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מרכז הידע והמחקר של האוכלוסיה הבדואית בנגב
مركز المعرفة والأبحاث للمجتمع البدوي في النقب
Bedouin Society Knowledge and Research Hub

The Ramifications of the Israel-Hamas War on the Employment and Economic Security of Bedouin Society in the Negev

Analysis of Administrative Data and an Online Survey

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Summary

Against the background of the outbreak of the war between Israel and Hamas that began on October 7, 2023, the Nagabiya Center – The Research and Information Center of Bedouin Society in the Negev – undertook a study that combined analyses of administrative data and an online survey. The research examined the economic and occupational ramifications of the war on Bedouin residents of the recognized and unrecognized communities in the Negev. Results of the study, presented below, include the analysis and integration of data from different sources, which mainly came from administrative sources and, specifically, the Employment Service. These analyses made it possible to create a wider understanding of the ramifications of the war on Bedouin society in the Negev.

The Main Results:

Income and employment

- 22.75% of the respondents, who are in the labor force, reported damage to their income.
- When comparing people with academic-level education to those without, the income of residents without academic-level education (high school education or less and/or technical training) was affected more (26.8%) than residents with an academic-level education (21.5%).
- 31.5% of the residents of the unrecognized villages reported loss of income due to the war.

Sense of economic security

- Nearly 70% of all respondents reported that they feared a loss of economic security because of the war.
- Approximately 71% of the respondents from the unrecognized Bedouin villages reported a loss of economic security due to the war.

Access to food, goods and health

- Approximately two-thirds of all respondents reported some degree of loss of access to goods, foods and health care, and in their ability to pay for medicines, due to the war.
- 70 – 75% of the residents of the unrecognized villages reported a loss of access to goods, food and health care and to their ability to pay for medicines, due to the war.
- Individuals without an academic-level education were affected significantly more than individuals with an academic-level education.

Public space and the workplace

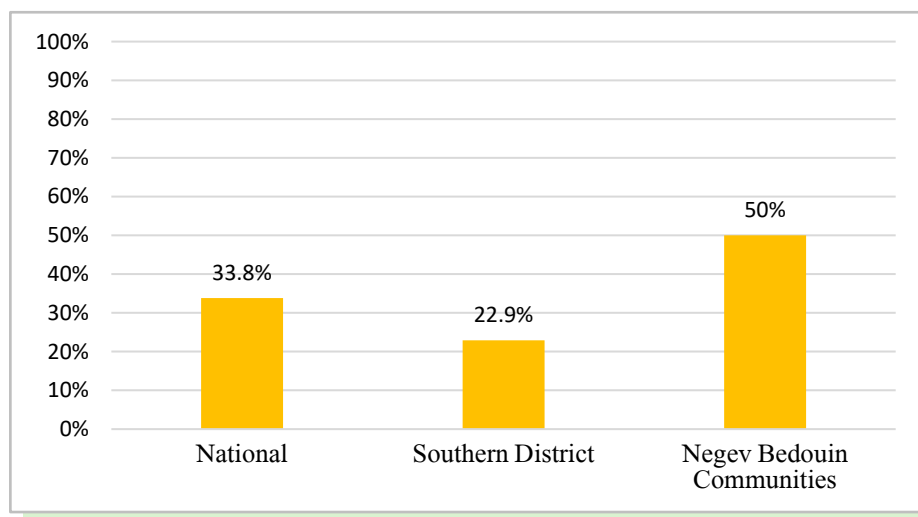
- 43.5% of all respondents reported that they do not feel safe to travel to cities, such as Beer Sheva, during the war.
- 47% reported that they experience a high level of fear of racist remarks and harassment in the workplace.

Poverty, Unemployment and Employment among Bedouins in the Negev

The Bedouin population of the Negev is 304,513: 63% live in the seven state-planned towns (Rahat, Hura, Lakiya, Tel Sheva, Kseifa, Ararah in the Negev and Segev Shalom); 9% live in two regional councils (El-Kassum and Neve-Midbar), which are comprised off 11 recognized villages; and 28% of the population lives in 35 unrecognized villages.

Updated data from the National Security Insurance only relate to the rates of poverty in the planned towns. The data from 2022 show that approximately 50% of the Bedouin families that live in the planned towns are under the poverty line, while the rate of poverty among families in the southern district is 22.9% and the national rate is 33.8%. In other words, the rate of Bedouin families in the planned towns who live under the poverty line is double the rate of the families from the southern district.

Figure 1: The Poverty Expectancy of Families – The National Security Insurance 2022



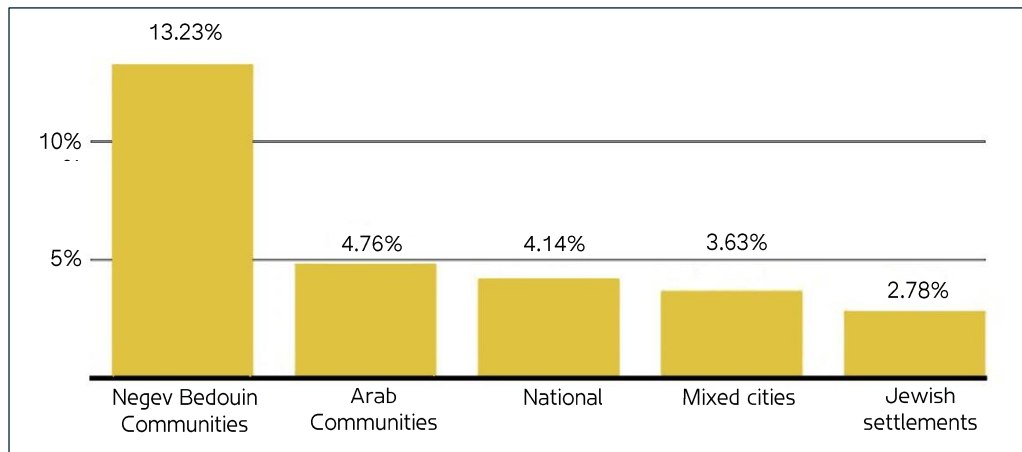
As mentioned above, the data from the National Security Insurance do not sample most of the recognized villages in the regional councils¹ except for two communities – Bir Hadaj in the Neve Midbar Regional Council and Al Sayed in the El-Kassum Regional Council. According to the 2022 data, the poverty expectancy among the families that live in Bir Hadaj is 77.8%, in which 86% of the children and 82.2% of the population live under the poverty line.

