

# **Children's Welfare in Israel: Growing Up in a Multi-Cultural Society**

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## **Introduction**

This country study is aimed at reviewing the well being of children in Israel. The report refers to all children living within the borders of Israel, whether citizens or not, as well as to children who are Israeli citizens and are living in the occupied territories (West Bank and Gaza Strip). The report does not refer to Palestinian children living within the occupied territories. In the report we have looked at children's economic and social welfare, their access to time and space and finally their rights. We have tried to do so by implying a generational perspective, wherever possible.

The report relies on a number of sources of information and publications. First and foremost, it is based on the annual 'State of the child report' published in Israel by the National Council for the Child (NCC). Additional data was taken from various reports and surveys conducted by the Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS). Finally, the Israeli National Insurance Institute (INII) and its administrative data archives were also valuable sources for our work. Following the Cost A19 MoU this study focuses on children aged 0-18. However, in some cases due to data unavailability, we refer to different age groups.

The report is composed of 5 parts. This brief introduction is followed by a demographic context description of children in Israel. Then, we explore their social and economic status. In the fourth part, we deal with their access to time and space and finally, we analyse their various rights according to different domains and ages.

## **Demographic and cultural context**

### **Population**

With a population of just over six million inhabitants (2002), Israel is not only a small country, but also a very young one. Some 33% of the population are

children under the age of 18 totaling to just over 2,200,000 children. In fact, when one looks at the generational distribution of the Israeli population one sees that although the share of the elderly in the population is growing and that of the children is shrinking, Israel is still a young society, and the share of children is among the highest in western societies (UNICEF, 2003).

Israel is not only a young society but also a very heterogeneous one. This is especially eminent when looking at the demographic composition of the child population. Only 70% of the children are Jews and some 24% of the children are Muslim Arabs. The rest of the child population includes Christians Arabs, Druze and some two per cent who are registered as having no religion (Ben-Arieh et al., 2003).

In fact, the demographic composition is even more complicated due to the fact that the two major religions consist of different sub-groups. Let us observe, for example, the Jewish child population. It includes Jews that came to Israel after January 1, 1990, mostly from the former USSR and Ethiopia. These child immigrants make up some 16% of the overall Jewish child population. About 10% of the Jewish children are Ultra-Orthodox. Finally, one should also keep in mind in that context, that there is still much evidence of a gap between Jewish children in families of Western origin (Ashkenzim) and those of African or Asian origin (Sepharadim) (Ben-Arieh et al., 2003).

The demographic diversity exists not only among the Jewish population, but also among the Arab one. Some eight per cent of those children are Christian Arabs. An additional eight per cent are Druze and some 10% are Bedouin Muslims (Ben-Arieh et al., 2003).

This differentiation between groups and sub-groups is important not only for demographic reasons but also because of the correlation found between these sub-groups and a variety of indicators of children's well being.

## **Migration**

The state of Israel was founded as a modern state after World War II and the holocaust, as the national home for Jews from all over the world. Israel is, thus, a migration society, built by waves of Jewish immigrants coming from all around the world. This immigration of Jews back to their homeland has continued all along the state's 56 years of existence. Still, this continuous immigration is marked by some significant 'waves'. One of them is the immigration from the former Soviet Union and Ethiopia, taking place during the recent years after these countries decided to allow Jewish immigration. This 'new' wave of immigration (defined as those who arrived in Israel after January 1, 1990) affected the fabric of the Israeli society significantly. During this period more than 250,000 children immigrated to Israel (including mostly

children from the former USSR and Ethiopia as well as children from Argentina, France, USA and eventually many other countries). As mentioned above, this number corresponds to 12% of all the children in the country (Ben-Arieh et al., 2003).

This significant wave of immigration brought to Israel not only many 'new' children. It has also brought forward new cultures and new compositions of families. Consequently, it has affected the well being of Israeli children on various levels (national, local, communitarian and familial levels). For example, the immigrants from Africa and especially those coming from Ethiopia are unique in that they have a large share of children (aged 0-17) among them (51.8%). The immigrants from North America are characterized by the large share of young children (aged 0-4) among them (11%) and the immigrants from the former Soviet Union are characterized by having fewer children among them and by a high proportion of single parent families (Ben-Arieh et al., 2003). In that regard, an in-depth study of the immigrant children is very much worthy.

### **Urban/rural setting**

The vast majority of Israeli children live in urban areas.<sup>1</sup> Approximately one fifth of them live in cities with more than 200,000 inhabitants and 11% live in rural areas. As to the latter, the largest group is Jewish (11.4%) and second in place are Moslems (eight per cent). Only 2.4% of Druze and 1.9% of Christian children live in rural areas. So do 6.3% of the children whose religion is unclassified.<sup>2</sup> It seems that the latter live within the Jewish society.

Children constitute a larger share of the population in smaller cities and in the Arab and Ultra-Orthodox cities. In contrast to the religious cities (those who have a significant portion of Ultra-orthodox or orthodox population), in the secular Jewish ones (notably, Tel-Aviv and Haifa) children constitute a smaller share of the population, while the elderly constitute a bigger one.

In a generational perspective one can argue that the Arab and Jewish orthodox communities are younger as well as the geographic peripheral localities (the smaller ones), in contrast the communities living in the bigger and more secular Jewish localities are older.

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<sup>1</sup> In Israel a locality is defined as 'urban' if it has more than 5,000 inhabitants and it would become a city if it has more than 20,000 inhabitants.

<sup>2</sup> Children with an unclassified religion is a new phenomenon in Israel consisting mainly of new immigrants from the former USSR which define themselves as atheists.

## **The families**

From 1980 to 2001 the average number of children per family decreased steadily from 2.7 in 1980 to 2.3 in 2001. Recent years indicate a tendency of stabilization. During this period, the number of families with one child has doubled (from 156,000 to 327,000), and their relative share in the population increased (from 27.3% to 34.9%). At the same time, the number of families with 6 or more children decreased (from 40,000 to 39,000) as well as their relative share of all families with children (from 6.9% to 4.2%) (Ben-Arieh et al., 2003).

Nevertheless, Israel is still characterized by relatively large families. Some 17% of the families have 4 or more children – much higher than in most western countries. This is mostly due to the birth rate among two of the sub-populations – the Arabs and the Ultra-Orthodox.

With regard to the family composition, Israel remains a more traditional society. Although the rate of single parent families is on the rise (especially among new immigrants from the former USSR), their proportion among all families is still relatively low – 8.6%. This is especially true with regard to the Arab population in which single parent families almost do not exist. Especially striking is the comparison between the percentage of single parent families among the veteran Jewish families and among the new immigrant families (9% and 23% respectively). The same tendency is recognized concerning the divorce rate: it is definitely on the rise, especially among secular Jews, however the overall divorce rate is still low (Ben-Arieh et al., 2003).

In 2000, some 170,000 children (eight per cent of all children) in Israel lived in a single parent family as compared to 118,000 children (six per cent of all children) in 1993. In 2000 68% of the children living in single parent families were living with a divorced parent as compared to 62% in 1993. Most of the single parent families (70%) had one or two children, only 14% of them had 4 children or more (Ben-Arieh et al., 2003).

As to participation in the labour force, the overall participation rate among married women was 56% in 2002. Among married women with children the participation rate was 75%. When looking at the long-term trend we notice that in 1967 25.3% of all married women were in the work force. This figure grew to 32.5% in 1975, to 43.1% in 1985 and to 52.3 in 1995. Since 1995 the growth continued but in a much slower pace (Israel Central Bureau of Statistics, [www.cbs.gov.il](http://www.cbs.gov.il)). Hence although the growing percentage of women participating in the work force is evident, the overall rate is still lower than in most European countries.

Furthermore, the issue of participation in the labor force in Israel should be looked at through a demographic context. It is evident that in two population groups there is usually one earner per household. Among the Arab community it is usually the women who do not participate in the workforce, while among the

Ultra-orthodox it is usually the men who choose not to participate in the workforce and enter a life-course of religious learning instead.

