



Inter-Agency Task Force on Israeli Arab Issues

**The Council for Higher Education's  
Plans to Enhance Arab Citizens Access to Higher Education:  
Progress and New Priorities<sup>1</sup>:**

September 2017

In 2011 Israel's Council for Higher Education (CHE) launched the first ever six-year plan to enhance Arab citizens' access to higher education in Israel. The plan, described in detail in a 2012 [Task Force briefing paper](#), invested NIS 330 million from 2011 through 2016 to remove barriers to higher education, and close access gaps from matriculation through graduation and advanced degrees. In 2016, upon completion of the first six-year plan, the CHE launched a *second* six-year plan to continue and expand these programs, with anticipated investments of more than NIS 600 million.

Higher education remains the most important factor overall for Arab citizens' access to Israel's job market and economic advancement. In terms of employment rates and access to in-demand fields, Arab citizens with higher education degrees—and degrees in in-demand fields especially—are far more likely to succeed than those without. Closing higher education gaps, therefore, is seen as a domestic priority by the Government of Israel and an essential part of its [unprecedented commitment](#) to economically advance Israel's Arab society. Higher education is also often the first opportunity most Jewish and Arab citizens have for meaningful contact and experiences with each other, as each community attends separate Hebrew and Arabic public school streams.

Efforts undertaken by the first six-year plan have led to significant improvements in the number of Arab students attending higher education, as well as in the diversity of fields of study. Within the framework of the plan, many programs were developed, piloted and improved over time. The second six-year plan builds on these efforts, further developing existing programs and identifying additional priorities.

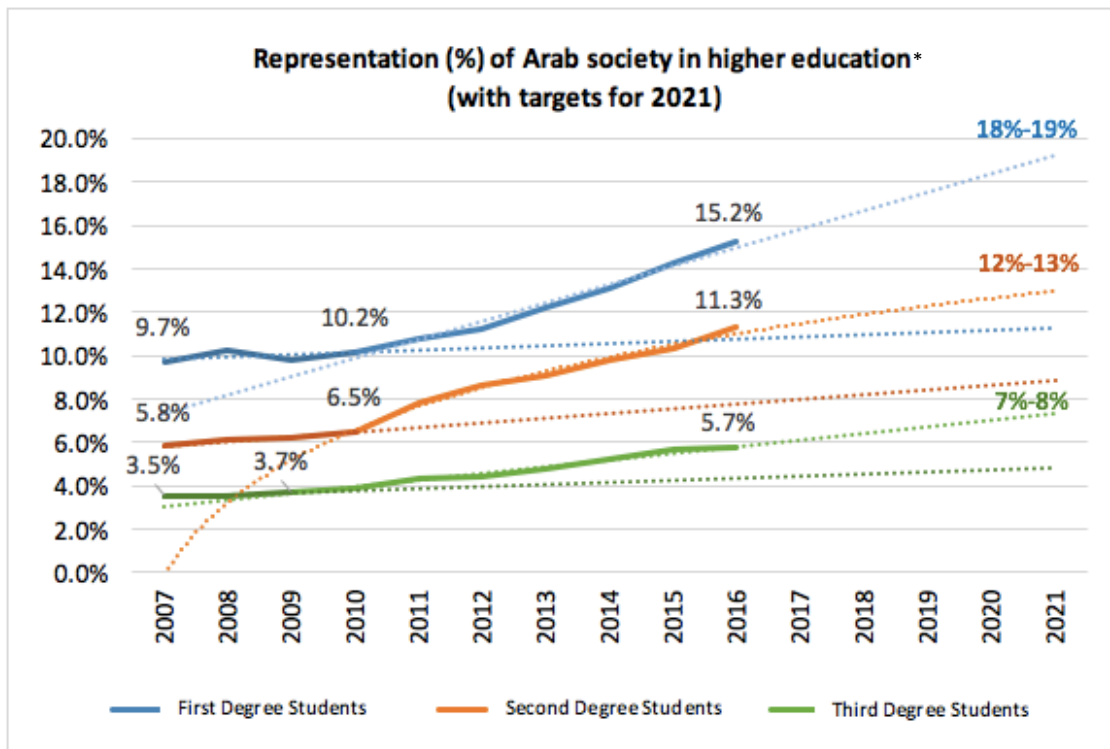
This update outlines the current status of Arab citizens' access to higher education in Israel, and the major programs and models within the framework of the first and second CHE's six-year plans. It concludes with the additional priorities identified for the second six-year plan.

