



**UK Task Force**

on issues relating to Arab citizens of Israel

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## **UK Task Force Briefing: Social Provision in the Negev Bedouin Communities December 2011**

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### **Social provision within the seven government-planned towns**

- According to the Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics, 103,490 of the Negev's Bedouin residents currently reside in the seven government-planned towns.<sup>1</sup>
- The new towns have only been partially successful. They are over-crowded, badly serviced, and deprive the inhabitants of grazing land for their livestock. The major failure, according to scholars at the nearby Ben Gurion University<sup>2</sup>, was a lack of an economic rationale for the towns. They were built without an urban policy framework, lacking business districts and industrial zones. The Bedouin traditionally made their living through agriculture and were unsuited to this new urban lifestyle. As a result, the seven towns quickly became among the most deprived in Israel, severely lacking in services such as public transport and banks. They were plagued by endemic joblessness and resulting cycles of crime and drug trafficking.
- Central government funding is one of the principal revenue streams for the 'recognised' Bedouin towns. However, although Bedouin authorities receive higher grants than other Israeli towns to compensate for their relative deprivation, the Bedouin authorities continue to receive less than their due, owing to an inability to match government funds through taxes. Bedouin authorities find it difficult to collect taxes from individuals and – as few large businesses are based in these towns – they do not benefit from corporation tax, unlike more affluent Jewish municipalities.

### **Social provision within the unrecognised villages**

- Despite the fact that many so-called 'unrecognised villages' were established following the government's relocation of the Bedouin in the early 1950s, these villages are not recognised by the government as legal settlements.
- According to the Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics, 60,840 Bedouin currently reside in the Negev's unrecognised villages.<sup>3</sup> On account of their illegal status, most unrecognised villages lack basic utilities such as municipal administration, running water, sewage, electricity, health care services, schools, and paved roads. The Bedouin living there also face demolition orders on their homes.
- The villages are represented by the Regional Council of the Unrecognised Villages in the Negev, which is a locally elected, grassroots organisation established in 1997 to represent the interests of each of the unrecognised villages at the national and international level.<sup>4</sup>

### **Social provision within the Abu Basma villages**

- Eleven formerly unrecognised villages were officially recognised as part of the establishment of the Abu Basma Regional Council in 2005. The council oversees: Abu Krinat, Bir Hadaj, Qasr a-Seir, Mar'it, Dreijat, Umm Batin, Molada, Al-Sayyid, Al-Atrash, Makhul, Trabin al-Sana. The council also provides municipal services, such as education, welfare and environmental protection to 40,000 Bedouin residents in nearby, unrecognised villages.

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<sup>1</sup> Barbara Epstein, *The Negev Bedouin: Social and Economic Rights*, (November 2011, p.1). See: <http://www.uktaskforce.org/docs/bedouin-description--non-land-centered-.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Harvey Lithwick, Ismael Abu Saad, Kathleen Abu-Saad, Merkaz HaNegev LeFitu'ah Ezori and Merkaz LeHeker HaHevra HaBeduit VeHitpathuta (Israel). "A Preliminary Evaluation of the Negev Bedouin Experience of Urbanization: Findings of the Urban Household Survey"; Negev Center for Regional Development, 2004

<sup>3</sup> Barbara Epstein, *The Negev Bedouin: Social and Economic Rights*, (November 2011, p.1). See: <http://www.uktaskforce.org/docs/bedouin-description--non-land-centered-.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> The Regional Council of Unrecognised Villages is a non-governmental organisation set up by the Bedouin community to advocate on behalf of unrecognised villages. It is not a recognised local authority.

- Since the establishment of the council, no master plans that would allow for legal construction within the villages' borders have been adopted because the Abu Basma council connects the issue of land ownership claims to the issue of planning and services. This means that the residents, in order to receive permits, need to sign a contract with the state that puts down in writing their willingness to give up claims of land ownership. So far none of the residents were willing to sign such a contract and no housing permits have been issued in the Abu Basma villages.<sup>5</sup>
- The Abu Basma Regional Council has suffered from a lack of legitimacy within the Bedouin community and has been criticised by many because it is an appointed, rather than an elected, body. Under the regional council's law, the Interior Ministry has been allowed to appoint a panel of officials to oversee local services for four years while the residents prepare to run the authority themselves. Israel had refused to allow elections for Abu Basma, accusing Bedouin citizens of being slow to register their residence in the 'recognised' villages of the council. In September 2010, however, after pressure from civil society organisations and Bedouin MKs, the Knesset did promise to hold elections for the Council in December 2012.<sup>6</sup>

### Multiple reasons for Bedouin poverty

The reasons for the poor socio-economic status of the Bedouin are multiple and complex and stem from issues around Bedouin cultural traditions (e.g. consanguineous [blood-related] marriages, polygamy and patriarchal society), as well as inadequate social service provision. For example, in the areas of education and health:

#### 1. Education:

- In many respects, the Bedouin have benefited a great deal from becoming citizens of Israel. For example, education has been one of the major agents of modernisation. Within a single generation, since the Compulsory Education Law came into effect in 1949, illiteracy was reduced from 95% to 25%.<sup>7</sup>
- However, there is still a huge disparity between the standard of education provided to Bedouin communities compared to that provided to Jewish communities. Bedouin schools are frequently housed in ill-equipped buildings, often not connected to electricity and water grids. Bedouin children also face major challenges in transportation to high schools in government-planned towns from unrecognised villages.
- Drop-out rates are particularly high (10.6% in 2004, compared to 5.8% and 3.8% in the Arab and Jewish educational systems, respectively).<sup>8</sup>
- Bedouin schools also report the lowest level of achievements in matriculation exams amongst all Arab sector schools in Israel (26.6% in 2008, compared to 32.4% and 50.5% in the Arab and Jewish educational systems, respectively).<sup>9</sup>
- Traditionally, Bedouin men are perceived as the decision-makers and women as inferior and ideally subservient. In some tribes, women are not allowed to leave the village without the permission of the sheikh. This plays a significant part in the high levels of illiteracy and unemployment among women. Women are thus less able to contribute financially to their communities, resulting in increased poverty. Another reason for increased poverty is the high birth rate among Bedouin. The average Bedouin woman has nine children.
- Around 20% of Bedouin men have more than one wife<sup>10</sup>, usually leading to neglect of the first wife and her children. Domestic violence and child abuse are also far more widespread than in the rest of Israel.

#### 2. Healthcare:

- Access to primary healthcare is extremely limited in the 35 unrecognised villages, with only 12 health clinics that operate for a few hours each day. Again, most residents of unrecognised villages need to travel 10-15km to access a clinic. There are 37 clinics in the 7 recognised towns.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>5</sup> ACRI – The Association for Civil Rights in Israel, *Shadow Report to the UN Committee on Economic and Social Rights*, (October 2011, p.16). See: <http://www.acri.org.il/he/wp-content/uploads/2011/10/ICESCR2011.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> Anna Stoil, *Bedouin council's first election in 2012*, (JPost: 9 June 2010), at: <http://www.jpost.com/International/Article.aspx?id=177916>

<sup>7</sup> Yosef Ben-David, *The Bedouin in Israel*, (Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs: 1 July 1999). See: [http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/MFAArchive/1990\\_1999/1999/7/The+Bedouin+in+Israel.htm](http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/MFAArchive/1990_1999/1999/7/The+Bedouin+in+Israel.htm)

<sup>8</sup> Adel Mana (editor), *Arab Society in Israel (no. 2): Population, Society and Economy* (Jerusalem: Van Leer Institute, 2008, p. 173) [in Hebrew]; CBS, *Statistical Abstract of Israel*, 2005, table 8.19.

<sup>9</sup> Ricky Levy (editor), *Matriculation Exams – 2008* (Jerusalem: Israeli Ministry of Education, August 2009, p. 24) [in Hebrew]

<sup>10</sup> David E. Miller, *Israeli anti-polygamy activists run into Islamic opposition*, (JPost: 23 December 2010), at: <http://www.jpost.com/MiddleEast/Article.aspx?id=200806>

<sup>11</sup> Dan Even, *Israeli Bedouin women lack access to prenatal care*, (Haaretz: 24 April 2011), at: <http://www.haaretz.com/print-edition/news/israeli-bedouin-women-lack-access-to-prenatal-care-1.357807>

- The Bedouin infant mortality rate is the highest in Israel.<sup>12</sup> In 2010, the mortality rate of Bedouin babies was 13.6 per 1,000, compared to 4.1 per 1,000 in Jewish communities in the south. According to the Israeli Ministry of Health, 43% of deaths among Bedouin infants up to a year old result from hereditary conditions and/or birth defects – as a result of marriages between those with family relationships. Other reasons cited for the higher infant mortality rates are poverty, lack of education and proper nourishment of mothers, lack of access to preventative medical care and also unwillingness to undergo recommended tests.
- It is estimated that 9% of Bedouin children up to the age of six suffer from stunted growth, and 4.4% are severely underweight – while only 2.3% of children up to age six in the general population suffer from these problems.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Dan Even, *Israeli Bedouin women lack access to prenatal care*, (Haaretz: 24 April 2011), at: <http://www.haaretz.com/print-edition/news/israeli-bedouin-women-lack-access-to-prenatal-care-1.357807>

<sup>13</sup> Barbara Epstein, *The Negev Bedouin: Social and Economic Rights*, (November 2011, p.2). See: <http://www.uktaskforce.org/docs/bedouin-description--non-land-centered-.pdf>