



Ultra-Orthodox Employment: Emerging Trends

Yael Cohen | Gilad Malach



THE ISRAEL
DEMOCRACY
INSTITUTE

This analysis is based on data from the 2016 Social Survey,
conducted by the Central Bureau of Statistics

Summary of Conclusions

The Social Survey is an annual survey that the Central Bureau of Statistics has conducted continuously since 2002 . Using a sample comprised of 7,500 respondents who are twenty years of age and over, the Social Survey provides up-to-date information about the living conditions and welfare of Israel's population. Every year, the survey is made up of two parts: a fixed series of questions and a new subject. Since the subject of the 2016 survey was working conditions, we can use it to keep track of the similarities and differences among workers from the ultra-Orthodox community as compared with workers from the rest of the Jewish population. This analysis does not include Israel's Arab population.

The statistics indicate that ultra-Orthodox employees, as a rule, view work more as a way to make a living than as a career. As a result, only a relatively low percentage of ultra-Orthodox employees fill management positions, are partners in workplace decision making processes, and have the opportunity to take vocational education courses that are sponsored by their employers.

The perception of work as merely a way to earn a living also affects ultra-Orthodox employees' prospects for advancement. The percentage of ultra-Orthodox employees who have prospects for advancement at work is lower than that of the general population and in most cases the motivation for changing jobs has more to do with the need for a higher income than a desire for self-actualization or a chance to use one's abilities to the fullest. The same goes for technology. A fairly low percentage of ultra-Orthodox employees use computers and the Internet on a regular basis at work, and a small percentage has become familiar in recent years with technological innovations that have changed their work environment.

As far as working conditions for ultra-Orthodox employees, the situation is more complex, and has to do with the way they perceive the workplace. Owing to the limited role that work plays in their lives, a relatively high percentage of ultra-Orthodox are pleased with their work-life balance, and report that they have never been required to work at home during their free time. However, ultra-Orthodox employees report more stringent working conditions that do not allow them to take a break when they wish to or to go out and run errands. Their desire to improve their working conditions by forming a workers' union is low, as is the awareness that such a possibility exists. Most ultra-Orthodox employees do not belong to an employee association and have no interest in joining such a group.

Ultra-Orthodox employees have a high level of job satisfaction that in most cases resembles that of the general population and occasionally surpasses it. We can see this in their perception of the importance of their work and their perception of the extent to which they use their abilities to the fullest, and also in their interpersonal relationships at work. Regarding discrimination in the workplace, we found an important and surprising statistic: A vast majority of ultra-Orthodox employees reports that they have never experienced discrimination based on religion or gender, and that they have never been asked to perform a task that went against their beliefs. This statistic is particularly encouraging in light of the growing number of ultra-Orthodox employees working in non-ultra-Orthodox frameworks.

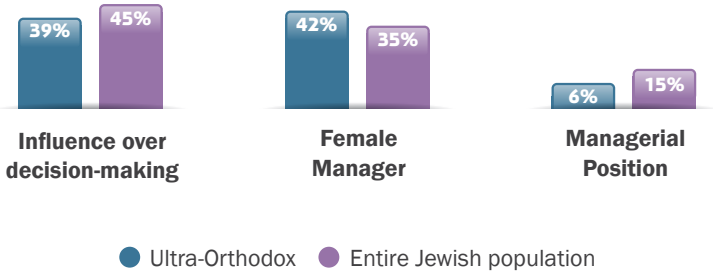
1 || Status at Work

Of all the elements that make up working conditions, the most important are employee status and workplace hierarchy. The Social Survey shows that ultra-Orthodox employees occupy the lowest rung of that hierarchy and fill fewer management and decision-making positions. Only a low percentage of them receive professional training.

Fewer ultra-Orthodox employees (6%) work in management positions than their counterparts in the general population (15%). Even where they are in management positions, they are usually in the lower ranks; 88% of ultra-Orthodox managers are in lower management positions, as compared with 67% of the general population. A very low percentage (12%) occupy management positions where they have subordinates, as compared to 29% of the general population. Interestingly, the percentage of ultra-Orthodox employees who report to women (42%) is higher than that of those who do so among the general population (35%). This is probably due to the high percentage of ultra-Orthodox women who work in education.