### **The cultural context: a society with two major minority groups**

As we noted above, Israel child population is unique in having two major minority groups – the Arab and the Jewish Ultra-orthodox child population. This population composition bares an impact not only due to the demographic complexity but also due its multi-cultural nature, and especially the conservative nature of the two minority groups.

First, it is evident that the Arab population is more conservative and traditional than the Jewish population (Al-Haj, 1987; Haj-Yahia, 1995). Such communities are known to have lower take-up rates of social services at large and to avoid involving ‘outsiders’ in their internal issues (Haj-Yahia, 1995). Second, the Arab population is a minority that experience a national and religious conflict with the majority of Israeli society. The social services are perceived not only as ‘outsiders’ but also as representatives of the Jewish state. Haj-Yahia (2000) found that Arab women strongly resist applying to social services and are even more opposed to seeking legal aid or reporting to the police in cases of domestic violence and wife abuse. Such resistance may indeed be attributed to cultural considerations (as noted above), but evidence linked it to political considerations as well, namely status as a national minority and perceived discrimination in provision of social services (Haj-Yahia et al., 2002).

Third, social services in general and child welfare services in particular are less available and are of lower quality in Arab localities than in Jewish ones. In this regard, low government investments in health, education and welfare services for the Arab population and the tremendous load carried by practitioners providing these services in Arab society clearly led to the development of inferior health, education and welfare services, discouraging use thereof and thus engendering lower take-up rates (for comprehensive objective data on these issues, see reports in the Annual Yearbook of the Israel State Comptroller).

The Ultra-orthodox Jewish population, too, is far more conservative than the general population of Israel. As such, similar cultural arguments apply (Friedman, 1991). Furthermore, the Ultra-orthodox separate themselves from the formal State of Israel in various respects. Like the Arab population, they perceive social services not only as outsiders but also as representatives of the state and have developed their own institutions accordingly, including social services, a civil guard (a kind of civilian police force responsible for enforcement of public order and modesty within the community) in lieu of the national police and even a religious court system that they prefer to use to settle

civil and personal affairs and even business disputes (Marty and Appleby, 1993). The use of child welfare services is affected by the ultra-orthodox community's conservative nature and support of more patriarchal patterns of family interaction. Moreover, even when the need for intervention occurs, it is dealt with within the community's own proprietary agencies (rabbis or social services).

This cultural context of child welfare in Israel is even more apparent when one realizes that to some extent geographical areas correlate with demographic and cultural variables such as nationality and religious status. Geography may also reflect cultural differences. In some countries, different cultures have developed in different geographic areas. Furthermore, take-up and operation of social services differ from one area to another, even though Israel is a small country and has had a nationwide social service system since the late 1970s (Ben-Arieh and Gal, 1998). Although social service regulations and operating methods are uniform throughout Israel, availability and usage vary in different areas, partly because of cultural differences.

Recent studies suggest three variables that possibly correlate with and might explain the differences in the take-up of child welfare services in different localities. First, cultural differences among minority groups that lead to less usage of social services (i.e. the Arab and ultra-orthodox groups); second, the perception of the social and the child protection services as formal state institutions may lead to lower take-up rates by minority groups wishing to avoid connection with the State of Israel (i.e. Arab and Ultra-orthodox); and third, the availability and quality of social services at large and child welfare services in particular, demonstrating that the issue concerns take-up as well as culture.

## **Economic and social welfare of children**

### **Background of the Israeli welfare system**

The Israeli welfare state combines an adherence to the Beveridge social insurance model with an emphasis on social assistance provision for the poor, meaning that it was built on similar premises as the British welfare state. Benefit levels are relatively low. Similarly to Britain and other liberal welfare states, Israel puts much emphasis on the provision of social insurance. It does so through free market mechanisms and in particular through the widespread occupational pensions for the elderly and the national programs which serve as a safety net and top-up (Doron and Kramer, 1991). In addition, historically, non-contributory and non-means-tested benefits have also played major role in the Israeli welfare policy (Gal, 2000). While ever since its establishment during the 1950's, the Israeli welfare policy was clearly based on the Beveridge model,

during the 1970's it moved closer to the Social-Democratic model. Despite the introduction of more wage-related benefits, wider coverage of needs and better indexing of benefit levels, it seems that the Israeli welfare policy remains more similar to the ideal liberal welfare state, than any other welfare states in the Esping-Andersen (1990) typology.

Moreover, decision-makers in Israel during the last decade and a half have been publicly committed to cutting welfare expenditure and to put emphasis on individual provision of needs through the market. Apart from social security, Israel has a national health insurance program that effectively provides relatively comprehensive health services to all citizens. Education, between the ages of 5 and 15 (accompanied by a process of lowering the minimum age to 3 in a 10 years process – starting on the year 2000), is compulsory and free (though, some personal payments do exist) and is usually provided by state schools. Finally, the state subsidizes housing for low income and immigrant families.

Social expenses have grown over the last decade. During the late 1990's these expenses reached just over 20% of GDP. In 1999, social services expenses constituted 23% of GDP, comprising 53.5% of the state budget that year. A third of the expenses (36.3%) was devoted to social security programs, primarily old age benefits and child allowances. Education was the major source of expenses among the ones dedicated to direct services. State educational expenses reached 6.8% of GDP in 1999, followed by health expenses as the second major source of governmental social services expenditures. That year the state funded approximately half of the national health expenditures, constituting 3.8% of GDP (Kop, 1999).

## **Child poverty in Israel**

### **Measuring poverty in Israel**

A relative approach to measuring poverty was formulated in the early 1970s within the framework of a research on poverty and income distribution. According to this approach, poverty is an expression of relative distress that should be evaluated in relation to the typical standard of living of a given society: a family is considered poor not only when it is unable to purchase a basic basket of products necessary for its subsistence, but when its living conditions are significantly inferior to those characteristic of the society as a whole.

The method for measuring poverty is based on three principles. The first principle views the family's net income as the relevant income for assessing poverty. Net income is defined as the family's market income (from work as well as from ownership of physical production means and financial assets) plus transfer payments (received not in return for economic efforts, such as national

insurance benefits or support from institutions and individuals in Israel and abroad), minus direct taxes (income tax, national insurance contributions and health insurance contributions).

The second principle regards the population's median net income (the level of income earned by 50% of families) as the society's representative income. The poverty line is defined as the level of income equivalent to 50% of the median net income. A family whose net income is lower than one half of the median net income is thus regarded as poor.

The third principle adjusts the poverty line to the family size. This principle is based on the assumption that family size involves economics of scale, whereby the growth of a family by an additional person increases its needs not by an equivalent, but rather by a lesser, proportion. In other words, the additional income required by a family in order to maintain a fixed standard of living decreases with the increase in the number of family members.

To enable a comparison between the standard of living of families of different sizes, an 'equivalence scale' was developed by which the needs of each such family can be measured against the needs of a family of a given basic size. More specifically, the equivalence scale translates the number of persons in a family into the number of 'standard' persons (or the number of 'standard adults') in that family. The scale is based on a two-member family which is assigned a value of two standard persons. According to this scale, a family with one member has a value of 1.25 standard persons. In other words, the needs of a one-member family are not assessed as equivalent to one half the needs of a two-member family, but as greater. Similarly, the needs of a four-member family (which has a value of 3.2 standard persons) are not set at double the needs of a two-member family (which has a value of 2 standard persons), but at less than double (only 1.6 times greater) (INII, 2003, [www.btl.gov.il](http://www.btl.gov.il)). In fact the Israel 'equivalence scale' rests upon similar principles as the OECD-scales, but does not conform neither with the traditional, nor the modified. The scale is closer to the traditional than the modified, giving more weight on size of families.