In order to present the employment status of the Bedouin society in the Negev before the war, we compared the rates of unemployment in the Bedouin communities in the Negev to the rates of unemployment in the rest of the population in the country, according to type of locality. The comparison was based on the latest detailed data published by the Employment Service in March 2023 that related to the rates of unemployment, according to geographical layout. The rates of unemployment in El-Kassum were the highest among the Bedouin communities in the Negev (except for the unrecognized villages, which are not

¹ The report from the National Security Insurance only contains data for communities with a population over 5,000.

sampled). In essence, the village has the highest rate of unemployment in the country. In the period that was examined, the rate of unemployment in El-Kassum stood at 19.26%. When comparing the unemployment rates in the Bedouin settlements in the Negev to the rest of the population – they are the highest. The unemployment rate in the Bedouin communities was four times higher than the national average, before the 2023 war.

Figure 2: The Mean Rate of Unemployment, Analysis of the Statistics for Data of Employment Services, Nagabiya Center, March 2023



The Ramifications of the War on Employment in Negev Bedouin Society

In order to assess the ramifications of the war on employment among Bedouins, we examined the employment data that were published by the Employment Service from the beginning of the war, according to:

1. The rates of job seekers in each of the Negev Bedouin communities
2. The main branches that characterize the employment patterns in Bedouin society
3. The number of Bedouin job seekers in each of the Bedouin communities, in each of the main employment branches.

It is important to note that the Employment Service reports the number of job seekers from the southern district, based on religious affiliation – that is Muslims, Jews, Christians, Druze and others. Since the entire Negev Bedouin population is Muslim and the Muslim population in the Negev is mainly Bedouin (all of the Muslim communities in the Negev are Bedouin communities), we assumed that the data that relate to the Muslims in the southern district mainly include the Bedouin population.

The data from the Employment Service that relate to the rate of job seekers during the months of the war point to the gaps that exist between all of the communities in Israel and the Negev Bedouin communities. While, in December 2023, the rate of job seekers in the country was estimated to be 6.5%, and in the southern district 8.7%, the average rate of job seekers in the Negev Bedouin communities was 15%.

Table 1: The Rate of Estimated Job Seekers, The Employment Service, September – December 2023

Community	September 2023	December 2023
The entire country	3.7%	6.5%
Southern district	5.1%	8.7%
Lakiya	11.7%	14.8%
Kseifa	15.5%	18.5%
Hura	7.6%	9.5%
Ararah in the Negev	16.1%	19.6%
Rahat	7.2%	10.6%
Segev Shalom	9.6%	11.5%
Tel Sheva	10.8%	13.6%

The main economic branches for the (male) Arab employees in the south, during the years 2012–2017, were construction (17.6%), transportation (16.4%), industry and production (14.6%), commerce and repairs (13.2%) and education (10.3%). The main employment branches for the Bedouin women in the southern district were education (55.7%) and health and welfare services (16.9%).²

According to the data from the Employment Service, the branches, which showed the largest increase in the number of job seekers, are the branches that, in part, characterize employment in Bedouin society. For example, the rate of job seekers in the unskilled construction branch increased by 66%. In the transportation branch (heavy truck and bus drivers), there was an increase of 55% of job seekers.³ When comparing Muslim and Jewish employees in these branches in the southern district, we find that while the Muslim employees continued to experience layoffs throughout the months of the war, this trend decreased among Jewish employees in December. Between the months of October – November, there was an increase in the number of employees who were fired in industry and construction, facility operators and drivers, and among unskilled workers. However, while a decrease began in the number of Jewish workers who were fired in the southern district, during the month of December, among the Muslim workers, this phenomenon increased. In December, the number of Jews in the employment branches of production and construction who were fired remained the same; among the Muslim workers, this figure increased by 11%. Among the Jewish machine operators and drivers, the number of people who were fired decreased by four percent, while among the Muslim employees, this figure increased by 35%. In the southern district, there was a 13% decrease in the number of Jewish unskilled workers who were fired, while there was a 57% increase in the number of Muslim unskilled workers who were fired from their jobs.

² Nasrin Haj Yehi, Eiman Saif, Nitza Caesar, & Ben Ferjon. A program for the advancement of integration of Arab society in the labor market. The Israel Democracy Institute, July 2021.