Ultra-Orthodox employees also participated in fewer professional in-service courses or training programs, within or outside the office framework. Twenty-five percent of ultra-Orthodox employees participated over the past year in a course or training program in order to improve their skills, as compared with 33% of the general population. The percentage of ultra-Orthodox men who took such courses (17%) was lower than that of ultra-Orthodox women who did so (30%). Also, fewer ultra-Orthodox employees (40%) perceive that they have influence over decisions made at work than employees in the general population (45%).

The small number of ultra-Orthodox employees in managerial positions may indicate that ultra-Orthodox employees work in lower quality workplaces. If this is true, the reason may be that only a small percentage of ultra-Orthodox employees have a college education (17%, as compared with 45% of employees from the general population). The low level of professional training that ultra-Orthodox employees receive may be keeping them from advancing to higher-level positions.



2 || Professional Advancement

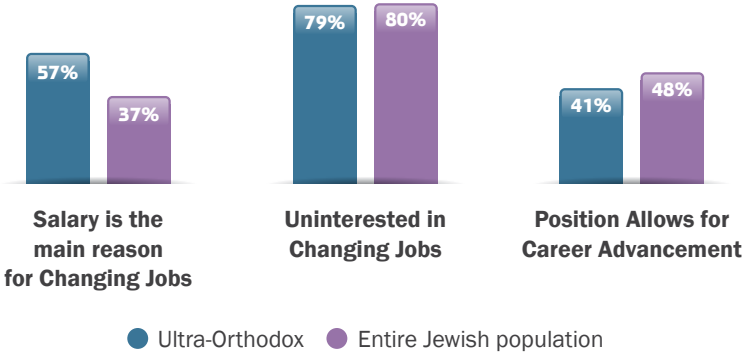
Professional advancement and career development mean higher status and better working conditions for employees within an organization.

Career advancement is a primary goal of employees, and their professional success depends upon their flexibility and professionalism. Employees have “careers without borders,” in which they change their professions, change jobs, and move from one position to another. Ultra-Orthodox employees, as a rule, have fewer prospects for professional advancement. The positions they fill have limited possibilities for promotion, and their reasons for looking for work are narrower and focus primarily on financial motivations.

Forty-one percent of ultra-Orthodox respondents said that their jobs included the possibility of career advancement, as compared with 48% of the respondents from the general population. Segmentation by age shows that there is a higher possibility of promotion among young employees in both groups (aged 20 to 35) than among older ones (aged 35 to 64). However, the gap between younger and older members of the ultra-Orthodox community who believe that promotion is possible in their jobs (31%) is narrower than in the general population (59%). This gap may indicate that the possibility of career advancement is also more limited among young ultra-Orthodox employees than among young people in the general population due to the level of training and the fact that the latter group sees work as a career.

Similar to 80% of the general population, most of the ultra-Orthodox community (79%) is not interested in changing jobs. But where there is a wish to do so, the primary reason in the ultra-Orthodox community is the desire for higher pay (57%), as opposed to 37% among the general population (a gap of 54%). Lower percentages of respondents cited other motives such as self-actualization, proximity to home, working conditions, and work hours.

The general population gave other reasons, also significant, for changing jobs: 22% would like a more interesting job with more possibility for self-actualization, and 15% would like a job more suited to their skills and education. We can conclude from this that the primary goal of ultra-Orthodox employees in finding jobs is to earn a living, and that they find parameters such as personal development at work and career development less important. Still, when we examine this question by age, we find that the young ultra-Orthodox employees (48%) chose the financial motivation less than the older ones (77%) – a gap of 60%. This shows that young ultra-Orthodox people are moving away from seeing work exclusively as a way to earn a living and more toward seeing work as a career.