In keeping with these principles, the poverty line per standard person in Israel was set at 50% of the median net income per standard person. A family is classified as poor if its net income, divided by the number of standard persons in the family, is lower than the poverty line per standard person. The poverty line per family can be calculated in a similar manner – by multiplying the poverty line per standard person by the number of standard persons in the family.

The poverty line per standard person in 2000 stood at NIS 1,338 (~250 Euro) a month, compared with NIS 1,289 (~240 Euro) in 1999 (in current values for the respective survey periods). In real terms, the poverty line per standard person rose by 2.7% compared to 1999. The average wage in the economy grew by nearly 7% in real terms between the Income Survey dates, hence the poverty



line per standard person declined from 20.7% of the average wage in 1999 to 19.9% in 2000 (National Insurance Institute, 2003).

### **Main developments in poverty<sup>3</sup>**

The number of poor families totaled 305,400 in 2000, compared to 299,700 in 1999. The increase in the number of poor families resulted entirely from the population growth in the country. The percentage of poor in the total population remained constant between 1999 and 2000 at the level of 18.8%. The percentage of poor children in the total population of children rose marginally, from 24.9% in 1999 to 25.2% in 2000. The number of poor persons reached 1,088,100 in 2000 (as compared to 1,059,100 in 1999), and included 481,100 children (466,500 in 1999).

In 2000, the contribution of transfer payments and direct taxes to reducing the incidence of poverty increased. Transfer payments and direct taxes extricated 45.3% of the total number of poor families from poverty, as measured by market income, compared to 44.2% in 1999. The contribution of transfer payments and direct taxes to reducing the incidence of poverty among persons also increased, albeit at a lower rate of 39% (38% in 1999), whereas among children it remained constant at the rate of 29.5%. Adding direct taxes to the transfer payments hurts their effectiveness in reducing poverty among families.

The slight decline in the overall incidence of poverty by net income, which characterized the population as a whole, was not observed among all specific population groups. Specifically, while the poverty incidence among the elderly declined a little, it rose slightly among single-parent and large families, non-Jewish families and families headed by a non-worker who is at working age. Among other population groups, the level of poverty remained unchanged.

The extent of poverty changes significantly according to geographical dispersion and locality. The northern district, the Jerusalem district (both having a relatively high concentration of Arabs) and the southern district were characterized by a high incidence of poverty, reaching 29% in the north, 23.3% in Jerusalem and 20% in the south. The developing regions are also characterized by an incidence of poverty that is higher than the overall average – 20.4% as compared to 17.6%, respectively.

Bnei Brak, Jerusalem and Ashdod are the poorest cities according to the poverty indices: 22%-33% of families living in these cities have a net income below the poverty line. In 2000 a certain improvement in the distribution of income was noticed. The Gini index for distribution of economic income

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<sup>3</sup> All the data on poverty is based on the National Insurance Institute annual reviews at [www.btl.gov.il](http://www.btl.gov.il).

*Children's Welfare in Ageing Europe*

(stemming mainly from the family's work as employee and self-employed) decreased from 0.512 in 1999 to 0.509 in 2000 – a decrease of 0.6%.

An analysis of the economic income's distribution patterns in households headed by an employee and in households headed by a self-employed shows contrasting developments. The Gini index for inequality in income distribution in households headed by employees, increased by 2% (from 0.4305 in 1999 to 0.4390 in 2000), whereas in households headed by self-employed, it decreased significantly. The increase in inequality of economic income in households headed by employees is consistent with the finding regarding the wage gaps between individual employees. Not only that these gaps did not decrease in 2000, but they even widened somewhat.

In 2000, the contribution of benefits and direct taxes – separately and together – to reducing economic income gaps increased (from 30.8% in 1999 to 31.2% in 2000). As a result, the Gini index for inequality in net income declined between 2000 and 1999 by 1.3% (from 0.355 to 0.350). The reduction in inequality reflects a decline in the share of the upper deciles at the expense of the rise in the share of the seventh till ninth deciles. No change occurred in the share of the other deciles between the two years. The moderate improvement in income inequality in 2000 did not essentially change the income distribution in the economy: The share of the lowest fifth quintile in total net income amounted to only 6.8%, whereas the upper fifth quintile took 41.5% of the total net income.

**Table 1.** Poverty rates pre-post welfare (transfer payments and direct taxes) by family type and age, 2000 (%).

		Poverty level	
		Pre welfare	Post welfare
Age group	All population	30.8	18.8
	Children	35.7	25.2
	Elderly	61.5	24.4
Family type	Single-parents	52.7	25.1
	Families with children	27.8	18.7
Family size	1-3 children	22.3	14.4
	4 children and more	57.6	41.8
Population group	Jews	30.8	17.2
	Arabs	55.9	42.9
	New immigrants	43.4	18.7

Source: National Insurance Institute, 'Annual Survey 2000', 2001.

### **The characteristics of children in poverty**

Between 1995 and 1998, the incidence of poverty among child immigrants declined from 22.6% to 17%, but in 1999 and 2000 it rose again to 18.7%, numbering 55,000 children. However, this figure is still lower than the overall percentage of children living in poverty. In Israel children are more likely to be poor if:

- they live in a household where there is less than two bread-earners;
- they live in a single parent household;
- there are four or more children living in the household;
- there is a disabled adult or a disabled child in the household;
- the family receives Income Support or Job Seeker's Allowance;
- the household belongs to a minority group, especially Arab or Ultra-Orthodox (Ben-Arieh and Gal, 1998).

### **Child poverty in a generational perspective**

Table 1 above shows a clear picture on the generational perspective of poverty in Israel. Looking at the pre and post welfare (transfer payments and direct taxes) poverty rates, one can see that although among the elderly the pre welfare rate is much higher (61.5%) in comparison to among the children (35.7%), the poverty rate among the elderly after welfare is a bit lower (24.4%) than among the children (25.2%). This demonstrates the generational aspects of the Israeli welfare state, and points out a welfare system that favors the elderly.

This generational perspective on poverty is enhanced when looking at children living in lower socio-economic localities. The Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics divided all localities into 10 deciles. Data on the population living in those localities show that 60% of those living in the poorest localities are children. It also shows that 25% of the children are living in localities in the 3 lowest groups while only 15% of the children are living in localities of the 3 highest levels (Ben-Arieh et al., 2003).

Indeed children in Israel are the poorest population group when compared to other age groups. Other comparisons between various population groups tend to support and correlate with this generational perspective as the poorer population groups are the younger ones and those who have more children among them (namely the Arab and Ultra-orthodox groups).

### **Children in families living on welfare**

Special attention should be paid to the significant increase in the number of children living in families eligible for income support: Between 1980-2000 their

number has increased by 170%. This increase is particularly noteworthy in view of the decrease in the number of children living in such families in 1995 and the dramatic increase occurring between 1995 and 1998 (Ben-Arieh et al., 2003). This increase stands in the midst of a public debate in Israel. This debate concerns the notion of Welfare to Work and the reasons for that dramatic increase. Many argue that it is due to the alleviation of the criteria for receiving income support. Others argue that these are not the actual criteria that are responsible for this increase but rather their implementation. Finally, one can not ignore the possibility that the rise in the number of those receiving income supports is also the consequence of the widening economical gaps and the exacerbation of the economical hardship in Israel.

There is also a constant increase in the number and proportion of children who live in families where at least one parent is unemployed. In 1992, five per cent of children lived in families where at least one parent received unemployment benefit, while in 1999, their share in the population reached 5.7% (Ben-Arieh et al., 2003).

### **Child-relevant monetary issues**

The first child allowance program was introduced in Israel in 1959 but it was only in 1975 that the program became universal. During the mid-1980s, selective elements were introduced into the program but various implementation difficulties and political pressure led to the re-universalisation of the child allowance program in 1992 (Gordon and Eliav, 1998). Child allowances are granted to all families with one or more children under the age of 18. The allowances are untaxed and grow according to the number of children, with the allowance for a single child equivalent to 2.6% of the average monthly wage. For a family with four children, the allowance is equivalent to 20.5% of the average wage. In addition, single parent families and large families receive an annual study grant (in cash) per child which is set at 18% of the average monthly wage. This special grant is paid at the beginning of the school year in early September of each year.