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<sup>1</sup> We extend our gratitude to **Aran Zinner** from the Council for Higher Education for his generosity in time, information and insights and for his assistance in bringing this issue to the awareness of Jewish-American audiences.

## Current Status

As of September 2017, Arab citizens make up **20.9%** of Israel's population overall (17.5% not including East Jerusalem) but participate in higher education at rates well below this proportion, especially in advanced degrees and as faculty. The first six-year plan has been successful in increasing the number of Arab students in Israel's colleges and universities. Today, Arab students make up **15.2%** of Israel's first degree students (compared with 10.2% in 2010), **11.3%** of master's students (compared with 6.5% in 2010) and **5.7%** of PhD students (compared with 3.9% in 2010). Representation is now on track to reach 2021 targets of **18.5%** of first degree students, **12.6%** of master's, and **7.3%** of doctoral students, as indicated in the following CHE chart.

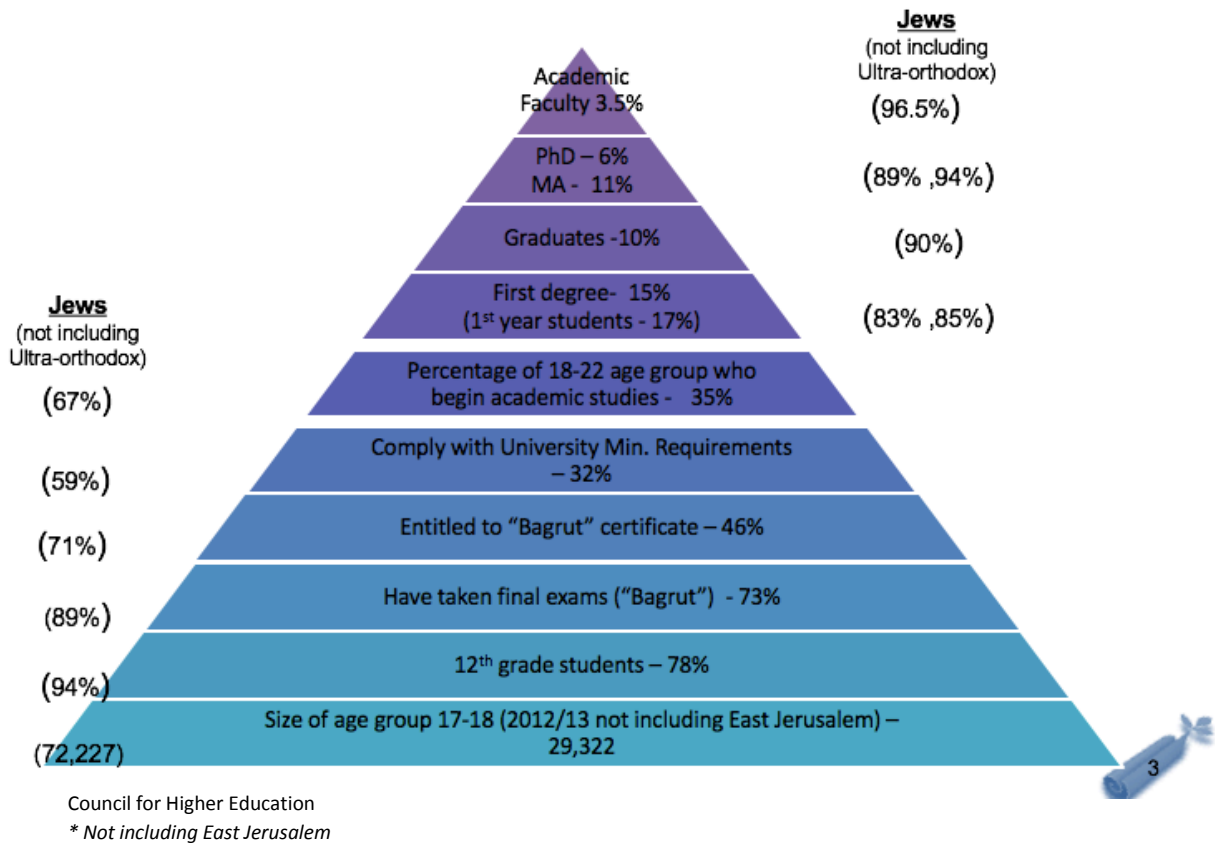


Council for Higher Education  
\* Not including East Jerusalem

## Representation and Achievement Gaps

Despite significant increases across the board, representation and achievement gaps between Arab and Jewish students remain. These gaps begin prior to matriculation, with lower achievement levels in high school, and persist through completion of higher education and advanced degrees, to especially low Arab representation among Israel's academic faculty as illustrated in the pyramid graph below.