³ [Dofek the Labor Market December 2023](#). Employment Service. [HEB]

Table 2: Number of Job Seekers in the Employment Service Due to Job Loss – Southern District, October – December 2023

Southern District				
Month	Unskilled workers		Machine and facility operators	Craftsmen in industry and construction
December	Jews	176	136	129
	Muslims	137	124	60
November	Jews	203	142	129
	Muslims	87	92	53
October	Jews	124	110	99
	Muslims	33	52	Less than 20

In 2023, the Bedouin population was 22% of the total population of the southern district and approximately 38% of the population in the Beer Sheva governorate.⁴ The data presented in Table 2 show that the rate of unskilled Bedouin workers, who were fired from the branches of production and construction, facility and machine operation and driving, was higher than their relative percentage in the population. The percentage of unskilled Muslim workers from the southern district who were fired during December was 43.7%. Out of all of the workers who were fired from the branch of machine operators and drivers, 47.7% were Muslim. Out of all of the workers who were fired from the branch of production and construction, the rate was 31.7%.

Alongside the damage caused to the employment branches in which many Bedouin workers are employed, and the ongoing trend of layoffs in the Negev, the war also caused damage to small businesses. Twenty percent of the business owners, who do not employ workers, or those who employ one to two workers, were absent from their business during the month of November 2023 (17% - due to economic reasons, such as, unfeasibility), as were 17% of the business owners who employ three or more workers.⁵ It is important to note that the rate of employees in Rahat was 39.2%, out of the total number of employees in the planned towns and in the regional councils. The rate of self-employed workers in the city was 40.84%.⁶ In light of the high percentage of these workers, it is expected that the harm will most likely increase in the city of Rahat. This is due to the city's geographical proximity to the communities located near the Gaza border, in which some of Rahat's residents were employed. Moreover, during the month of December, the percentage of job seekers – 11.8% – was the highest percentage from all of the Israeli cities that have over 40,000 residents.⁷

⁴ In the Beer Sheva governorate, the concentration of the Muslim population, and hence the Bedouin population, is higher than in the southern district, since there are very few Bedouins who live north of Beer Sheva.

⁵ Kfir Batz and Asaf Geva. *The Impact of Iron Swords on the Labor Market in October 2023*. The Department of the Head Economist, December 2023.

⁶ *The Statistical Year of Bedouin Society in the Negev* (in preparation). Nagbia: The Center for Information and Research of the Bedouin Society in the Negev.

⁷ See [The Labor Market Pulse December 2023](#). Employment Service. [HEB]

In light of the fact that the war between Israel and Hamas affected the labor branches, which employ many workers from Bedouin society, we examined the results of this impact on all the Bedouin residents in the Negev, that is, the residents of the planned towns, the regional councils and the unrecognized villages. Given the deep impact the war has had on the economic-employment status in Rahat, which is the most industrialized Bedouin city in the Negev, as well the community that has the highest rate of education and the lowest rates of unemployment, we hypothesized that the trends occurring in this city would be found in others. Moreover, we hypothesized that these negative trends would increase in the unrecognized villages.

Findings of the Nagabiya Center's Survey about the Economic and Employment Effects in Bedouin Society, due to the War

Three-hundred and fifty residents completed the survey: 46.3% were from the planned towns (162 respondents), 36.3% were from the unrecognized villages (127 respondents) and 17.4% were from the regional councils (the recognized villages in Neve Midbar and El-Kassum – 61 respondents). Since this was an online survey, we can assume that the respondents have digital skills, most of whom have higher education. The rate of the respondents with academic education was higher than their rate in the population. Out of all of the survey respondents, 53.7% had academic education (21.4% had a Masters' degree and 32.3% had a Bachelor's degree), 3.4% had technical training, 28.6% had high school education and 14.3% had less than 12 years of education. In order to examine the ramifications of the war on employment, the data were examined in relation to the groups of respondents who reported that they participate in the labor force (employed or self-employed). The survey questions that tapped the sense of economic security, access to food, goods and medical care and medicines, and to the sense of security in the public space and in the workplace, were analyzed for all of the survey respondents. The survey was conducted online during the last two weeks of November 2023, approximately one and a half months after the events of October 7.