3 || Employment Conditions

Most places of employment provide additional benefits above and beyond compensation, such as benefits, perquisites, and “cushy” conditions. As a rule, ultra-Orthodox employees are pleased with their employment benefits, though they are less satisfied than their counterparts in the general population when it comes to certain benefits such as flexibility in the workplace.

Like a majority employees in the general population (69%), most ultra-Orthodox employees (72%) are pleased or very pleased with the employment contracts that they signed, although their conditions are not as good when it comes to the fine print. For example, only 51% are eligible for sick leave from their first day on the job, as compared with 57% in the general population. In addition, a relatively high percentage of ultra-Orthodox men (22%) are employed without a contract — more than ultra-Orthodox women (9%) and men in the general population (10%).

the same percentage of ultra-Orthodox as compared to the general population is not employed in positions with problematic environmental conditions, including heat, cold, second-hand cigarette smoke, standing during work hours, and exposure to disease – at the same rate as the general population. The percentage of those who are exposed to other employees’ second-hand cigarette smoke, for example, is lower than that of their counterparts in the general population. There is a gap of 79% in the percentage of employees who work non-fixed hours (18% of ultra-Orthodox employees and 33% of employees in the general population).

Ultra-Orthodox employees report that their conditions are more rigid. While 61% of employees in the general population reported that they could always or frequently take a break, only 42% of ultra-Orthodox employees said that they could do so (a gap of 45%). The numbers were similar regarding the ability to go out and run errands: 45% of ultra-Orthodox employees said that it was very difficult for them to go on errands during work time, as compared with 29% of employees in the general population (a gap of 55%).

Another relevant statistic regarding work conditions has to do with labor unions in the workplace. Unions are usually less common in the ultra-Orthodox community. Only 17% of ultra-Orthodox employees work in places that have unions, as compared with 33% of the general population (a gap of 94%).

Most ultra-Orthodox employees do not ascribe much importance to workplace organizing. Only 24% want a union, as compared with 31% of their counterparts in the general population. Fewer of them believe that working conditions are better in workplaces that have unions (58% of ultra-Orthodox employees believe this, as compared with 65% of employees from the general population) or that a workers' committee provides employment security (as 56% of ultra-Orthodox employees and 63% of employees from the general population believe). Interestingly, most ultra-Orthodox employees (79%) do not belong to a union for the reason that their workplaces do not have them on offer, and less because of fears of forming a union, unwillingness to pay membership dues, or the belief that belonging to a union does no good. In other words, their opinion about unions and their contribution, or lack thereof, may stem from unfamiliarity with such bodies rather than any principled opposition.



● Ultra-Orthodox ● Entire Jewish population

4 || Technology and Innovation

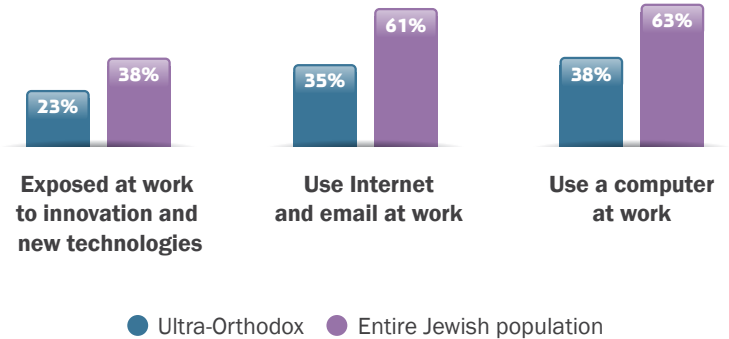
On principle, ultra-Orthodox society opposes Internet use. This is particularly evident even among ultra-Orthodox employees who use computers, the Internet, e-mail, and new technologies on a limited basis at work.

While 63% of employees from the general population said that they use computers and social networks frequently or all the time, only 38% of ultra-Orthodox employees said that they did so (a gap of 66%). Similarly, while 51% of employees in the general population said that they use the Internet and e-mail for professional purposes frequently or all the time, only 35% of ultra-Orthodox employees said that they did. This shows wide gaps in technology use among the ultra-Orthodox population.