## Gaps in higher education between Jews and Arabs\*



- **78%** of Arab youth reached the 12<sup>th</sup> grade, compared to 94% of non-Ultra-Orthodox Jewish youth.
- **73%** of Arab youth took the matriculation exams, compared to 89% of non-Ultra-Orthodox Jewish youth.
- **46%** of Arab youth received a matriculation certificate, compared with 71% of non-Ultra-Orthodox Jewish youth.
- **32%** of Arab youth's matriculation complied with higher education minimum requirements, compared with 59% of non-Ultra-Orthodox Jewish youth.
- While Arabs make up **17% of first year higher education students**, they are only **10% of first degree graduates** because of higher dropout rates than their Jewish peers. Between the first and second year of undergraduate studies, 13% of Arab students drop out compared with 10% of Jewish ones.
- Arab students are also far less likely to graduate on time compared to Jewish students. More Arab students than Jewish students change their fields of studies (16.7% compared with 9% respectively) and only **36%** of Arab students are able to finish their academic studies in the standard time, compared with **53%** of Jewish students.

- Representation gaps are more pronounced in advanced degrees with Arab students comprising **11.3%** and **5.7%** percent of Master’s and Doctoral candidates.
- Arabs make up **3.5%** of all higher education faculty, and **2%** of administrative staff in Israel’s colleges and universities.