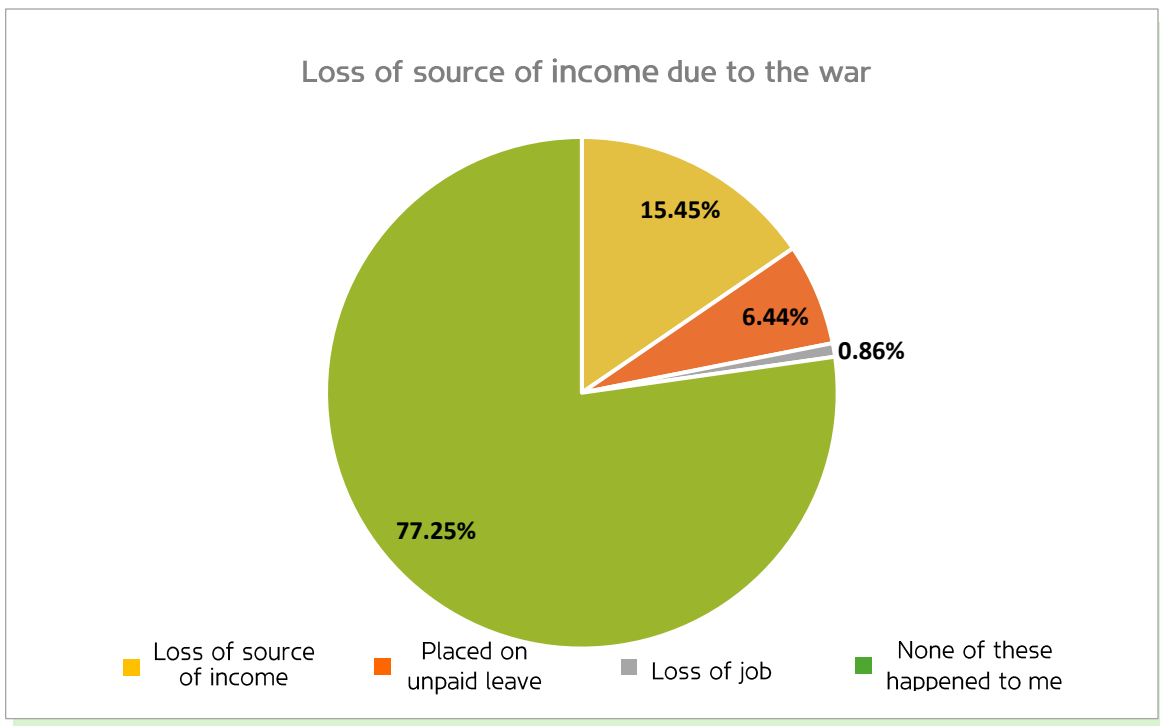
Income and employment

Nearly 23% of the respondents, who participate in the labor force, reported that they experienced loss of income. When the respondents with an academic-level education were compared to those without such an education, the results showed that the people without an academic-level education (high school or less; technical training) were affected more by the war than those with academic-level education (26.8% vs. 21.5%, respectively).

Out of the respondents who are in the labor force, 15.5% reported that they lost their source of income. An additional 6.5% were placed on unpaid leave and 0.86% were fired. When analyzing the data in terms of education, 27.6% of the respondents who do not have an academic-level education lost their source of income due to the war. The respondents with an academic-level education also reported a high rate of loss of source of income. Nearly 22% of the respondents with undergraduate and/or graduate degrees reported a loss of income. Moreover, respondents with undergraduate and graduate degrees were the only groups that reported being fired because of the war: approximately 1% of the respondents with an undergraduate degree and 1.5% of the respondents with a Masters reported being fired during the war. All of them were residents of unrecognized villages. Nine percent of the respondents, who did not have an academic-level education, reported

that they were placed on unpaid leave, while 5.5% of the respondents with an academic-level education reported that they, too, were placed on unpaid leave during the war.

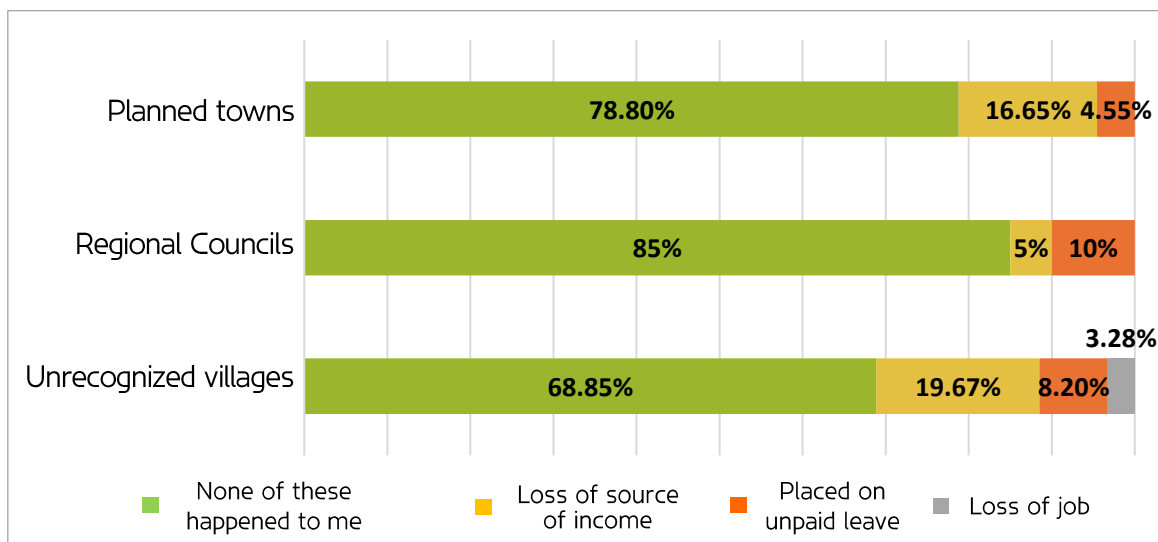
Figure 3: Reports of Loss of Source of Income among All of the Survey Respondents



Approximately 31% of the residents of the unrecognized villages, who are in the labor force, reported that their income from work was affected, during the war.

Nearly 20% of the respondents from the unrecognized villages, 16.6% from the planned towns and 5% from the regional councils reported a loss of their source of income. The percentage of residents of the unrecognized villages who reported that they were fired due to war was 3.5%. In essence, the residents of the unrecognized villages suffered the most loss of income from work (31.5%). In the planned towns, this rate was 21.2%, followed by the regional councils (15%).

