

# A Master Plan for Informal Education in Arab Society

Vision, Challenges & Opportunities

Nasreen Hadad Haj-Yahya | Arik Rudnitzky

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Policy  
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122

Abstract



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## **ABSTRACT**

Israel's Government Resolution 922, passed on December 30, 2015, puts forward a five-year economic development plan (2016–2020) for Arab communities that is considered a landmark in government policy vis-à-vis the Arab public in Israel. The resolution places special emphasis on non-formal education, calling for the government to promote a comprehensive program of non-formal education in Arab communities in Israel through the gradual reform of allocation mechanisms and the creation of new tracks and specialized programs. Resolution 922 also stipulates that the funds allocated to participating Arab localities, as a percentage of the Ministry of Education's overall budget for non-formal education, should be no lower than these localities' relative share of the total population of Israel. The five-year program calls for a total allocation of NIS 650 million for non-formal education in Arab society.

There is increasing recognition in the Ministry of Education and other state institutions that formal education is a catalyst for integrating the Arab population in the economy, in the future job market, and in society in general. There is also growing

understanding that non-formal education plays a substantial role in achieving these goals—particularly in improving Hebrew-language knowledge, which government officials have identified as an essential condition for integrating Arab citizens to the Israeli economy.

Resolution 922 is a critical decision for the integration of the Arab public into the Israeli economy and society, because it represents the first time that the government has officially recognized the importance of non-formal education and allocated special funding for this purpose. As one of the first organizational steps, the Ministry of Education's Arab Society Division was expanded and now includes 15 inspectors (compared to three in the past). The ministry also contracted with JDC-Ashalim, which assumed responsibility for coordinating the government agencies, local authorities, and NGOs operating in Arab communities. Total annual funding of NIS 130 million was allocated for this initiative—NIS 60 million for national non-formal education programs, and NIS 70 million for Arab local authority activities.

The current very poor state of non-formal education in Arab society can be attributed to two main reasons: First, responsibility for non-formal education is scattered among various public bodies and government ministries, each of which defines non-formal education from its own particular point of view. The Ministry of Education's Youth and Society Administration, the Israel Association of Community Centers, Arab local authorities, youth movements, and civil society organizations—all of these run programs in the field of non-formal education in Arab society. This diffusion of responsibility creates islands of professional knowledge, without any entity coordinating them or providing uniform guidelines.

Second, most of the Arab local authorities are ranked in the lowest socioeconomic clusters in Israel, making it difficult for them to prioritize

non-formal education highly and allocate resources for it. This creates wide disparities between the level of non-formal education in Arab society and in Jewish society.

All of the above leads to one inevitable conclusion: Generating real improvement in the state of non-formal education in Arab society will require collaboration and coordination among all of the relevant entities.

Any initiative to develop non-formal education must contend with barriers; this is especially true in Arab society:

**(1) Inequality in the allocation of resources.** Prior to Resolution 922, non-formal education was almost completely absent from budgeting systems at both the national and local levels of government. Even after the current budget increase, the resources are insufficient, and the Arab local authorities find it difficult to deliver their share of the funding.

**(2) Poor infrastructure in Arab localities.** This includes inadequate physical infrastructure, financial and managerial deficiencies of local authorities, a lack of non-formal frameworks for addressing the phenomenon of school dropout, and a dearth of youth movement activities in Arab communities.

**(3) Content.** There are almost no programs written specifically for Arab children and youth; most of the existing programs were translated from Hebrew without being culturally adapted for Arab youth.

**(4) Human capital.** This includes a shortage of professional personnel, low parental involvement, and a wide digital gap between the Jewish and Arab populations.

**(5) Social and cultural barriers particular to Arab society.** The dominance of traditional Arab culture and the lack of parental connection to the non-formal education system impair the proper functioning of non-formal education activities.

Based on fieldwork that included interviews with officials and consultations with experts, we formulated strategic recommendations, as well as recommendations for concrete goals, at both the national and local levels of government. Our recommendations are based on three assumptions:

**(1)** It is vital to pay attention to the cultural dimension when developing programs in the field of non-formal education.

**(2)** Arab society in Israel is heterogeneous, and thus there is no uniform solution for all its segments; instead, its internal diversity should be taken into consideration.

**(3)** Programs should be developed via dialogue with the target population (that is, the Arab population in Israel) and with respect for its viewpoint, which usually differs from that of the state.

## **Recommendations**

**(1)** At the **strategic** level, we recommend:

**(a) Curriculum development:**

- ▶ Expanding the Content Development Unit at the National Training Center for Non-Formal Education for Arab Society
- ▶ The unit's work should address three main areas:
  - Culturally adapting existing programs
  - Developing new materials
  - Measurement and evaluation

**(b) Human capital:**

- ▶ Focusing on selecting and training personnel for professional work in the field of non-formal education

**(c) Allocation of monetary resources:**

- ▶ Creating a designated unit within the Ministry of Education for allocating resources to non-formal education in Arab society and overseeing their proper use
- ▶ The unit will operate a mechanism for the transfer of budget allocations to Arab local authorities in installments, conditional on the authorities meeting certain requirements.

**(2) At the national level, we recommend:**

- ▶ Forming an inter-ministerial steering committee for non-formal education in Arab society
- ▶ Creating an administration within the Ministry of Education to guide Arab local authorities in promoting non-formal education within their jurisdictions
- ▶ Creating a special portal for non-formal education in Arab society at the Ministry of Education. The portal will facilitate the monitoring of progress in the non-formal education system in Arab localities.

**(3) At the local authority level, we recommend:**

- ▶ Establishing a local forum for non-formal education in each locality. The forum will create a master plan for non-formal education locally and will liaise with the Arab Society Division at the Ministry of Education.

Government decision 922 is considered a landmark in government policy on Arab citizens of Israel. The decision sets forth the government's commitment to promoting a system-wide program for informal education in Arab locales, by putting into place a process of gradual shifts in budget allocation mechanisms, and developing new channels of activity and designated programs tailored to the needs of the Arab-Israeli community. What values should lie at the basis of a program for informal education in Arab-Israeli communities; what are the barriers to implementing the government reform; and how can we ensure that Decision #922 will generate substantive and sustainable change? This policy study provides responses to these and other important questions. It brings to light up-to-date data on the current situation of informal education in the Arab-Israeli community, and identified unmet needs. Adoption of its recommendations will make it possible to overcome barriers and obstacles to implementing government reform, and will ensure more effective and efficient allocation utilization of budgets designated to this area.

**Nasreen Hadad Haj-Yahya** is the Head of the Arab-Jewish Relations Program at IDI. She holds an MA in education and social geography and is a doctoral candidate in the History Department at Tel Aviv University. The topic of her doctoral dissertation is, "The contemporary impact of social space barriers on the inaction and future orientation of young Arabs aged 18–22." Nasreen's areas of expertise include, the socioeconomic profile of young Arab men and women; the integration of Arabs into higher education and the job market; proper representation of Arabs in the civil service and decision-making processes.

**Arik Rudnitzky** is a PhD student who has been researching Arab Israeli issues for more than a decade. His fields of expertise include political, national and social developments in Israel's Arab society; Jewish-Arab relations; and government policies on Arabs in Israel. Rudnitzky holds MA (magna cum laude) and BA degrees in Middle Eastern History from the Faculty of Humanities and an MBA degree from the Faculty of Management, both at Tel Aviv University.

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