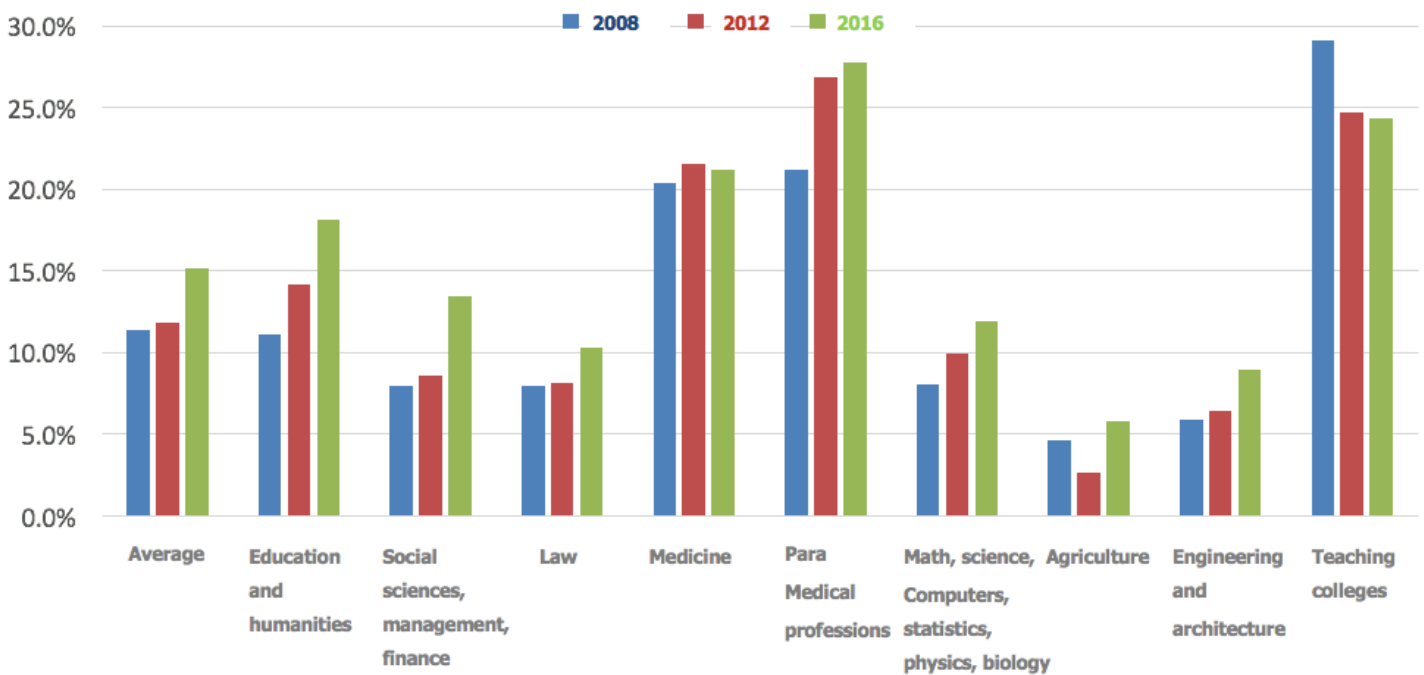
\* Percentages above do not include East Jerusalem

### Fields of Study

Both the first and second six-year plans intended to address access not only to higher education, but to in-demand fields of study that have particularly low numbers of Arab students, especially engineering and hi-tech related degrees. There has been some success in encouraging Arab students to branch out from fields such as teaching and paramedical professions and towards less saturated fields. As illustrated in the graph below, however, Arab students are still underrepresented in non-medical STEM fields that are key to entering Israel’s most advanced labor market.



### Arab Student Distribution by Field of Study



Not Including the Open University

### Gateway to Employment

Regardless of field of study, higher education is the most decisive factor for Arab citizens’ access to Israel’s labor market in terms of the rate and quality of employment, and access to in-demand fields.

## Arab Men

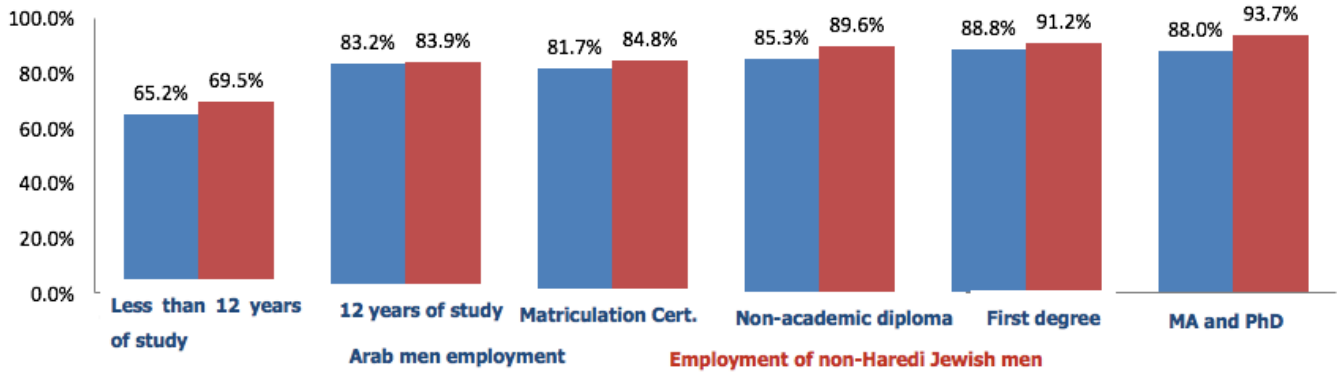
Israel's employment rates for Arab and Jewish men with comparable educational attainment are similar, with Arab men lagging behind Jewish men by 5% or less. However, there are many more Arab men working at lower-level and lower-skilled jobs than Jewish men since far fewer have the education to enter advanced fields. In addition, those with advanced degrees still face challenges entering the workforce in their areas of expertise.