Segmentation by age shows that this gap exists between young people (ages 20 to 34) and older people (ages 35 to 64) regarding the use of technology. While the percentages of these groups in the general population were identical regarding computer and social media use, there was a gap of 39% in the ultra-Orthodox community between younger (46%) and older respondents (31%), and a gap of 51% between younger (42%) and older respondents (28%) regarding Internet and e-mail use. In other words, the lower the age, the greater the exposure to and use of these technologies, and the narrower the gap between the general and ultra-Orthodox populations.

This limited use of computers and the Internet stems, among other things, from the fact that many ultra-Orthodox people work in environments within the ultra-Orthodox community where computer and Internet use are less common. Thirty-seven percent of ultra-Orthodox respondents are employed in the field of education, and work in places that adhere to ultra-Orthodox norms. This statistic also explains earlier findings such as ultra-Orthodox employees' relatively limited career advancement prospects and the fact that only a minority of them fill management positions.

This trend is closely linked to the subject of innovation in the workplace. The ultra-Orthodox population works primarily in places where innovation processes and new technologies have less influence upon their environment. Twenty-three percent of ultra-Orthodox respondents (as compared with 38% of the respondents from the general population, for a gap of 67%) work in places where the introduction of new processes or technologies had a direct effect on the work environment.



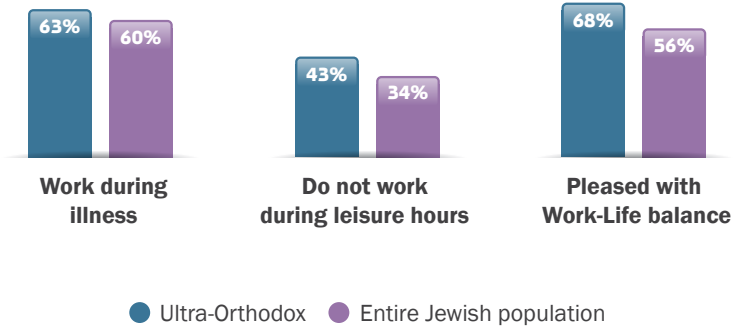
5 || Work-Life Balance

Finding a proper balance between work, family, and leisure is one of the most significant challenges that any employee faces. According to the survey results, the ultra-Orthodox population is relatively pleased with the balance between the time they devote to work and the time they devote to other areas of life. Sixty-seven percent of ultra-Orthodox employees said that they were pleased or very pleased with the balance between the hours they devoted to work and those they devoted to home and leisure, as compared with 57% of employees in the general population. No significant difference was found between men and women regarding this issue in either population.

Similarly, 43% of ultra-Orthodox respondents said that they had never worked during their free time, as compared with 34% of the general population.

There are two main explanations for these differences. First, since the percentage of ultra-Orthodox men who work (50%) is relatively low, many ultra-Orthodox households have only one breadwinner. In this situation, the “non-working” partner can take on a larger share of the household responsibilities, taking the pressure off the working spouse and allowing him (or her) a better balance between work and home. Second, due to the above-mentioned attitude in the ultra-Orthodox community toward work as a way to earn a living rather than as a career, the pressure that career development entails, such as working beyond normal business hours and constant tension between work and leisure, decreases.

We found no significant differences between both populations on other questions related to this topic, such as the difficulty in meeting family responsibilities due to work commitments or working during illness. In both populations, 50% never had difficulty in fulfilling family responsibilities due to work and 61% worked while they were ill.



6 || Job Satisfaction

Job satisfaction is defined as a positive attitude of employees toward their workplace. This attitude is expressed in employees' desire to persevere at work, identification with the workplace's goals, and the effort to achieve them. Job satisfaction is an important element in employees' positive attitude, as well as its ability to predict positive behaviors such as doing more than required and commitment to the job, or negative manifestations such as absenteeism or hostile behavior at work.

