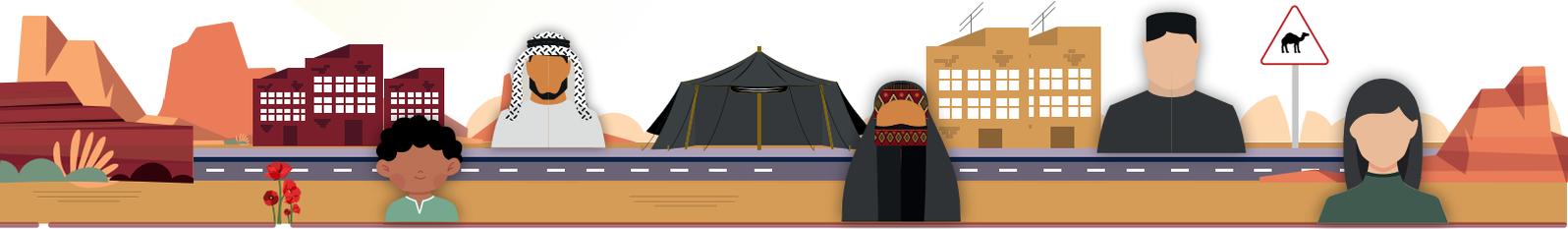


Introduction to the Bedouin Community in the Negev



This resource provides a basic introduction to Bedouin communities in the Negev, Israel. Refer to the Source Sheet Companion for a list of references and a selection of additional resources for further learning.



The Negev Bedouin are desert-dwelling Muslim Arabs with a historically semi-nomadic and herding lifestyle who retain unique cultural traditions and heritage. The center of the Bedouin population in Israel is in the Negev desert - *Naqab* in Arabic. They are part of a diverse Arab minority in Israel and share many interests and concerns with broader Arab society.¹⁻⁵

300,000

Negev Bedouin Population

51%
aged
0-18

15%
of Arab
Citizens

3.5%
of Israel's
Population

Bedouin navigate a complex and dynamic identity, encompassing language, culture, Islamic faith, and daily life.⁶

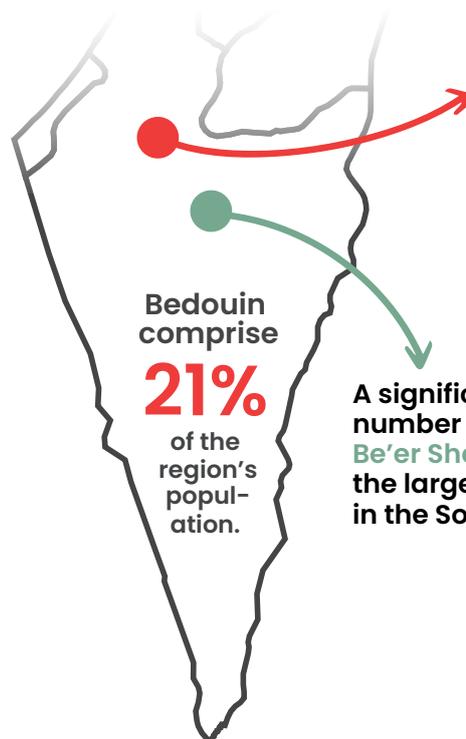
Bedouin have varied experiences and may use many terms to define themselves:



- Bedouin
- Muslim
- Arab
- Israeli
- Palestinian

The Negev, in Israel's Southern periphery, is less developed and presents fewer opportunities for employment and socioeconomic mobility.

Over the last one hundred years, Bedouin have undergone rapid processes of sedentarization, modernization, and urbanization.⁷⁻¹²



Rahat is the largest Arab city in Israel.
2021 population:
76,238

Bedouin comprise **21%** of the region's population.

A significant number live in **Be'er Sheva**, the largest city in the South.



Between 1969 and 1990, Israel established 7 towns, and in the 2000s, recognized 12 additional villages, and initiated various plans to regulate and resettle unrecognized Bedouin communities. However, many Bedouin do not want to move and resist relinquishing historic land claims and traditions. Today, about 25-40% of the Negev Bedouin live in villages that are not legally recognized by the state.^{13,14}

Most live in three types of all-Bedouin localities:

+30 
unrecognized villages

12 
recognized villages
(within 2 regional councils)

7 
state-planned towns and cities



Unrecognized villages are not connected to essential services and can lack access to:^{15,16}



Running Water



Electricity



Rocket Shelters



Public Transportation



Easy Access to Education



Health Services



and other infrastructure.