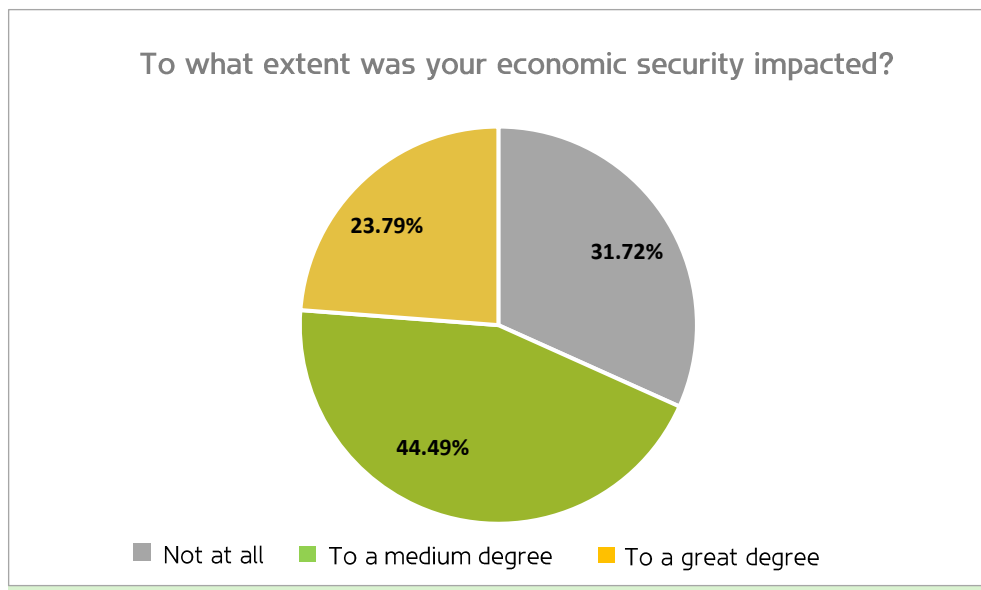
Figure 4: Reports of Loss of Source of Income, according to Kind of Community



Approximately 70% of all of the respondents reported on the undermining of their sense of economic security, due to the war. The residents of the unrecognized villages reported on higher rates of this undermining (approximately 71%).

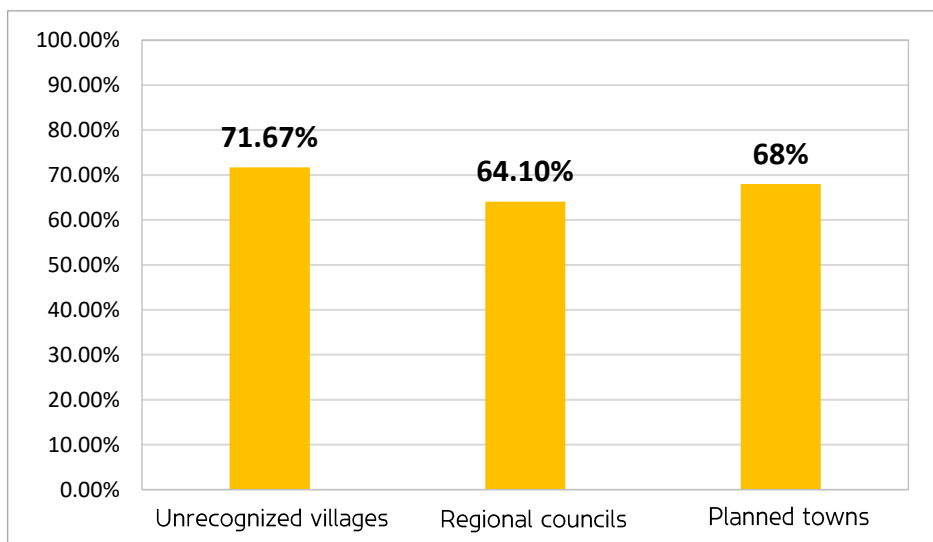
Just over 68% of all of the respondents reported that, because of the war, their sense of economic security was undermined to a medium – very high degree. Seventy percent of all of the respondents reported that they feared that they would lose their income because of the war.

Figure 5: Reports of the Effect of the War on the Sense of Economic Security in the Entire Sample



Nearly 72% of the respondents from the unrecognized villages noted that their sense of economic security was undermined to a medium or high degree, due to the war. This group was followed by the respondents from the planned towns (68%) and then the residents of the regional councils (64.1%).

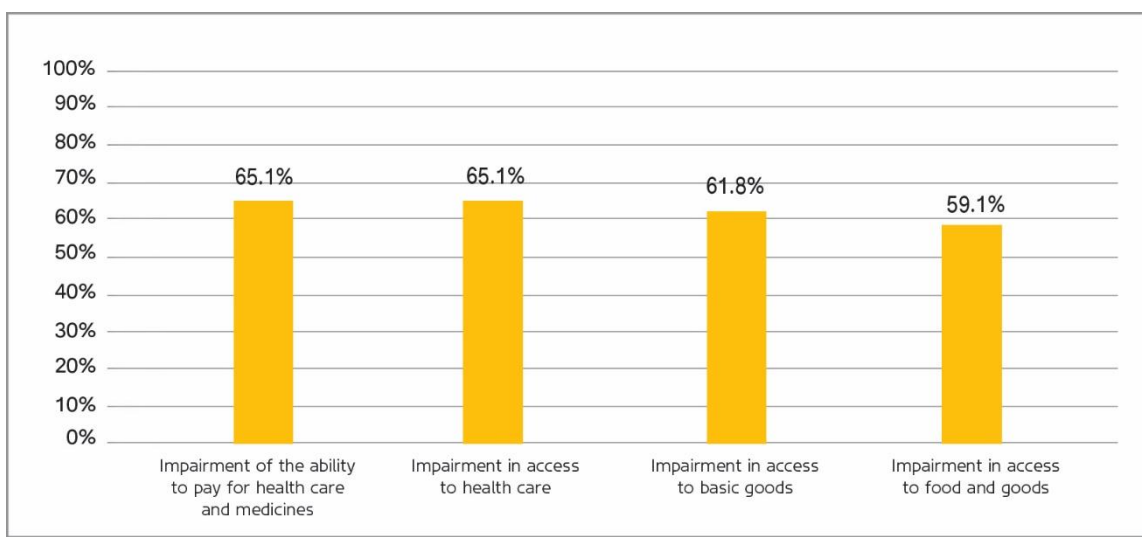
Figure 6: Reports of the Impact of the War on the Sense of Economic Security (Medium – High Level), according to Type of Locality