Every industrial country has a package of tax allowances, cash benefits, exemptions from charges, subsidies and various services aimed at assisting parents with the costs of raising children. Israel has a fully individualized taxation system according to which the individual is the basis for the tax liability assessment. Hence, the same tax rate is applied irrespective of marital situation, employment status or the partner's income. However, Israel has a tax credit which is directed at working woman and children.

The Israeli income tax system includes a number of tax benefits targeted upon families. In general, as we have already said, the income taxes filing unit

is individual. In other words, husbands and wives are taxed independently. However, tax benefit credits, which result in lower taxes, are granted to single parent families, to working women for each of her children under the age of 18 and to an individual earner, who is responsible for the sustenance of his or her partner. It was estimated that family tax benefits would result in a tax loss of 1530 million shekels in 2000 (~300 million Euro), which was approximately six per cent of all income lost due to tax expenditures (State Revenue Authority, 2000).

Israel adopted an alimony law in 1972, which is intended to ensure that divorced women, with a verdict of alimony and child custody, are eligible to receive income support from the state. The benefit is means-tested and administered on a national level by the National Insurance Institute. The level of the benefit is equivalent to the level set by the court in the alimony judgment but it cannot exceed the level of a regular income support benefit. In effect, the average level of alimony payments is 19.4% of the average wage and it is paid to 24,500 women.

Furthermore, Israel operates a universal cash benefit system for children (child allowances). Those child allowances do not vary by the child's age or by the family composition (two parents or single parent) but rather by the number of children (paying more to the 3<sup>rd</sup> and above child). The benefit is updated regularly. It is also index linked. However, during the recent years there have been some major cut backs in the child allowances rate.

Israel does not subsidize the cost of childcare, at least not in a universal way. There are subsidies available to some extent and to a number of sub-populations but not as national rights to all children. Child health costs are, however, totally covered by the national health insurance.

### **Children's social services in Israel**

The primary responsibility for children's upbringing rests on the parents' shoulders. Yet, during the course of childhood (18 years) there are several other actors and agencies that contribute to children's well-being and healthy development. Responsibility for child and family policies is divided between a number of ministries and governmental institutions. However, there is no governmental mechanism in charge of the coordination between them. The Israeli parliament ('Knesset') has established a committee for the Status of the Woman, as well as, recently, a committee for the Status of Children. The main responsibilities are divided between the different ministries as follows: Child allowances, maternity cash benefits, maternity leaves as well as all the other social security benefits are under the responsibility of the National Insurance Institute. The Ministry of Health is responsible for health care and for the

universal system of mother and baby welfare clinics. The Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs is responsible for all social services as well as for day-care services for children aged 0-3 and for the day-care services for older children of working mothers. Day-care and educational services for children older than 3 years old are under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education.

#### **Maternity, paternal, parental, and family leaves**

In Israel, the cost of hospitalisation for birth is covered by the state health insurance program and mothers are also granted a lump sum maternity grant, equivalent to 20% of the average wage, intended to cover the cost of initial equipment for the baby. Israel has a 12 week maternity leave program, six of which can be taken before the expected birth. During this period, an insured mother (i.e., a mother who has completed the minimal qualification period of contribution to the state social insurance fund for at least six months) is eligible for a taxed maternity allowance that is equivalent to 100% of her average daily income in the three month period preceding the birth (National Insurance Institute, 2000). She is also eligible for another nine months of unpaid leave following the 12 weeks paid leave period. Since 1995, fathers may take paternal leave instead of the mother, starting from the seventh week following the birth, and they are also eligible for a maternity allowance for a period of up to 42 days. However fathers seldom use this. The overall employment patterns are that of the mother taking its full paid maternal leave and many times extending it with a few weeks of unpaid maternal leave.

By law, full time working mothers are eligible to work an hour less per day during the four months following the completion of their maternity leave. Parents are also granted a fully paid sick leave, up to six days a year, for the care of sick children under the age of 16. Parents can choose which one of them would take the leave.

#### **Early childhood education and care (ECEC)**

Most Jewish children between the ages of 2-5 stay in pre-school or in child-care programs (starting with some 70% at the age of 2 years old and reaching to more than 95% among the 3-5 years old). As for Arab children, only 45% of the 3 year olds stay in such programs, while 72% of the 4 year olds and more than 90% of the 5 year olds do (Ben-Arieh and Zionit, 1999). Younger children attend special programs that are operated by NGO's, in particular religious and women's organizations. Nevertheless, there is clear evidence of growth in the role of the private sector in this field (Efrat et al., 1998).

### **Child and adolescent health**

Israel's maternal and child health system is universal and highly effective. The mother and baby welfare clinics offer services for the pregnant mother as well as for children between the ages of 0-4. These services have take-up rates of well over 90% and thus play a major role in achieving low infant and maternal mortality rates. When they enter the compulsory education system, they become the responsibility of the school health services and their health records are transferred to them (to the school services).

Medical care in Israel is mostly the responsibility of the public sector. All citizens are entitled to a universal health insurance, which is financed by taxation and personal payment. However, medical care is forbidden from being contingent on payment (National Health Insurance Legislation, 1996).

### **School-aged children: policies and programs**

Israel has no coherent policy or services for school aged children, apart from that of the formal education. Nevertheless, it is apparent that these children are very active in youth movements and in social activities and interactions after school hours. They do so mostly within the framework of the local settings of community centers and municipal organization.

### **Education**

Up until 1999 the statutory minimum school age was set at 5 years old. However, a new legislation lowered it to the age of 3 (and, also made this additional period of time free of charge). This new legislation should be implemented gradually within the next 10 years (starting on the year 2000).

Children are allowed to leave school at the age of 15. The school enrolment rates at the ages of 15-18 are as following: 94.2% at 15, 91.3% at 16 and 84.6% at 17. Similarly to the issue of young children's education, concerning the issue of school enrollment rates, we also find some significant differences between Jews and Arabs, in favor of the Jews. School enrolment rates among the Arab youth are 89.1% at 15, 82.9% at 16 and 75.6% at 17.

### **Working children**

Between 1990 and 1999 the percentage of working youth (age 15-17) decreased from 8.6% to 7.5%. This decrease is prevalent both among Jewish and Arab youth. Almost 4,200 young people (whose age is under 15) were illegally employed during 1998, mostly in service and commerce. Their cases were dealt by the department for the Enforcement of the Law at the Ministry of Labour and

Social Affairs. Of course, this number refers only to the children known to the authorities. It would be reasonable to assume that their number is significantly higher.

### **Child abuse and neglect**

During the year 2000, nearly 32,000 children at risk were reported to Child Protection Officers (CPO), or 17.8 per 1,000 children (Ben-Arieh et al., 2003). As this number refers to reported cases it is reasonable to conclude that the total number of child abuse and neglect cases is even higher and the rate is different from 1.78% for the total population.

In Israel, as in other countries, neglect is responsible for the largest share of reported cases, followed by physical abuse, while sexual and emotional abuse are far less common. This distribution is consistent with worldwide statistics. Insofar as gender is concerned the percentage of boys among abused children was higher than that of girls. Furthermore, the older the children are the greater their proportion in the overall reported victim population (Ben-Arieh et al., 2003).