→ Disputes over land, settlement rights, home demolitions, and housing shortages remain the biggest source of tensions in Bedouin-state relations.

Building permits are difficult to obtain, contributing to persistent housing shortages. Structures built without government authorization—in recognized and unrecognized communities—are subject to demolition orders.¹⁷⁻²⁰

↑ 45%
in demolition notices
in 2022-2023

+18,500
buildings in the Negev
have been demolished
over the last decade



Economy & mobility

The Negev Bedouin are Israel's most economically disadvantaged community. In recent years, the government has invested resources in socio-economic development of Bedouin communities in the Negev. However, major gaps remain. ^{21-24, 30-33}

68% of Bedouin live in poverty **VS** **40%** of Arab society

→ Bedouin municipalities are ranked in the **two lowest** socio-economic clusters out of ten.



On average, Bedouin families are approximately **30% larger** than Arab households in the country.



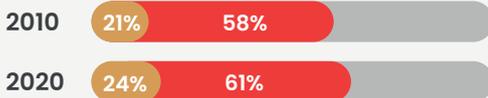
10% of Bedouin households are single-parent, typically led by mothers.



Polygamy, still practiced by an estimated **20-40% of Bedouin households**, contributes to these family patterns, and adds to high poverty rates and limited economic mobility, **particularly for women**. ²⁵⁻²⁹

Employment rate:

Bedouin Women vs. Men



Young Bedouin (18-24)



are unemployed, not receiving an education, nor enrolled in vocational training

IDF Service

Like all Arab citizens, Bedouin are not required to serve in the Israel Defense Force (IDF), though there is a strong history of voluntary enlistment and the IDF holds Bedouin trackers in high regard. Some Bedouin make careers as officers in the IDF. ³⁴



Most common fields of work:

73% working women are in education, health, and welfare services

72% of men work in lower-wage industries including construction, transportation, industry, and commerce.

Main barriers for women seeking employment are:

52% can't find a job close to home

47% don't have a daycare in their locality

41% don't possess sufficient education or training

There's societal pressure for women to prioritize family life and household responsibilities.

Creating income-earning opportunities for Bedouin women is considered a key way of reducing poverty and improving mobility overall. ³⁶

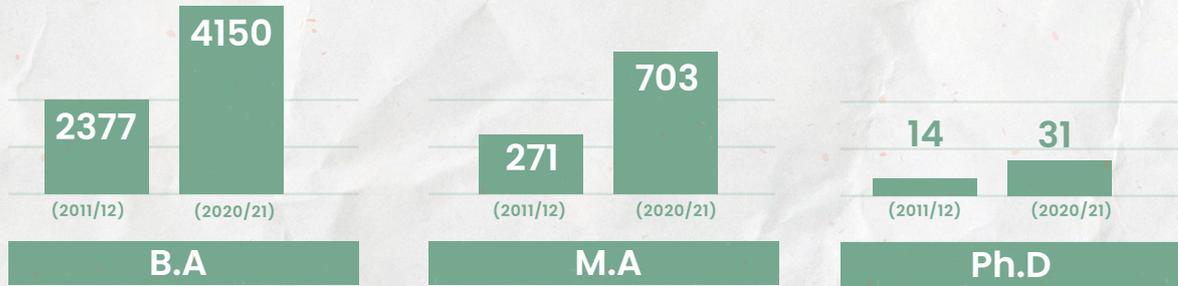
74%

of women are the primary caretaker for small children

67% can work in the mornings only

Higher Education

Over the last two decades, Bedouin participation in Israeli higher education institutions doubled, though they remain significantly under-represented. This has also contributed to younger generations moving away from more traditional lifestyles, favoring greater integration.³⁷⁻⁴⁰



This graph shows total number of Bedouin students in each degree total number of students.



Hebrew language barriers

pose challenges to socioeconomic integration. 34% of women and 76% of men report a strong command of Hebrew.

Changemaking & Community Development

Spearheaded by NGOs and community leaders, numerous initiatives focus on:



Civil equality and partnership between Jews and Bedouins



Preserving traditional practices and knowledge



Improving access to education and enhancing social mobility



Fostering leadership within the community



Empowering Bedouin women through targeted programs



Developing sustainable housing solutions



There are about **160** civil society organizations in the Negev that are either led by Bedouins or have joint leadership by Jews and Bedouins.^{41, 42}

About the designer:

Hi, I'm Shuaa AbuKaf. I'm a freelance Bedouin graphic designer crafting designs inspired by my culture and a love for bringing stories to life through visuals.

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