Access to goods, food, and health care

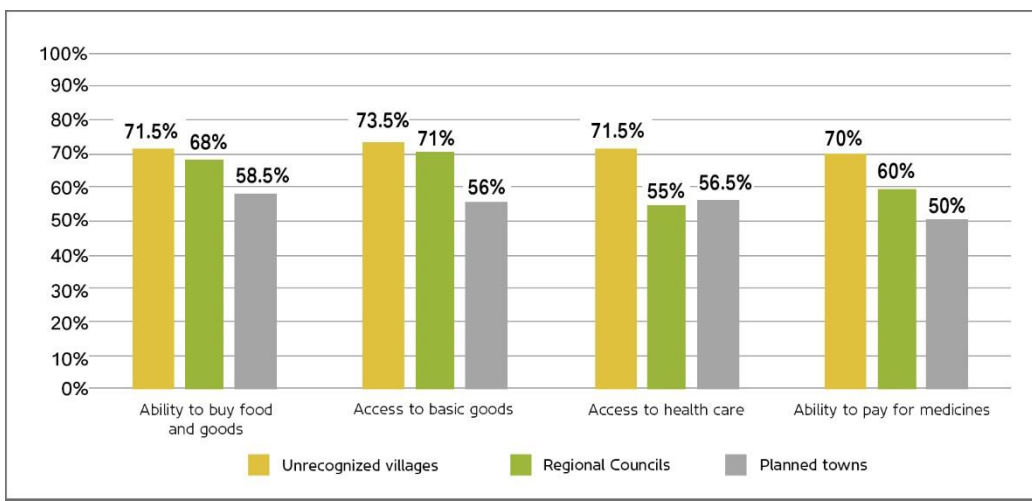
Approximately two-thirds of all of the respondents reported some degree of harm to their access to goods, food and health care and to their ability to cover the costs of medicines during the war. The residents of the unrecognized villages were hurt the most: 70 – 75% of the respondents reported some degree of harm to their access to goods, food, and health care. The residents with a non-academic level of education were significantly more harmed than the residents with an academic level of education were.

Figure 7: Reports of Impairment in Access to Goods, Food, Medicines, and Health Care among All Survey Respondents



Out of all of the respondents, 65.1% reported levels of medium to very severe damage to their access to food and goods, and to their access to basic goods. Nearly 62% of all of the respondents reported levels of medium to very severe damage to their access to health services; 59.1% reported damage to their ability to pay for health services and medicines during the war.

Figure 8: Reports of Impairment in Access to Goods, Food, Medicines, and Health Care, according to Kind of Community

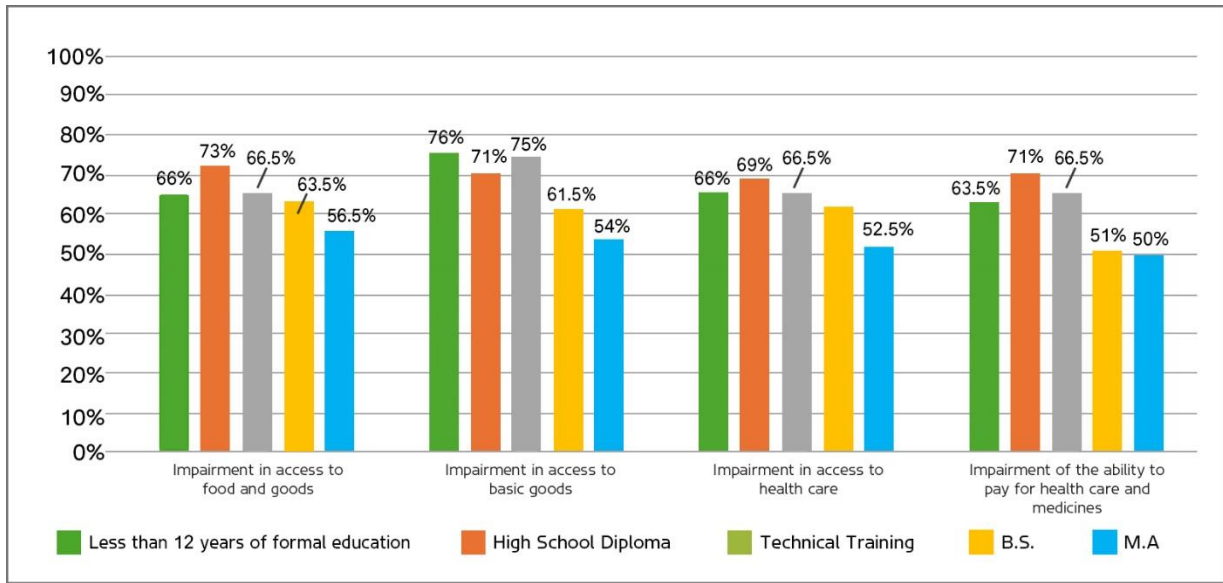


The residents of the unrecognized villages experienced the most severe damage to their access to food, goods, health care and their ability to pay for them. Nearly 72% of these residents reported that their ability to buy food and goods was damaged and 73.5% reported that their access to basic goods was harmed, due to the war. Nearly 72% reported that their access to health care was damaged and 70% noted that their ability to pay for health care and medicines was damaged during the war. In contrast, 68% of the residents of the regional council reported that their ability to buy food and goods was injured as a result of the war; 71% percent of these residents reported that their access to basic goods was also harmed, due to the war. Fifty-five percent reported that their access to health care was damaged and 60% noted that their ability to pay for this care and medicines was damaged. Finally, 58.5% of the respondents from the planned towns reported that their ability to buy food and goods was harmed, and 56% reported that their access to basic goods was damaged, because of the war. Additionally, 56.5% reported that their access to medical care was harmed and 50% noted that their ability to pay for this care and medicines was also damaged.