### **Nationality and child abuse and neglect (Jews and Arabs)**

The rate of reporting cases of child abuse and neglect is much lower in Arab communities than in the Jewish ones. The immediate question to be asked is whether this gap reflects differences in actual rates of child abuse and neglect in the two societies or 'only' represents a gap in reporting. We note that Israel lacks nationwide surveys on the incidence of child abuse and neglect. Nevertheless, several studies carried out in Israeli Arab society show these rates to be similar to those of other countries and to estimated rates among Jewish children in Israel (Dwairy, 1991; Haj-Yahia and Dawoud-Noursi, 1998; Haj-Yahia and Ben-Arieh, 2000), possibly indicating that the gap presented above is largely due to deficient reporting rather than differences in incidence. This conclusion is reinforced by the gap's dimensions. A reported case rate in Arab localities amounting to less than half the rate in Jewish ones is difficult to attribute to cultural or societal differences alone. As we have reason to believe that the actual rates are similar, the marked discrepancy apparently points to severe underreporting of child abuse and neglect in Israel's Arab localities in Israel. Although differences in reporting are culture contingent and may be attributed to the nationality variable to some extent, structural and organizational variables exert an effect as well. Not least among the administrative variables is the availability of a service to which one can report. In this regard, we are aware that social workers in general and CPOs in



particular are far less available in Arab localities than in Jewish ones, possibly contributing to the reporting gap. Arab social workers consist of some 8.2% of all social workers in Israel, while Arab residents total 18% of the country's total population (Ben-Arieh et al., 2003).

### **Geographic region and child abuse and neglect**

Various studies have attempted to associate child abuse and neglect rates with geographic variables for some time. Several of these studies concentrated on mapping child maltreatment, enabling child protective services and community-based agencies to identify and target areas in which children may be at high risk (Swanson, 2000). Indeed, rates of reported cases of child abuse and neglect in Israel vary according to geographic area, with rates substantially higher than average in the south, Haifa and the lower northern regions, similar to the nationwide rate in the far north and along the central coast strip and lower in the Jerusalem area and among the Jewish population living in settlements in the West Bank and Gaza Strip (the occupied territories).

The gap is especially evident when rates in southern Israel are compared with those of the Jerusalem area, the former constituting nearly double the latter. Once again, the gap appears too large to be explained exclusively by actual differences in child abuse and neglect rates, implying that differences in reporting are its real cause. In this respect, a closer look at the composition of the child population in both areas may help resolve the issue. The child population of Jerusalem includes larger Arab and ultra-orthodox minorities than does that of the south of Israel.

Although the Arab population does not contribute to such low rates of reporting in the Haifa and lower north region or even in the far north were they also consist a large portion of the child population, as we have noted earlier, reporting rates are lower among the Arab population, partly explaining the lower rates in Jerusalem.

We believe that the unique situation in the Jerusalem region is especially due to the large portion of the Ultra-orthodox community and that of the orthodox community as well. Both communities are much more conservative than the general population and tend to report less cases of child abuse and neglect. This religious conservatism could be behind the low rate of reported cases also in the occupied territories where the vast majority of the population is orthodox. Furthermore in Jerusalem there is a substantial Ultra-orthodox community who due to political reasons (i.e. do not acknowledge the existence of the state of Israel) is largely detached from the state authorities; hence its reporting rate is known to be substantially lower as well (Ben-Arieh, 1994).

## **Children's access to space and use of time**

Children play, work, and engage in creative activities, consumption, social interactions, and other activities which are similar to those of adults', yet qualitatively different. In order to have a better knowledge and understanding of children's lives and well-being, especially from a child's perspective, we must acquire a better knowledge on their time use and their access to various places and spaces, hence on their daily activities.

Concerns regarding children's daily activities are not new. Nevertheless, such studies are scarce and partial. The knowledge we have on children's daily activities is, therefore, far from being sufficient. Hence, the picture drawn in the subsequent chapters is partial, however, the best one we managed to draw under these circumstances. We will first discuss children's access to space, whether physical, social or virtual, and we then continue by examining issues of children's time-use.

### **Access to physical space**

Other than the school, the home and the neighborhood are the main physical spaces where most children live. Each one of these spaces is, therefore, an important factor of any discussion on children's well-being. In Israel we had already established years ago, a correlation between house density and children's well being, using the house density as one of our prime indicators for deprivation.

Table 2 clearly shows that non-Jewish households are far more crowded and include more children than Jewish households. Hence, the non-Jewish children's access to space is limited in comparison to that of the Jewish kids.

A sub-issue of children's access to space is their access to safe places and their ability to spend time in safe environments. In spite of our efforts, we have not been able to present such data. We did, however, collect much data on children's injuries as a sort of an outcome indicator for children's access to safe places. This data indicates that some half a million children are admitted to Emergency Rooms every year (average numbers of the last 5 years). Some 170,000 of them are admitted due to injuries according to the following division: 38% are due to falls, 17% are a result of road accidents, some nine per cent are due to poisoning, five per cent to burns, four per cent to either bites or stings, four per cent to different hits and some 3.5% are due to cuts or stabs. The rest are due to unknown reasons. Most of the injuries take place at the children's own homes or in the close vicinity (in the neighbourhood or playground).

**Table 2.** Households with children by number of children, population group and housing density (thousands, percentages and averages\*), 1999.

Housing density	Households with children		Number of children in household (percentages)					Average number of children in household
	Thousands	%	1	2	3	4-5	6+	
<b>Jews</b>								
Total	661.2	100.0	36.2	33.5	18.4	9.2	2.7	2.18
Up to 0.99	146.7	100.0	57.7	31.4	9.5	1.2	--	1.56
1.99-1.00	451.8	100.0	32.7	35.7	21.9	8.8	0.9	2.14
2.99-2.00	54.3	100.0	10.5	25.0	14.2	32.2	18.2	3.71
+3.00	7.3	100.0	-	-	-	26.6	52.8	6.11
<b>Non-Jews</b>								
Total	171.3	100.0	22.2	23.6	18.9	26.1	9.2	3.04
Up to 0.99	12.4	100.0	70.9	26.2	--	--	--	1.39
1.99-1.00	92.9	100.0	26.3	29.8	23.9	18.8	1.3	2.46
2.99-2.00	47.6	100.0	7.7	16.8	17.3	42.4	15.7	2.81
+3.00	18.2	100.0	6.0	8.4	9.5	37.6	38.5	5.04

Source: Israel Central Bureau of Statistics, 'Statistical Abstract of Israel', 2000.

\* (--) – unknown or not released for publication.

### Access to social space

As we mentioned above, the social environment of children is changing. Family structure and networks are changing (as we have shown earlier in this report). While smaller families with a high percentage of single parent households are on the rise, traditional families with two parents and three children are decreasing. These changes, which are particularly prominent among the majority of the Jewish families, affect the access of children to social spaces, by creating new spaces and new ways to access them.

However, these changes are occurring not only among the majority of Jewish children. Arab children are also experiencing this transition from a traditional large multi-generational family (with at least three generations living together) to a smaller 'modern' nuclear family, consisting of two generations only. Similar tendencies can be seen also among the Jewish Ultra-Orthodox families. Hence, these two sub-populations are also creating new social spaces for children.

Finally, the social infrastructure of Israel is changing from a small society with strong community identities and networks to a much more fragmented society with fewer networks and less community bonds. These changes impact

the social space of children and influence their access and use of the social environment.

### **Access to virtual space**

Children's access to virtual space occurs, obviously, within real time and space. The time and place of this access are, therefore, pivot points around which issues of power and control are articulated. In other words, the nature and the extent of children's access to the virtual space is structured by *where* they access it (e.g. in the home or in the school) and by *when* they do so (e.g. in the evenings or during their lunch break).

Virtual space is more accessible to some children than the other. It seems that new patterns of social exclusion are emerging due to the difference in the children's access to virtual spaces. Some 54% of the Jewish youth (ages 12-17) report that they surf the Internet at least once a week from their home. While we do not have exact figures regarding Arab youth, according to common estimation, only 25% of them have access to the Internet from their home. This gap is relevant not only to the Jewish and the Arab children, but also to the Jewish youth population itself. Indeed, within the latter, 46% reported to have accessed the Internet less than once a week.