## Arab Women

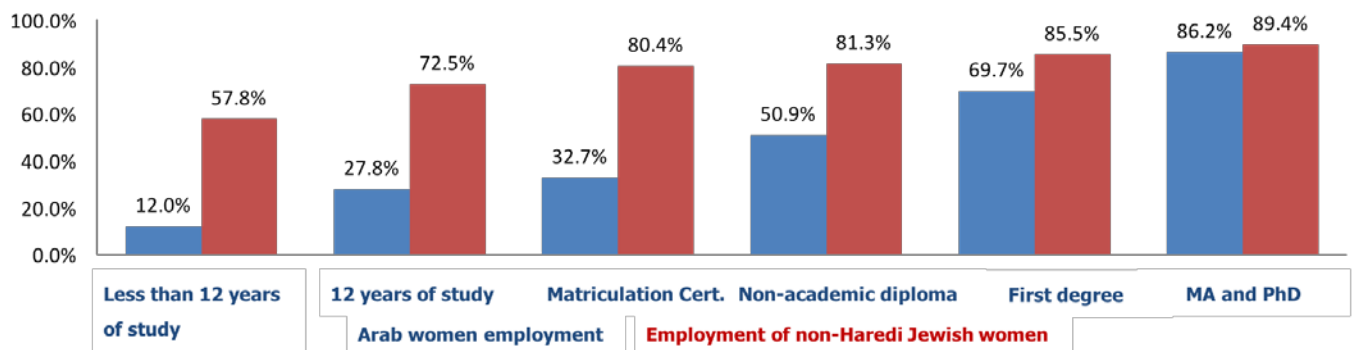
Among Arab women, the correlation between education and employment is clear. The higher the educational attainment of an Arab woman, the more likely she is to participate in the workforce, and the smaller the gap with Jewish women. With Arab women's overall employment rates at 34% (by far Israel's lowest), the Government of Israel has made enhancing Arab women's access to employment a major priority for advancing Arab society and strengthening Israel's economy as a whole.