The respondents in the survey were asked questions about their feelings at work as expressed in the personal and interpersonal sphere. As a rule, ultra-Orthodox employees feel at home in their workplaces, use their abilities to the fullest, and are treated in a manner that respects their values.

Ninety-two percent of ultra-Orthodox employees feel that their work has value, as compared with 87% of the general population. The same applies to the question of whether they feel they are using their abilities to the fullest: Only seven percent of the ultra-Orthodox employees feel that they need additional training, as do a similar percentage of employees in the general population. Close to half of ultra-Orthodox employees (47%) feel that their current skills are well suited to their tasks, as compared with the general population (42%). However, ultra-Orthodox employees seemed less confident in their ability to cope with more complex workplace tasks. Only 45% of them felt that they had suitable skills for such endeavors, as compared with 50% of the general population.

The interpersonal sphere and the supervisor’s attitude toward the ultra-Orthodox employees’ work and their values is an extremely important issue in the integration of ultra-Orthodox employees into the job market. Special notice should be taken of the following surprising statistic: ultra-Orthodox employees do not feel that they are being treated badly because of their beliefs. Ninety-six percent feel that their supervisors treat them respectfully, as does a similar percentage of the general population. When asked whether they felt that their co-workers were helpful to them, 66% of the ultra-Orthodox employees said that they always or frequently were, as compared with 61% of employees from the general population.

Another important finding regarding the way employees feel at work is that the vast majority of ultra-Orthodox employees are not asked to perform tasks that go against their values. Eighty-three percent of the ultra-Orthodox employees said that they had never encountered a task at work that ran counter to their values, while only 77% of employees in the general population gave a similar answer.

It is no wonder, then, that the percentage of the ultra-Orthodox respondents who answered “Yes” to the question “Do you feel at home at work?” — 90% — was similar to the percentage of employees in the general population who gave the same answer — 88%.



● Ultra-Orthodox ● Entire Jewish population

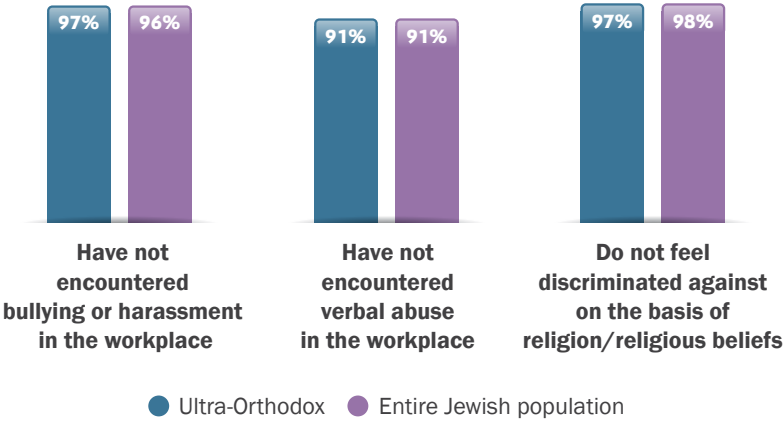
7 || Discrimination

Treating any employee differently because of his or her personal characteristics is discrimination, which is prohibited. Discrimination may stem from prejudice or from an employer's desire to treat an employee differently because he or she belongs to a specific group. It is commonly claimed that ultra-Orthodox employees suffer discrimination in the job market, particularly in hiring, and that employers shun them because they belong to a group with different characteristics than the general population. However, the statistics indicate that ultra-Orthodox employees have no complaints about exposure to discrimination of any kind, damage to their sense of self-worth, or exposure to verbal or physical harassment. Yet we should note that the survey does not mention the issue of discrimination in hiring.

An analysis of the data shows that a minority of employees in the general population has encountered some form of discrimination or violence. The same is true of ultra-Orthodox employees, ninety-six percent of whom report that they have not suffered discrimination on the basis of ethnic origin, age, or gender. An important and interesting statistic is that discrimination on the basis of religious belief does not exist in the ultra-Orthodox population, even though it might be assumed that ultra-Orthodox people, whose religiosity is such a significant part of their personal identity, would encounter discrimination because of their faith. However, when asked whether they had experienced discrimination of this kind, ninety-seven percent of the ultra-Orthodox respondents said that they had not.

