size

1. Israeli CBS. “[Population by Population Group](#)”. 15 September 2022.
2. Israeli CBS. “[Population of Israel on the Eve of 2022](#)”. 30 December 2021.
3. There is no consensus or official numbers on the number of people holding East Jerusalem residency status. The numbers provided in the fact sheet are IATF approximations from our research and discussions with partners in the field. For example [the most recent CBS Report states](#) there are 366,797 Arabs living in Jerusalem. Its [2022 Media Release](#) on Muslims states 362,000 Muslims live in Jerusalem. A 2020 [Reuters article](#) estimated that there are 340,000 Palestinian East Jerusalem Residents.
 - o In addition to East Jerusalem residents, the 1.5 million number for Arab society in Israel also includes 24,000 Druze residents of the Golan Heights. Like East Jerusalem residents, this population, which lives on land annexed by Israel following 1967, has residency status rather than citizenship. For more information on these distinctions, please see the Basic Distinctions Between Legal Statuses of Arabic Speaking Populations in Israel and the Palestinian Territories resource.

B. Identity, religious, and cultural diversity within Arab society

4. ‘48ers is not a common term in English, but Arab citizens of Israel frequently use it to refer to themselves or in discourse among Palestinians. ‘48ers, refers to the 1948 War. It describes the people who were within Israel in the 1949 Armistice line and their descendants.
5. **Muslim:** Israeli CBS. “[The Muslim Population in Israel: 2022](#)”. 6 July 2022.
 - o At the end of 2021, 1.707 million Muslims lived in Israel, nearly all of whom are Arab, comprising 18% of Israeli society.

- o The above report offers lots of additional data in English for further learning.
6. **Christian:** Israeli CBS. "[Christmas 2021—Christians in Israel](#)". 21 December 2021. (Hebrew).
- o Christian Arabs comprise about 1.5% of Israel's population and 7% of the Arab population within Israel. Nazareth and Haifa have the largest Christian Arab populations in Israel.
 - o Further learning in English: This [Times of Israel article](#) summarizes the December 2021 report linked above and offers additional perspectives. Additionally, you can see the 2020 version of the annual Christmas report from the CBS [here](#).
7. **Druze:** Israeli CBS. "[The Druze Population of Israel On the Occasion of the Nabi Shu'ayb Festival](#)". 24 April 2022.
- o Druze comprise 7.6% of Israel's Arab population, with the largest Druze population centers being Yarka and Daliyat ak-Karmel.
 - o While the vast majority of Druze hold Israeli citizenship, 24,000 who live in the Golan Heights have residency status. For more information on these distinctions, please see the Basic Distinctions Between Legal Statuses of Arabic Speaking Populations in Israel and the Palestinian Territories resource.
 - o The above report offers lots of additional data in English for further learning. To learn more, see IATF's Fact Sheet on Israel's Druze Population [here](#).
8. **Negev Bedouin:** There are not reliable or consistent data on the Negev Bedouin population. You can read more about this challenge in a [Haaretz article](#) here. IATF uses a 300,000 estimate based on our consultations with experts and the field. This number is also cited in [Ben Gurion University's Negev Bedouin database](#).
- o To learn more about Israel's Negev Bedouin population, explore IATF's resource on the Bedouin community [here](#).
 - o In addition to the Negev Bedouin population, Israel has much smaller Bedouin communities in the Galilee region. The heritage, affiliations, culture, and socioeconomic experiences of these northern communities are distinct from Negev Bedouin populations. Most Israeli data concerning Bedouin relate to Negev Bedouin.
9. Unrecognized Bedouin villages are communities that are not legally recognized or formally zoned or planned by the Israeli government. Primarily located in rural areas, most unrecognized villages are in the Negev and some are in the Galilee. In many cases, unrecognized villages lack key infrastructure including roads, water, and electricity. An estimated 100,000 Bedouin live in unrecognized villages.

SECTION 2: GEOGRAPHY

10. **Triangle Region:** TOI Staff. "[Report: Netanyahu suggested to US that Arab Israeli towns be placed in Palestine](#)". Times of Israel. 4 February 2020.
- o Concentrated in central and northern West sections of the country, many of the "Triangle" communities lie in close proximity to the West Bank.
 - o It has a predominately Muslim population and is traditionally an agricultural region. Umm Al Fahm is the biggest city in the region.

11. **Negev:** See footnote 8 for our note about our estimate for the Bedouin population in the Negev.
- o Rahat, Israel's only Bedouin city, is located in the Negev and is quickly becoming the largest Arab city in Israel.
12. **North and Galilee:** Israeli CBS. "[Population by District and Religion 2020](#)". 31 March 2021.
- o More than half of Arab citizens live in this region, which includes Nazareth, the largest Arab city in Israel.
13. **Mixed Cities:** Ilan Amit and Liron Shoham. "[Arab Communities and Arab-Jewish Relations in Israeli Mixed Cities](#)". Inter-Agency Task Force on Israeli Arab Issues. 13 October 2021.
- o The term "mixed cities" is often used to refer only to the cities that historically have had a large percentages of Jewish and Arab citizens. Today, however, other cities in Israel have significant Arab populations and have come to be treated by the Israeli government and civil society organizations as mixed cities. See the above report for more details on this term and its use.
 - The "traditional" mixed cities are: Jerusalem (even though the majority of Arabic-speakers do not hold Israeli citizenship), Haifa, Lod, Ramle, Akko, and Tel Aviv-Jaffa.
 - Additional mixed cities are: Nof HaGalil and Ma'alot-Tarshisha. Beer Sheva is sometimes included as well.
 - Mixed cities were flashpoints of intracommunal violence in May 2021, making headlines. The resource linked above offers a much more detailed examination of the topic of mixed cities in the context of these events.