**Employment Rates by Educational Attainment  
Ministry of Finance 2015**

### Arab Men

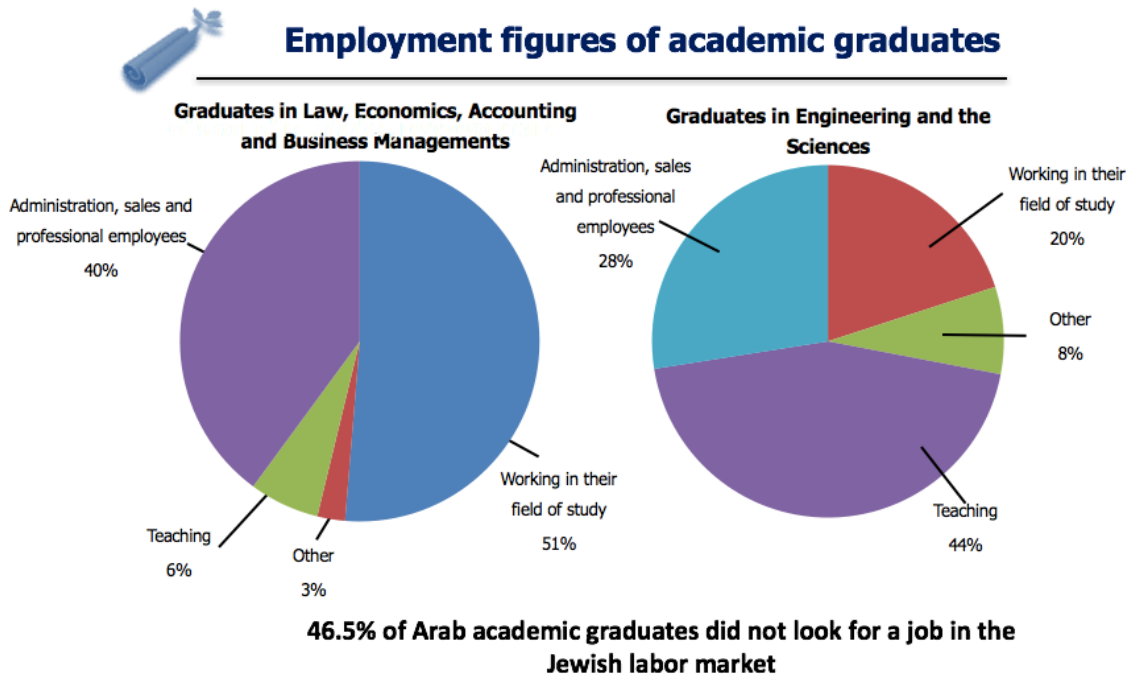


### Arab Women



## Fields of Employment

While there is a direct relationship between higher education and employment of Arab citizens, that employment is usually not in their field of study. In 2011, when the first six-year plan was launched, only **20%** of graduates in engineering and the sciences worked as professionals in their field of study, as were only **51%** of graduates in law, economics, accounting and business management. Overall, **46.5%** of Arab graduates did not even look for a job in the Jewish labor market. As discussed further below, the CHE plans incorporate career counseling to close gaps in transitioning from higher education to relevant industries.



Source: Ministry of Economy, 2011 data

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## MAJOR COMPONENTS OF THE FIRST AND SECOND SIX-YEAR PLANS

The CHE's second six-year plan builds on the national framework established by the first six-year plan. The goals of both are to (1) increase the number of Arab students and graduates and shorten the average time to graduation; (2) widen the range of fields of study undertaken by Arab men and women; and (3) increase the number of Arab students in advanced degree programs.

The framework is based on the premises that:

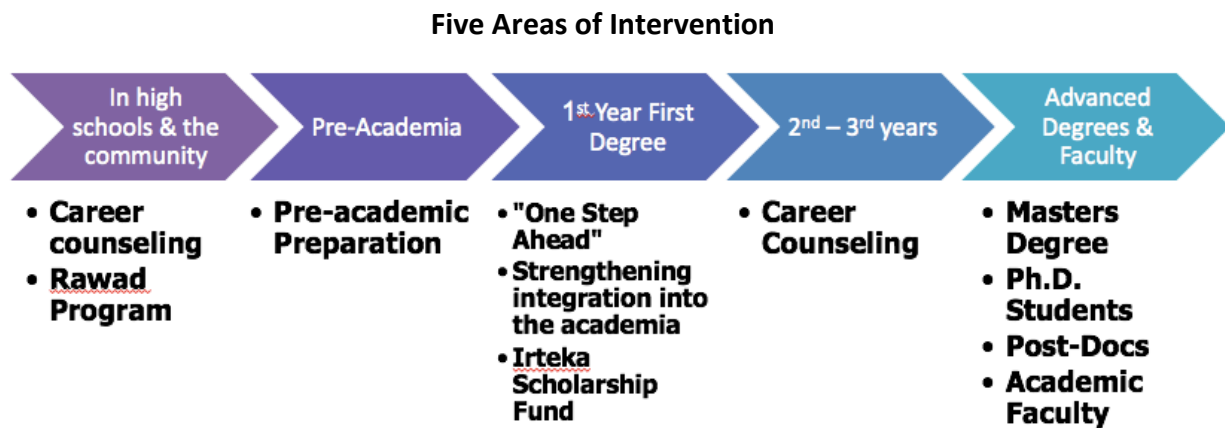
- Enhancing access to higher education should take place within existing institutions;
- The plans should encompass all Arab citizens of relevant age, students and non-students;
- A wide variety of barriers from high school through employment need to be targeted;
- Increasing the number of students requires better absorption and experience in higher education institutions;

- Flexibility is necessary to allow for piloting, trial and error and real-time modifications in consultation with Arab society; and
- Academic institutions must be responsible and take ownership of the process on their own campuses. Each must appoint a senior staff person under the President/Rector to lead the process, translate the institutional website into Arabic, and establish a steering committee.