### **Children and mobile phones**

While not totally virtual, mobile phones are becoming a major tool in enabling children's access to various spaces. Almost 75% of the youth in Israel (ages 12-17) reported having mobile phones. Possessing them affects not only children's access to social networks, but it also bears an influence on the spaces they enter and use. In fact, the wide use of mobile phones creates at least a virtual access to the social and family networks. Indeed, by using them, children are able to access their friends, even if physically apart. Similarly, parents can keep track of their children and monitor their whereabouts regardless of their physical proximity.

### **Children's mobility**

Children move between spaces on a regular basis. Transport and the ability to move around is a key to social involvement for many children. However, for children living in low-income families, the access to transport is often constrained by a lack of personal and family mobility and by the cost of using public transport. Particularly disadvantaged are children who live in areas served by inadequate and costly public transport and whose families are low-

income with no private transport at their disposal. This immobility also constrains their capacity to join and regularly attend clubs and other social activities with their peers.

Recently, this issue of mobility has become more and more significant in Israel, after being influenced not only by economic constraints, but also by safety issues, such as the suicide bombing of public buses. Hence, children's access and usage of the public transportation is limited. Without access to transport which may enable them to go out of their immediate environment freely, and develop social networks and activities further afield, many children are effectively confined to their immediate locality. As previously mentioned, this constraint is prominent especially among poor children, who live in families that do not possess private adequate means of transportation as those who live in affluent families and can be driven around by their parents.

Mobility is also a generational phenomenon. Since children do not possess their own means of transportation, they constitute a growing share of the public transportation users, while the share of the other age groups is shrinking. When they do not use public transportation, they, generally, suffer from reduced levels of mobility. This is especially true these days, after public transportation has become means of transportation to be used only if no other means of transportation is available (as we have already said, mainly for security reasons).

Finally, we do have some evidence on children's physical mobility, both within the country and out of it. Some 80,000 youth aged 17 are holding a driver licence. Some 500,000 children and youth travel abroad each year, mainly for vacation. These figures strengthen the arguments presented above, suggesting that children's mobility depends mainly on class and socio-economical status.

### **Access to time and time-use**

As we mentioned above, we do not have rich data on children's time-use and daily activities. However, some recent studies and surveys enable us to draw a certain picture on the subject. Nevertheless, this picture will be only partial, since the available research does not refer to the overall child population. The main study convened on this topic refers to Jewish high school students in the age of 14-17 and was carried by the central bureau of statistics in 1999. Its findings are summarized in Tables 3 and 4. The general discussion on this topic is divided into two areas: children's time use at home and children's activities and time use out of home.

**Children's time use at home**

Similar to the children in most western countries, children in Israel spend a growing part of their time at home, reading, watching television or using the computer. More than 80% of the Jewish youth read at least one daily newspaper per week (although as we see from Figure 1, between 1993 and 1997, there has been a downward trend in the percentage of teenagers who read a daily newspaper). More than half of the Jewish youth read at least one book per month (with an average of 2.5 books per month). 58.4% of the Jewish youth used a computer at least once per week (spending an average of 1.4 hours per day using their PC) but only 24% have used the Internet. Almost 90% of them watched TV during the last week (spending almost 2 hours per day on it).

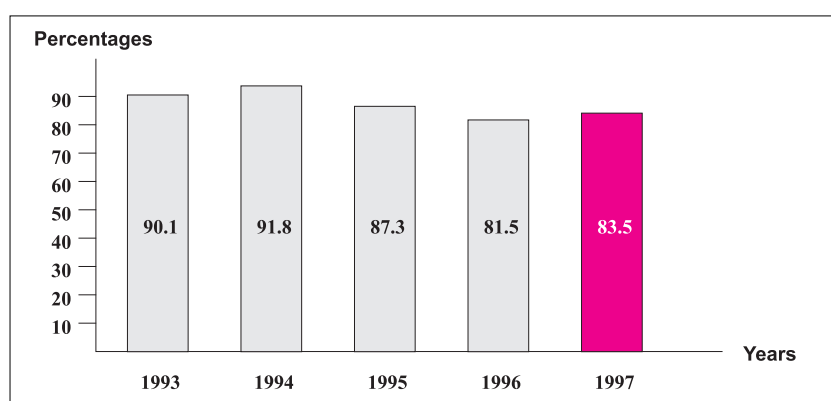
**Table 3.** Reading, leisure and in home activities among Jewish youth aged 14-17, 1999 (Percentage of the relevant population, otherwise – average).

	Boys	Girls	Total
Has read a daily newspaper* during the past week	80.3	79.8	80.1
Has read at least one book during the past month	43.5	59.7	51.8
Average number of books per reader in past month	2.3	2.6	2.5
Used a computer during the past week	63	54.2	58.4
Used the Internet during the past week	29.7	18.7	24
Watched television during the past week	90.9	88.7	89.8
Watched a movie on television* during the past week	85.6	81.7	83.6

Source: Israel Central Bureau of Statistics, 2000. 'Reading, leisure and sports activities among ages 14-17, 1999'.

\* At least once and at least one type.

**Figure 1.** Teenagers who have read at least one daily newspaper within the past five days, 1993-1997 (%).



Source: Ben-Arieh et al., 2003.

Finally, children also spend some 1.5 hours per day doing their homework, and the same amount of time on house tasks. A small scale study done among Arab children in Jerusalem is consistent with the data we have regarding the Jewish children (Kadech, 2003)

### **Children's time-use outside of their house**

Table 4 below shows that more than 40% of the Jewish youth visited a museum at least once a year and some 52% attended a performance at least once a year. Only 1.3% visited the theater at least once a month as compared to more than half of the Jewish youth who saw at least one movie per month (with an average of seeing 2.8 movies per month). More than 60% of them went-out (to a café, restaurant, pub and so) at least once per month and some 80% have engaged in sports during the year while only 38% attended a sport event in last year.

Contrary to the similarity between children in Israel and the ones in western countries concerning their indoors activities and time use, we recognise a significant difference concerning their outdoor activities. Youth in Israel is, thus, unique in the amount of time and in the level of participation in various organized youth activities.

Indeed, children devote at least 2.4 hours a day to activities within organized youth frameworks, in particular in youth movements, and in various youth leadership programs. They spend almost 3 hours a day, on average, in outside activities.

**Table 4.** Leisure, sports and out of home activities among Jewish youth aged 14-17, 1999 (Percentage of the relevant population, otherwise – average).

	Boys	Girls	Total
Participated in hobby groups* during the past year	21.5	32.7	27.2
Visited a museum* during the past year	35.5	46	40.9
Attended performances* during the past year	49.9	54.2	52.1
Musical performance during the past year	21.4	30.5	26.1
Theater, musical, opera during the past year	27.8	37.1	32.6
Attended theater etc. - average per person in past month	1.2	1.5	1.3
Saw a movie at a movie theater* during the past month	52.5	48.2	50.3
Average number of movies per person in past month	(2.7)	2.8	2.8
Went to a café, restaurant, pub etc.* during the past month	64.3	56.9	60.5
Went to a café etc. - average per person in past month	2.6	3.2	2.9
Went on a vacation or a trip in Israel* during the past year	54.8	65.5	60.4
Took a vacation or a trip abroad* during the past year	26.2	31.2	28.9
Engaged in sports* during the past year	81.6	76.8	79.1
Participated in supervised physical activity during the past year	56	50.1	52.9
Attended sports events* during the past year	56.4	22.3	38.6

*Source: Israel Central Bureau of Statistics, 2000. 'Reading, leisure and sports activities among ages 14-17, 1999'.*

\* At least once and at least one type.

*Children's Welfare in Ageing Europe*

Additional data presented in Table 5 below show that 72% of the Jewish high school students went to the cinema, and 26% went to the theater, at least once during the month that preceded the survey. The rate of those attending concerts or dance performances during that month was the lowest: five and seven % respectively. It is interesting to note that 47% of the students have never visited a museum, 55% have never gone to an entertainment show, 70% have never seen a dance performance and 75% have never attended a musical performance.