SECTION 3: JEWISH-ARAB RELATIONS

14. **Shared Society:** The number of NGOs is an IATF estimate from ongoing research.
15. **Language Barriers:** Both Jewish and Arab citizens are often far from fluent in each other's languages when they graduate from high school, with very few Jews in Israel speaking much Arabic at all. This barrier contributes to the limited interactions between these population groups. We chose to focus on Arabic-speakers limited Hebrew abilities because this is a major obstacle to finding employment in a primarily Hebrew-speaking economy, exacerbating socioeconomic gaps.
16. **Survey on Tensions:** David Rosenberg. "['There Are Tensions Every Day': Jewish-Arab Relations, Five Months After Riots Rocked Israel](#)". Haaretz. 20 October 2021.

SECTION 4: SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS

17. **Local Economy:** Israeli CBS. "[List of Municipal Authorities by District and Socioeconomic Cluster](#)". 2017.
- o This statistic means that out of 10 possible rankings of socioeconomic strength, 95% of Arab municipalities fall in the 4 lowest categories.
 - o Although this resource is from 2017, the information remains by and large accurate

in 2022. Confirmed through a conversation with Enya Bana from the Arab Center for Alternative Planning in April 2022.

- o There are 78 Arab local authorities in Israel. This includes 134 Arab towns and villages. Confirmed through a conversation with Enya Bana from the Arab Center for Alternative planning in April 2022.
- o For a detailed examination of urban planning issues in Arab society, see IATF's 2020 report on the topic [here](#).

18–19. **Employment Rates and Poverty Rates:** Daphna Aviram-Nitzan and Nasreen Haddad Haj-Yahya. "[Arabs in the Labor Market and COVID-19](#)". Israeli Democracy Institute. 9 March 2021.

- o This source has other useful statistics on the economic challenges faced by Arab families and the impact of COVID-19.
- o Employment Diversity is also an important issue for socioeconomic development in Arab society. As larger portions of Arab society complete higher education, the number of Arab employees in influential or high-earning industries has increased; however, gaps remain and representation is uneven:

Underrepresented:

- 12.2% of government employees are Arab after a decade of intensive efforts to increase representation. However, this representation is disproportionately in the Ministry of Health (where 2/3 of Arab civil servants are employed). Source: "[Government of Israel as a Diverse Employer: The Civil Service Commission 2019 Diversity Report](#)." Inter-Agency Task Force on Israeli Arab Issues. 27 August 2020.
- In 2021, 1.8% of Israel's high-tech workforce was Arab.

Overrepresented:

- 25% of Israel's physicians, 24% of its nurses and 47% of its pharmacists are Arab. Arab medical professionals were publicly on the front lines fighting COVID-19. Source: Yaron, Lee. "[Arab Israelis Fight Coronavirus as First-class Doctors but Second-class Citizens](#)". Haaretz. 17 May 2020.
- Teachers: The number of Arab citizens, particularly women, are choosing to study education outpaces the jobs available in the sector.

20. **COVID-19:** Bank of Israel. "[Bank of Israel 2020 Report](#)". 6 April 2021. (Hebrew).

- o For an English-language summary of the above resource, see [here](#).

21. **Employment rates and salaries:** Israeli Knesset Research and Information Center. "[Data on employment and wages in Arab society, with an emphasis on the high-tech industry](#)." 20 September 2020.

22. **Socioeconomic Development:** To learn more about Resolution 550, see this IATF resource [here](#).

SECTION 5: EDUCATION

23. **Number of students:** Calculations came from adding data from Israeli CBS. Schools, Classes, and Students in Primary and Secondary Education. 10 October 2021 [here](#) and [here](#).
24. **Higher education gaps:** Council for Higher Education. "[Accessibility of higher education in the Arab Sector](#)". 10 October 2021.
25. **Matriculation certificate:** Israeli CBS. "[Matriculation Examinees by Entitlement to a Certificate and Select Characteristics](#)". 28 October 2021.

SECTION 6: POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

26. These numbers are accurate as of December 1, 2022. [Click here](#) for the most current list of all Knesset members by political party.
 - o Ra'am, the Islamic party, has 5 Arab MKs; Hadash-Ta'al has 4 Arab MKs. In the previous Knesset, Arab Members of Knesset also represented non-traditionally Arab parties but that is not the case in this government. Yisrael Beiteynu has 1 Druze MK.
27. To learn more about these trends and the prior 2021 election results, see these [IATF resources](#). To follow current events in Israel related to Arab citizens, you can subscribe to IATF's weekly media update.