

# Workplace Diversity in a Polarized Society

Haredim and Non-Haredim

Asaf Malchi Working Together

Abstract



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# **WORKPLACE DIVERSITY IN A POLARIZED SOCIETY**

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## **Haredim and Non-Haredim Working Together**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This study examined the attitudes of non-haredi employees and employers (managers) toward haredi colleagues and employees in a variety of mixed workplaces in the Israeli business sector. The idea was to gain deeper knowledge of the advantages, disadvantages, challenges, solutions, and successes with respect to the integration of haredim in mixed workplaces. What makes the study unique is its attempt to characterize and obtain a better understanding of the complex relations between haredim and non-haredim in the workplace from the perspective of employers and employees in the general population. This perspective provides a fascinating glimpse into a dynamic public sphere. Success stories in this sphere, based on tolerance and intercultural acceptance, can teach us something about the potential human and economic benefits of lessening the mutual alienation between secular and haredi Jews and of helping them become acquainted with one another. However, the integration of haredim in the workplace still faces many challenges, and we can learn from these, too, about this potential.

Because employers and employer organizations, as well as the government bodies that deal with empowerment of special populations in the labor

force, have a decisive role to play in improving and expanding diversity in private-sector employment, this study presents several recommendations for enhancing the onboarding and employment of haredi workers.

### **Recommendations for Employers, Organizations, and Businesses**

**(1) Basic familiarization with the haredi world:** Due to the social distance, foreignness, and cultural differences between haredi and non-haredi society, non-haredim must learn about characteristics of the haredi community and its needs in the workplace. To help achieve optimal onboarding and employment of workers from this group, team managers should be offered cultural training workshops on haredi culture and its traits.

**(2) Preparation:** Integration of haredim in workplaces requires logistical preparation (e.g., kosher kitchens, transportation arrangements, flexible work hours and vacation days).

**(3) Assistance from professional recruiters:** In order to implement recommendations 1 and 2, it is best to make use of the services of professional recruiters within and outside the haredi community who have proven experience in placing and assisting haredim in the labor market. This recommendation is particularly apt in the early stages of hiring haredi workers, especially in organizations that will be hiring a large number of haredi workers.

**(4) Development of a culture of interpersonal discussion:** In order to bridge cultural gaps in the workplace and have an inclusive, tolerant culture, the senior management of the organization should spearhead a culture of discussion that fosters closer relations between managers and employees and among the employees themselves.

**(5) Creation of a comfortable, enabling workplace:** In order to promote the employment of haredi women, it is best, if possible, to start by hiring small groups of two or three women who will work together in a heterogeneous staff. This will give them a sense of security and enable them to integrate more easily in the organization. In addition, the special needs of haredi workers, haredi culture, and the haredi lifestyle should be taken into consideration as much as possible. For example, vacations should be permitted on certain days when businesses are customarily open (e.g., optional vacation days on the intermediate days of festivals and Tisha Be'av).

**(6) Setting boundaries for flexibility and accommodations:** Despite the previous recommendation, organizations should set clear boundaries in advance regarding the accommodations that managers and employers are willing to offer for the sake of optimal employment of haredim and regarding the legitimacy of such accommodations. In other words, we must bear in mind that respectful, inclusive accommodation of haredi employees is liable to be perceived by non-haredim as offensive and inappropriate in matters pertaining, for example, to the separation of the sexes or a modest dress code for all workers in a mixed workplace. Nevertheless, we believe that the managers should be the ones who draw balanced, normative boundaries appropriate to their organizations, and not rely on binding, across-the-board government regulations.

**(7) A commitment to the process by management:** Active, proactive involvement of the management of the organization in optimal onboarding and integration of haredi employees is essential to the success of the process. Therefore large organizations that wish to successfully integrate haredim should, if possible, appoint a diversity officer. This person will specialize in this field and introduce employment norms that will allow for optimal onboarding of this segment of society in the organization.

Together, these recommendations will help employers and managers in private companies and businesses improve the integration and employment of haredim in the private sector and in the Israeli job market as a whole.

### **General recommendations for the government**

These processes are part of a broader social and business program for multidimensional employment diversity that is not based solely on expediency and the bottom line. Rather, the program also promotes social values by holding the entire system responsible for the changing face of Israeli society. As those who navigate the country's needs on the macroeconomic and societal levels, the government bodies in charge of employment policy for haredim and the diversity of the labor market have a vital role to play in expanding this process. The following are a few recommendations for these bodies based on prior research:

**(1) Awareness and policy:** It is crucial for the relevant government ministries and their executive branches to adopt an active policy for raising employers' awareness of the importance of hiring and employing haredi workers. This general recommendation will need to be reexamined as circumstances change, especially with respect to the possibility of providing assistance and information on the subject to small and medium-sized businesses, but without neglecting the role of the leading Israeli companies.

**(2) Information-gathering and quantification:** We recommend conducting a regular, periodic, professional survey of employers to determine the scope of employment of haredim (and other special populations) in the various segments of the economy. This employer survey will provide a firm basis for deciding on appropriate government policies, improving such policies, and developing specific tools that suit the needs of employers and the profile of the workers. Instituting an

annual employer survey will enable policymakers and decision-makers to further the employment of special populations, including the haredim, in industries and occupations in which they are underrepresented, and will make possible a systematic characterization of the lines of work in which haredim are employed. Such a survey can also be expected to boost managers' and employers' confidence in the state's commitment to creating diverse workplaces.

**(3) Regulation of organizations and tools for employers:** Due to the importance of diversity officers in large organizations and leading Israeli companies, procedures and regulations (overseen by the Ministry of Labor and Social Services) should be instituted requiring the appointment of such an administrative officer in every business or organization with more than 500 employees. Such regulation can leverage the professionalization and focus of large businesses and help them internalize the social (and commercial) importance of workplace diversification in Israel. In addition, employers should be given information, training, and professional guidance for instituting this position in large businesses.

**(4) Employer compact:** The matter can be advanced, if only symbolically and on a declarative level, by drawing up an “employer compact” in which entrepreneurs, managers, and employers from various organizations declare the national importance of employing haredim for the sake of economic resilience and social solidarity in Israel. This declaration should include a commitment to fair, equal, and respectful employment, which is urgently needed in Israel. However, a public declaration on this subject is also liable to elicit the opposition of extremist haredi circles that are not interested in integration in mixed workplaces.

The findings of this study attest that despite the many challenges and difficulties, ultimately everyone involved—employers, managers, and non-haredi workers as well as haredi workers—will receive the opportunity to get to know each other and work together for a shared



goal, both commercial and societal. The better employers and managers prepare for the unique challenge entailed by onboarding and employing haredi workers, the more successful the process will be for the haredi community, Israeli society, and the labor market.

This pioneering study provides significant insights as to the complex relations between ultra-Orthodox (Haredi) and other ("secular") employees in "mixed" workplaces, from the perspectives of secular employers and employees alike.

- What do employers think about hiring ultra-Orthodox workers?
- How do employees behave and relate to their ultra-Orthodox coworkers?
- Must special adaptations be made in order to succeed in integrating ultra-Orthodox workers into mixed workplaces?
- How does the exposure to ultra-Orthodox workers influence the views and attitudes of the secular majority towards this minority community?

Today, these questions are more relevant than ever, in light of the pressing need for boosting employment rates among Haredim, and the growing alienation between the ultra-Orthodox community and the general public, in the wake of the community's behavior during the COVID-19 crisis.

The study provides concrete recommendation's for enhancing the process of hiring of Haredi employees, adopting more diverse employment practices, and successful integration at the workplace in a variety of occupations and work environments.

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