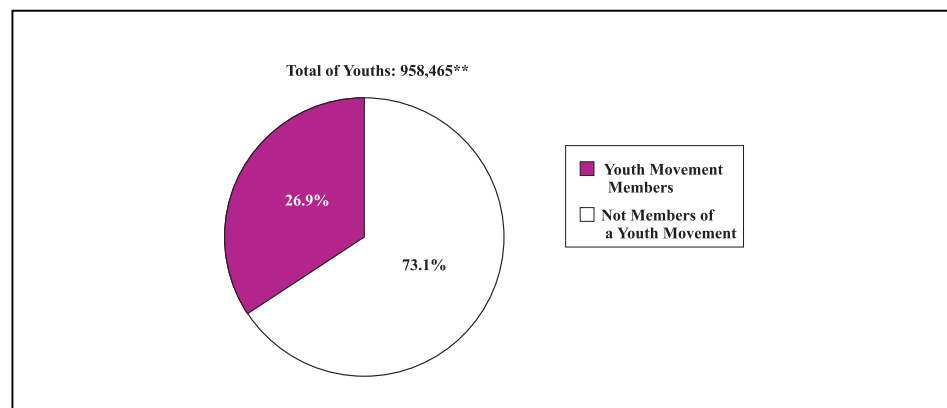
**Table 5.** High school students' (aged 15-17) visits to shows and exhibitions (%) 1997.

Frequency of visits	Movie	Theater	Entertainment	Concerts	Dance	Popular Music	Museum
During the last month	72.0	26.0	12.0	5.0	7.0	12.0	13.0
Between 1-3 months	10.0	19.0	8.0	3.0	4.0	6.0	7.0
3-6 months ago	4.0	9.0	7.0	2.0	4.0	8.0	6.0
More than 6 months ago	9.0	24.0	18.0	15.0	15.0	33.0	27.0
Have never visited	5.0	22.0	55.0	75.0	70.0	41.0	47.0

Source: *The Public Council for Culture and Arts, 1997.*

Finally the youth participation in youth movements is unique to Israel especially in regard to the rate of participation, as we can see Figure 2.

**Figure 2.** Youth aged 9-18 participating in youth movement activities. 1997 (percentage of age group).



Source: *Nesher, 1997.*

\* Jewish children and teenagers.



As we mentioned above, the data presented above is supported also by a number of small-scale studies that were conducted in Israel recently. Most of those studies were carried among Jewish youth, some were however conducted among Jewish younger children and very few also among Arab children.

However the data presented above on time use of children and youth should serve as a basic start point for studying children's time use and daily activities. It is a starting point, which gives us some partial understanding of the overall picture, but still it is a partial picture. Hence we need more studies before we can portrait a thorough picture of children's access to time and especially their use of it in Israel.

To this stage our report and its first four parts presented the status of children in Israel, in regard to the economic and social domains, and in regard to their time use and daily activities. It is our belief that when one tries to integrate the knowledge on children's well being into these domains, one possible (and fruitful) discourse could be through the analyses of children's rights and their entitlement to various rights along the different domains of life, according to their civil status and through different ages. This is so, for a number of reasons. First and foremost, children's rights are powerful indicators of their well-being. Secondly, it seems that children's entitlement to various rights and services is contingent on their civil status. Indeed, the entire social security system in Israel is available only to citizens or permanent residents, as are much of children's economic, political and civil rights.

### **Children's rights, status and voice within society**

When discussing children's rights, it is important to acknowledge that they include civil, political, economic, social and other rights. Interestingly, children's rights' hierarchy is a direct inversion of that of adults. While the adults' hierarchy begins with civil and political rights (e.g. the right to vote and to be elected in general elections) and relegates social rights to a lesser position, children's hierarchy is the other way around. The following part of this country study will describe the rights granted to children throughout the course of their development, in a range of aspects of their lives. These rights are stipulated by the state's laws, rules and regulations, in addition to internal directives issued by the various ministries and in court decisions.

Table 6 presents an overview of children's rights according to their type (i.e. civil, political, economic and social), as well as the children's age and civil status. Thus, the emerging multi-dimensional picture enables us to compare the civil status of children on a continuum which accounts for age and type of rights. As difficult as it is to condense so much information into one table, it seems safe to underscore our one main conclusion from that table and that is

**Table 6.** Children's rights in Israel by their civil status, age and type of right (a partial list).

Age <sup>4</sup>	Type of rights	Political	Economic	Social	Others
	Civil				
0-3	Right for citizenship Right for issuing a passport Right for a name Right for a guardian in legal procedures Right to prosecute Right for medical treatment Right for privacy Right for education Right for special education		Right to work in performances or commercial ads Right for legal action in accordance with the child's guardian Right for parental physical care Right for child support by the National Insurance Institute	Right for parental emotional care Right for state protection Right for adoption Right for health insurance <sup>5</sup> Right for social security (i.e. child allowances, disabled benefits and more) Right for free education	No legal or civic responsibility in legal procedures
3-5					
5-10	Right for preventing the publication of nude pictures Right to change sport club		Right for doing legal actions that are natural to children of the same age	Right of 9 years old and older to express his/ her acceptance of adoption Right for abortion without parents' consent <sup>6</sup>	
10-12	Right for consideration in child viewing and in placement process Right to change religion				
12-13	Right for legal representation in criminal process			The right for special procedures in criminal process (Juvenile courts, special process and more)	Age of criminal and civic legal responsibility

<sup>4</sup> The various rights are listed via the earliest age at which they are granted.

<sup>5</sup> All legal residents of Israel are entitled for health insurance regardless of their payment, the health insurance of illegal residents is contingent on payment of a premium.

<sup>6</sup> This is true for any age, even if earlier.

*Children's Welfare in Ageing Europe*

Age	Type of rights	Political	Economic	Social	Others
14	Civil Right for HIV test without parents' consent Right for sexual relations with others (up to 2 years older)		The right to open a bank account with parents' consent The right to work in school holidays <sup>7*</sup>		Can be sent to jail
15	Right to refuse medical treatment Right for medical psychiatric treatment without parents' consent Right for legal representation in civic proceedings	Right to be a member in local (municipal) committees for the status of the child Right to participate in political demonstrations outside of school with parents' consent	The right to work <sup>4*</sup> Right for tax benefits* Right to be a partner in commercial firms		
16	The right an for identity card (citizenship certificate)** Right for marriage with court's permission Right for driver license on small motor cycle and tractors		Right to open bank account without parents' consent		
17	Right to marriage Right for driver license	Right to vote in party primaries and in local municipalities **			

<sup>7</sup> Although this right is granted only to permanent residents or citizens, the Law of Youth Labor protects any working youth.

*COST A19: Israel*

Type of rights		Political	Economic	Social	Others
Age	Civil				
18-21	Right for changing name	Right to vote for parliament (18) ** Right to be elected (21) ** Right and duty to serve in the army *	Right to work with no restrictions **	Right for information on natural parents for adopted children	Right to buy alcohol

Rights granted to all children in Israel regardless of their civil status

\* Rights granted only to permanent residents or citizens

\*\* Rights granted only to citizens

that the civil status of children is connected to their rights, but in various ways and degrees and in accordance to the different types of rights. This would be the place to note that some children in Israel are deprived of full citizenship or even of permanent residency, by means of formal and informal policies. Most notable are children of foreign workers and children of Arabs, where one of the parents is from the territories or from another Arab country.

### **Civil rights**

While civil rights are considered to be adults' most basic rights, they are not so, when it comes to children. Many would argue that we need to safeguard children's social and emotional well-being first, and hence, we should focus on their social and economic rights. Others would argue that granting children civil rights might pose a risk to their development, especially if these rights are conflicting with those of adults (i.e. parents or teachers). Finally, it may be argued that one should be careful not to 'abandon children to their rights'. This approach argues that granting children more rights might enhance their responsibility, thus their burden. While we clearly resent the two last approaches, it is in this field of civil rights that those dilemmas are best presented and dealt with.