The respondents, who had an educational level of technical training, high school, and less than 12 years of formal education, reported higher levels of damage to their access to food, goods and medicines, than the respondents who had an academic-level of education. Seventy-three percent of the respondents with high school education reported that their access to food and goods was damaged. In descending order, respondents with technical training (66.5%), with less than 12 years of formal education (66%), with undergraduate degrees (63.5%) and with graduate degrees (56.5%) reported damage to this access. Seventy-six percent of the respondents, who had less than 12 years of formal education, reported that their access to basic goods had been harmed. This group was followed by respondents who had technical training (75%), respondents with a high school diploma (71%), respondents with an undergraduate degree (61.5%) and respondents with a Masters' degree (54%).

Sixty-nine percent of the respondents with a high school level of education reported that their access to health care had been damaged. After this group, in descending order, were respondents with technical training (66.5%), with less than 12 years of formal schooling (66%), with a Masters' degree (62%) and with a Bachelor's degree (52.5%). Seventy-one percent of the respondents, who had a high school level of education reported that their ability to pay for health care and medicines had been harmed. In descending order, respondents with technical training (66.5%), with less than 12 years of formal education (63.5%), with an undergraduate degree (51%) and with a graduate degree (50%), also noted this damage.

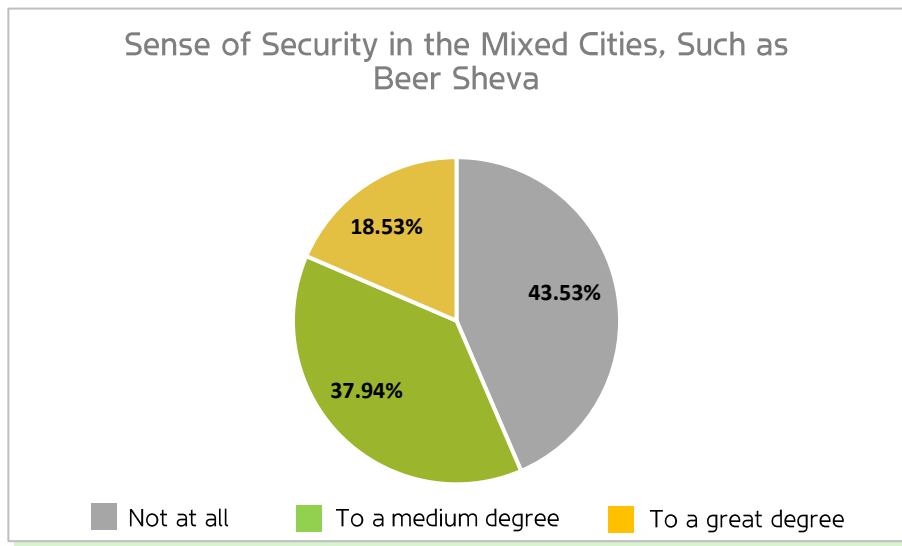
Figure 9: Reports of Impairment in Access to Goods, Food, Medicines, and Health Care, according to Level of Education



Public space and workplace

Nearly 44% of all of the respondents reported that they do not feel at all safe to come to cities, such as Beer Sheva, during the war. Forty-seven percent noted that they have a high level of fear of racist remarks and harassment in the workplace.

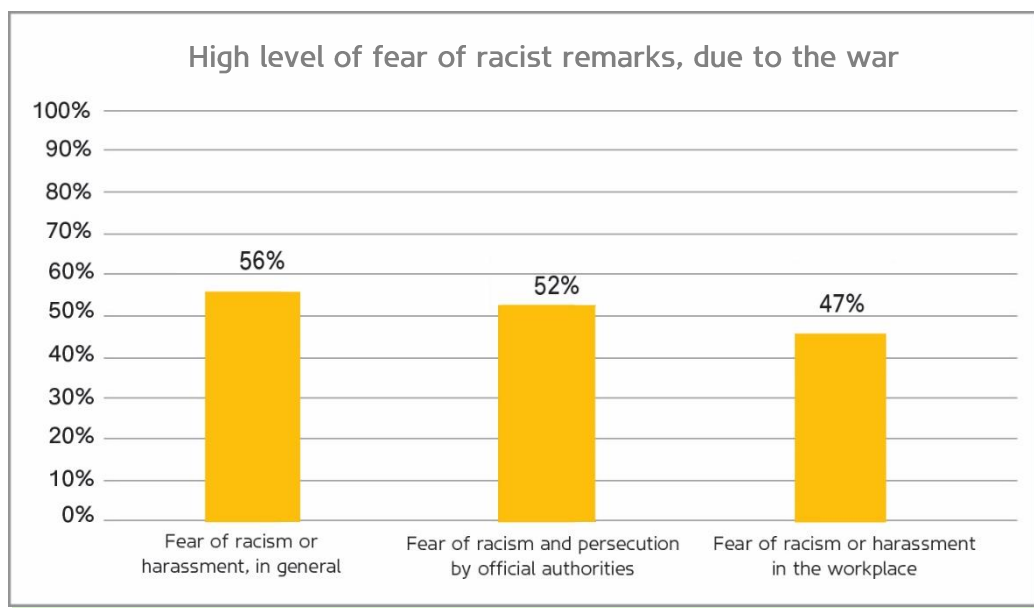
Figure 10: Reports Concerning Sense of Security in the Public Space among All Survey Respondents