### Areas of Intervention

The CHE organized the six-year plans along five main stages of the education continuum: high school, pre-higher education, the first year of academic studies, completion of a first degree and career orientation, advanced degrees and faculty. The plans' major programs all fall under a particular area of focus along this continuum.

State-funded colleges and universities are the program implementers for all but the first stage of the plan. As part of the first six-year plan, in order to submit proposals and receive funding for doing so, these institutions were required to develop a support and guidance system led by a senior academic staff to manage and oversee programs and an institutional steering committee, as well as translate their website into Arabic.



### High School and Community

Efforts focused on high school and the community aim to increase the number of Arab high school students interested in and ready to enter higher education, and moreover, to increase the number pursuing in-demand fields. The programs operating in this area aim to enhance awareness about higher education and Israel's labor market among high school students and in their community, support them and their families with the decision-making process, and encourage selection of relevant academic paths.

**High Schools:** In the Arab high schools, programs are operated by [Kav Mashve](#), [Israel Association of Community Centers](#), and the [Atid Educational Network](#). Implementation began in 2015, reaching approximately 4,000 high school students. As of the end of the 2017 school year, the

program will reach 6,250 students. Programs in high schools are slated to continue through the course of the second six-year plan.

**Rawad:** The community program within the framework of the plan is *Rawad*, operated by the [Aluma Association](#). This program employs local Arab coordinators that provide counseling and assistance to Arabs age 18 through 30 in their own communities. It provides academic and career counseling, preparatory courses for the psychometric exam, access to scholarships and pre-academic courses, and personal accompaniment throughout the first year of studies. This program has been growing steadily and will reach 40 coordinators serving 61 municipalities by the end of the 2018/2019 academic year.

### **Pre-academic preparation courses**

Israel's colleges and universities offer pre-academic courses for students who feel under prepared for the first year of higher education or want to begin a step ahead. Though Arab students begin their academic studies with a variety of disadvantages related to lower matriculation results, Hebrew language proficiency, and less developed academic skills, for example, few were taking advantage of pre-academic courses. This stemmed from numerous causes including (i) lack of courses that were well-suited to the particular needs of Arab students, (ii) negative stigmas associated with pre-academic studies (i.e. as a sign of weakness, or a waste of time), (iii) a lack of awareness of their importance and potential benefits, and (iv) financial costs that deter or obstruct participation.

The first six-year plan aimed to increase Arab participation in pre-academic courses, and encourage more institutions to provide courses addressing Arab students' needs. The plan provided subsidies for participation, created a preparation and mentoring package for Arab participants, and offered scholarships for excelling course graduates continuing to academic studies. Additional budgets were allocated to each academic institution for marketing pre-academic courses in Arab society so as to enhance awareness and dispel stigmas.

As a result of these efforts, Arab participation in pre academic courses throughout the country grew from around 6% of all participants in such courses in 2011, to around 14.6% in 2017. In 2016, a special support package was added for East Jerusalem students with a focus on Hebrew enhancement.

### **First year and first degree assistance**

To lower dropout rates among Arab students and to address the fact that still today, 64% of Arab students take longer to graduate from first degree studies than the Jewish majority, several programs have been established within the first plan:

1. **"One Step Ahead"** – This intensive, short-term course for new students takes place in the summer prior to the start of the first year of higher education. The course covers orientation to academia, study skills, and Hebrew language enhancement. The number of academic institutions offering this program grew from 13 in 2014 to 18 in 2017 and the number of Arab participants grew from 774 students in 2014 to 1,366 in 2017.