When we examined the personal confidence indices of employees in both the general population and ultra-Orthodox community, we found that almost none of them had experienced verbal violence, threats, humiliation, sexual advances, bullying, or harassment. More than 95% of employees in both populations said that they had not encountered any of these behaviors at work.

Since many ultra-Orthodox employees work in ultra-Orthodox or religious workplaces, they do not encounter discrimination on the basis of religion. However, we should note that with the increase in the integration of ultra-Orthodox employees into secular workplaces, the fact that ultra-Orthodox employees encounter no discrimination of any kind is evidence that they are integrating successfully.



Conclusions and Recommendations

The 2016 Social Survey provides a comprehensive assessment of the current state of ultra-Orthodox employees in the workplace. This assessment is extremely important because public attention is focused largely upon the employment rate in the ultra-Orthodox community rather than on employees' situation vis-a-vis the job market. The survey shows that there is a distinction between ultra-Orthodox employees' objectively inferior situation and their subjective perceptions, which are similar to, and sometimes surpass, those of the general population of employees.

Below, are the primary conclusions to be gleaned from and recommendations to be made based on our analysis of the survey:

- 1.** The small percentage of managers, lack of professional training, and limited use of the Internet and innovative technologies characterize the current status of ultra-Orthodox employees. There are two reasons for this situation: limited level of training and perception of work as only a way to make a living rather than as a career builder. This year, Labor Ministry officials decided to work toward creating high-quality employment in the ultra-Orthodox sector by improving the incentives for providing good professional training and proper job placement. The younger members of the ultra-Orthodox community (20-34) seem to be changing their view of work, regarding it less as a way to make ends meet and more as a pathway to a career.
- 2.** Professional training and vocational training institutions must address the concept of one's employment being a career, as well as the advantages of such a mindset. Moreover, these institutions should be aware of the long-term benefits to having employees work under appropriate conditions. These assertions, true for all employees, are particularly relevant for ultra-Orthodox men, since they enter the labor market at an older age and after having undergone relatively limited professional training.

- 3.** On the subjective level, ultra-Orthodox employees report that they 'feel at home' in their workplaces and have a good work-life balance. This balance should be preserved even as emphasis is given to high-income employment and career. Ultra-Orthodox employees also firmly reject any claim that they suffer discrimination on the basis of religion or religious belief, and report that they are not given tasks that go against their values. This finding shows that once ultra-Orthodox employees enter workplaces, they encounter no obstacles whatsoever due to their religion or beliefs.

- 4.** It seems, then, that the main challenge to the integration of ultra-Orthodox employees into workplaces in the general population is screening and discrimination in hiring, not any obstacles connected to the former's level of religiosity or ultra-Orthodox lifestyle. In other words, the hesitation that both non-ultra-Orthodox employers and prospective ultra-Orthodox employees feel about having the latter work for the former takes place before, not after, an ultra-Orthodox person joins a non-ultra-Orthodox work place. Therefore, we should focus the incentives and public-relations efforts among non-ultra-Orthodox employers on the hiring of ultra-Orthodox employees. Finally, this issue in particular and the findings of the survey in general should be addressed in relevant institutions within the ultra-Orthodox community.

Yael Cohen is a research assistant in IDI's Ultra-Orthodox in Israel Program. Cohen has a master's degree in conflict management and resolution from Ben Gurion University of the Negev. In addition, Cohen managed the Be-Atzmi (On My Own) nonprofit social organization's "Welfare to Work" program.

Dr. Gilad Malach is the director of IDI's Ultra-Orthodox in Israel Program. Malach is also a political science lecturer at Bar-Ilan University. He is a public policy expert in the fields of ultra-Orthodox employment, military service and education.

This publication was made possible by the generous support of the Russell Berrie Foundation

www.idi.org.il |  |  | 



Photographer: Nati Shohat, Flash 90