In their responses to the question about traveling to localities that are outside of the respondents' community, 43.5% of the entire sample reported that this made them feel very insecure. This trend increased in relation to cities, such as Beer Sheva: 43.5% reported that they do not feel secure at all to travel to the cities during the war, 38% reported that they feel a medium sense of security and 18.5% reported that they feel a high level of

security. Beer Sheva serves as a main employment space for residents of the unrecognized Bedouin villages, since these residents have few employment opportunities in their villages. The fear that was expressed by many of the respondents demonstrates that the war, which has increased tensions between Jews and Arabs, has consequences for the employment of the Bedouin workers in the Negev. Additionally, 56% of the respondents expressed their fear of overall racism and harassment, Fifty-two percent expressed fear of persecution by official authorities, and 47% noted their fear of racist remarks and harassment in their workplace.

Figure 11: Survey Respondents' Reports of Fear of Racist Remarks



Effects of the War: The Weakening of the Disadvantaged Population Weakening of the Disadvantaged Population

The Negev Bedouin population lives in diverse spaces, in three different kinds of communities – planned towns, recognized villages in the regional councils, and unrecognized villages. Thus, there is spatial variance, since there are communities that are unrecognized by the State. This pushes the residents of these villages to the margins. Thus, this spatial variance has a hierarchical characteristic: the more that a space is marginalized, it has less resources, infrastructure and employment opportunities, exposing its population to higher rates of vulnerability.

The survey results point to the seriousness of the economic and employment consequences for all of the Bedouin communities in the Negev. The residents of the recognized communities were significantly hurt during the war. The harm caused to these communities, in general, and to Rahat, in specific, which is home to 26% of the entire Negev Bedouin population, and which has among the highest rates of employment and education, signals the deep harm caused to all of the Bedouin communities. The percentage of employees in Rahat is high, in relation to the other Bedouin communities, and the city serves approximately 40% of all the Bedouins who participate in the labor market. While the results of our survey exposed the significant harm caused to the employees in the

planned towns, the results from the Department of the Head Economist showed that the harm caused to these workers affects both employed and self-employed workers. Moreover, the highest percentage of business owners who lost significant income during the war come from Rahat. This finding requires us to not only specifically relate to the salaried workers who were fired or placed on unpaid leave, but also to understand the need to revitalize the local businesses that are a significant sector of the local labor market in Rahat.

The survey results point to the fact that the more marginalized a space is, the negative impacts of the war on the socio-economic and employment state of the population in that space are greater. In other words, the residents of the unrecognized villages are the most vulnerable population. The findings demonstrate that these residents were harmed the most during the war, from both an economic and employment aspect. They reported the highest rates of loss of: income (31.15%), sense of economic security (71%), access to food and goods, and the ability to pay for health services and food (between 70 – 75%). Moreover, the damage to the access to food and medical services among the residents of the unrecognized villages was 20% higher than in the planned towns and the regional councils. This statistic testifies to the depth of the distress of the residents of the unrecognized villages: it is deeper than that of the residents of the towns and the regional councils, emphasizing the spatial marginality of these residents.

Another trend that arose from the results of the survey reflects the harm caused to the respondents who do not have an academic level of education: the rate of harm was greater among the residents of the unrecognized villages than for residents living in the planned towns and regional councils. The respondents who do not have an academic level of education reported the most significant levels of harm, due to the war. Approximately 28% of the respondents without a higher educational level reported a loss of their source of income. Moreover, they were also placed on unpaid leave at a higher rate (9%) during the war. The percentages of damage to their access to food and goods and their ability to pay for health care was also higher (63 – 76%) than among people with academic-level education. These findings match the wide trends that have developed during the war, concerning the harm caused to labor branches – such as in construction, transportation and industry and production – which hire workers without an academic-level of education. Alongside the employment and economic ramifications, we also found that the respondents, from all three kinds of Bedouin communities, expressed fears of arriving to the Jewish cities. They feared harassment in the workplace, due to their ethno-national background. In other words, it was not only that the war affected their income, economic security and socio-economic status, but also exacerbated the tension between Arabs and Jews, which, in turn has the potential to continue to undermine employment opportunities for the Bedouin population. The increase in tension between Arabs and Jews in Israel, and, in particular, in the Negev, demands intervention that will encourage employers to hire Bedouin workers, especially during times of national crisis.

The trends that arose from the analyses of the data emphasize the need to differentially address the issues facing the residents from the different kinds of Bedouin communities. The survey results point to the impact of the war on every aspect of economic and job security of the Negev Bedouin population. However, this impact changes, according to kind of community: it is the most serious among the residents of the unrecognized villages. As a result, there is a need to develop a unique plan for these residents – a plan that will focus on building an infrastructure of defense, since without such protection in the public space, there will be an increase in the fear of the residents to move around in the space. In turn, this projects on their access to employment, to distribution of food, goods and subsidies of health care and medicines. One of the main characteristics of the unrecognized villages is that they lack infrastructures, including transportation and paved roads. This lack greatly impacts access to grocery stores and pharmacies, during times of war. As a result, the acute need arises to provide food, and goods, especially medicines, along with food stamps. Since the residents do not feel safe to travel outside of their village, due to the ongoing war and rocket attacks, giving residents food stamps does not ensure that they will actually be able to use them.

Overall, the high percentages of respondents, from the entire sample, and, in specific, from the unrecognized villages and from the residents who do not have an academic-level education, have suffered economic loss. As a result, they cannot cover the costs of health care and medicines. All of this points to the deepening of poverty in this population during the war.

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