2. **"Absorption into the Academia"** – Through this program every academic institution develops a holistic plan to support Arab student transition and absorption into higher education. Activities budgeted include: academic and social support, academic counseling, and cultural activities.
3. **Dialogue program** – Dialogue and joint activities between Arab and Jewish students are seen as an important measure to create a more inclusive and welcoming campus where Arab students can succeed. The six-year plan provided budgets for campuses to develop and run such programs. These budgets are expected to increase in the second six-year plan as more campuses have been using them.
4. **IRTEKA Scholarships Fund** – This scholarship fund was launched in 2014 as a partnership between the CHE, the Authority for Economic Development of the Minorities Sector, Israel's Lottery, and American Jewish philanthropy. As of 2016, it is being fully supported by the Government of Israel in partnership with Israel's Lottery. The goal of the scholarships is to remove financial barriers to academic studies for Arab students and incentivize in-demand fields of study by covering 80%-100% of first-degree tuition costs to Arab students from weak socio-economic backgrounds who study in-demand fields'.<sup>2</sup> The number of scholarships has grown from 650 in 2014 to 800 as of the first year of the second six-year plan, with the total annual budget now NIS 18 million.

### **Career Counseling for First Degree Students**

For students in their 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> years of study (and 4<sup>th</sup> for engineering), the CHE plan provides for career counseling centers within Israel's colleges and universities, equipped to support and prepare students for the transition to the labor market. The model for a career center geared towards Arab needs was developed and initially implemented as a joint initiative between the CHE and [Kav Mashve](#). Once developed, the initial phase of implementation also focused on raising awareness among professors, department heads, and students that these resources are available. The second phase focused on making these centers an integrated part of academic institutions such that they will be sustained as part of university services. As of this academic year, career centers with these capabilities are integrated into every Israeli higher education institution. Now that the basic operation of these centers is part of colleges and universities' budgets, funds from the second six-year plan for these centers are being used to expand their capacities and develop additional services for Arab students.

### **Advanced degrees and faculty**

To increase the number of Arab students pursuing advanced degrees, scholarships are being offered to MA students undertaking a research thesis (NIS 40,000), PhD students (NIS 70,000),

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<sup>2</sup> "Preferred fields" were defined by a special Steering Committee established by the CHE with the participation of governmental bodies and leading Arab academics, Chaired by Prof. Edriss Titti from the Weitzman Institute. These are spheres of study relevant for the advanced labor market where Arab students are under-represented, including, for example, high-tech, engineering, economics, sciences and the arts.

post-docs (NIS 80,000), and to young Arab faculty (full salary) through the “Maof” scholarships program. In many cases, not all the scholarships were allocated due to a lack of candidates who met scholarship criteria. The CHE is currently working with the [Yad Hanadiv](#) Rothschild Foundation to develop an excellence program to increase the number of Arabs pursuing advanced degrees and academic careers.

## **AREAS TO BE FURTHER DEVELOPED**

The second six-year plan is designed to build on the successes of the first six-year plan, but also use the substantially larger budgets, learning and experience gained to expand its scope. Below is a list of some of the second-year plan’s new and expanded priorities:

1. **Fields of study:** Continuing to diversify fields of study (especially for women) and focus on excellence.
2. **Prolonged studies:** Evaluating existing support programs, focusing on the longer-than average graduation rates among Arab students.
3. **Diversity:** Enhanced focus on Arab representation in advanced degrees and among faculty and administrative staff.
4. **Multicultural campuses:** More emphasis on creating diverse campuses and establishing multicultural tools and practices, including for example, representation of Arabs in academic and administrative staff, culturally sensitive academic calendars, signs in Arabic, marketing in Arab society, cultural training of academic and administrative staff on campus including teaching Arabic, etc.
5. **Psychology:** Increasing the number of Arab students studying psychology.
6. **Negev Bedouins and East Jerusalem residents:** Continued focus on special programs for Bedouins in the Negev and Arab residents of East Jerusalem.
7. **Psychometric exam:** Exploring alternatives to the psychometric exam.
8. **Public transportation:** Mapping existing barriers related to the lack of appropriate public transportation services between Arab localities and higher education institutions, and discuss these with the Ministry of Transportation.