### **Age**

According to the Israeli law, the age of civil maturity is 18.<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, as we can see in Table 1, certain laws stipulate other ages, mostly lower ones. Generally, the rights that are granted to younger children are the passive ones in addition to those concerning their formal civil status. The active civil rights, which concern less their civil status and more the execution of various acts, are granted to older children.

### **Civil status**

While most civil rights are granted to all children living in Israel, there is a differentiation in the granting of rights due to the different legal status. The right of children with special needs to receive special education is granted only to permanent residents or citizens. Similarly, the rights for personal documents,

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<sup>8</sup> According to Article 3 of the Law of Legal capacity and Guardianship, 1962: 'a person who is a minor is under 18 years old; a person who has reached the age of 18 is an adult.' Eighteen is also recognized as the age of civil maturity in other laws, such as the Law of Names, 1956, the Law of Citizenship, 1952, the Law of Inheritance, 1965, the Law of Child Adoption, 1981 and more.

such as an identity card and a passport, as well as the formal right to a citizenship are restricted only to full citizens of Israel only.

### **Economic rights**

Children's well-being is contingent among other factors on children's economic contribution and on their being active economic actors (Ben-Arieh et al., 2001). Thus, the issue of economic rights and citizenship is of apparent importance. Hence, the subject of children's economic rights should be discussed not only in regard to their rights for economic benefits but also in regard to their right to be active economic actors.

#### **Age**

As observed in Table 6, while young children are entitled to economic benefits, the right to be economically active is contingent on the child's age.

#### **Civil status**

It seems that economic rights are among the most contingent on the child's civil status. This is so regarding both the rights for economic benefits, restricted to full citizens only, and the right to be a formal actor in the labour market. One should keep in mind that this is true only in regard to formal and legal work activity. It is well-known that, although illegal, non-citizen children, in Israel as in other western countries, tend to be a part of the labour force, from very young age.

### **Social rights**

As already mentioned above, the children's rights hierarchy is a complete inversion of that of adults. While adults' rights hierarchy begins with civil and political rights, that of the children begins with social rights. Their civil and political rights are placed only at the bottom. It is, therefore, particularly important to examine the issue of citizenship and children's social rights.

#### **Age**

Apparently, the findings of our analysis support the notion of inversion between political and social rights. While there is a positive correlation between growing up and the entitlement to political rights, there is no such correlation concerning the social rights, as most of them are granted to children already at a very young age.

### **Civil status**

While the right for social security (which basically means the right for economic support), the right for special education for children with special needs and the right for social assistance are granted only, or in priority, to Israeli citizens, all other social rights are granted regardless of the children's civil status. Once again, our analysis attributes this situation to the wider entitlement to social rights and to the notion that all children are entitled to protection, in contrast to the participation rights.

### **Political rights**

In many aspects, political rights are the most action-oriented rights. They are granted by virtue of law, but they become 'real' only if the person entitled to them expresses and uses them. The entitlement to political rights means allowing children to act by giving them a share of the political power in a society. This given power obviously reduces the share of adults. Hence, it is understandable why political rights of children are the least in consensus and are seen as the most threatening to the adult world.

### **Age**

The analysis of children's rights in Israel shows clearly that political rights are granted only to older children. In fact, we failed to find political rights that are granted to children before the age of 15. Furthermore, the more substantial rights – those granting actual political involvement (i.e. the right to vote and be elected) – are even more restricted by means of age. Children can vote for local municipalities at the age of 17, they can vote in the national election only upon becoming an adult (at the age of 18) and be elected only upon reaching the age of 21.

### **Civil status**

Similar to our analysis concerning the aspect of age, here again we perceive that the more substantial political rights are granted only to full citizens. Even the right and the duty to serve in the army are restricted to permanent residents of Israel. It is important to note, that in the State of Israel military service is first and foremost an obligation, for men and women alike (The Law of Defence Service, 1986). However, for many Israelis, the military service is also a right, since it is considered to be an important aspect of national identity, of social construction, and of belonging to a group.

This feeling of 'belonging to a group' is most likely the reason for the high rates of volunteering to combat military units. This seems to be also the reason for the young soldiers' willingness to serve a longer period than the 3 obligatory years. This idea is further reflected in the choice made by many religious young women to serve in a special national service program (either 1 or 2 years of service), even though not obliged to serve in the army for religious reasons.

### **Other rights**

In this section we refer to a number of rights which we could not categorise within any of the four previously mentioned rights (i.e. civil, political, economic and social). At large, one can look at those rights, presented in the table, as a collection of different rights, not necessarily connected or related to one another. However, when analyzing them by age and civil status there are a few points worth pointing out.

### **Age**

Some of these rights concern the age of majority or the legal age. Basically they deal with the limits of childhood and fix the age under which a child does not have to answer for his or her acts (whether criminal or tortuous). In Israel the line is drawn at the age of twelve. However, some special treatments and procedures are accorded to minors (under the age of 18).

### **Civil status**

Probably due to the residual nature of those other rights we failed to identify any correlation between the child civil status and entitlements to the rights.

### **Children's rights according to civil status and age – an integrated overview**

We have briefly gone through the various types of children rights and analyzed them according to dimensions of age and the civil status. It is time now to integrate what we have learned into a more holistic analysis. Our findings raise some conclusions on the citizenship of children and on the generational nature of children's rights:

Different types of rights are granted to children in a different manner. Social rights are considered to be the most basic ones and therefore are more likely to be granted to all children living and at a younger age. Civil and political rights



are more likely to be granted on the basis of the child civil status and to older children.

The legal status of children's rights varies by age. There is a correlation between the children's age and the number of rights they are granted. While younger children are entitled only for the more basic and passive rights (i.e. concerning social security), older children are entitled (even if not enough, to our opinion) to civil and political rights, as well as to the more active rights (i.e. the right to vote in regional election).

There is also a considerable variance in regard to the civil statuses of children, clearly discriminating in favour of children with full citizenship status. This differentiation is especially important when considering the causal relationship between some of the rights children are entitled to and their well-being. The children's civil status heavily determines their civil rights. This is so especially in regard to formal citizenship, as it is mirrored in two of the most important formal documentation: the identity card and the passport. The children's civil status also determines their entitlement to social rights. The children's right and ability to enjoy social security is clearly contingent on their citizenship. This contingency is especially important for poor children, as social security benefits are designed to reduce much of the economic hardship associated with poverty and its detrimental impacts on children. Finally, the children's civil status is a central component of their political rights. Being a citizen is a must if a child wants to participate in the political process not only via demonstrations and local municipal committees but through the 'real political game' of political parties and elections.

This last issue of political rights is a very good example of the multi-faceted nature of children's citizenship. The case of political rights renders it apparent that citizenship is also a mode of activity and is a prerequisite for the participation of children in any decision-making and political process. This facet of citizenship and participation will stand at the centre of the next section of our report.

### **The dynamics of participation – citizenship and participation as a mode of activity**

Being a citizen is not only a legal status. It also means being an active human being who cares and participates in decision making within his or her own community. We all want our children to be 'good citizens', that is, we want them to be active and involved in their communities. Being an active and involved child safeguards the child's well-being (Ben-Arieh et al., 2001). In short, we want our children to participate not only in order to train them to become good adult citizens in the future but also as means for securing their

well-being as children in the present (Qvortrup, 1997). Thus, any effort to study children's citizenship should also examine their participation. Such an examination would also serve a generational perspective when one would compare between the different age groups' participation and political involvement.

Child participation is one of the major principles underlying the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). It does not only mean hearing the children, but also taking their point of view into consideration. Indeed, studies found that children feel that they are not taken seriously (Melton and Limber, 1992). Child participation is considered to be a guiding principle, and as such it should be part of every aspect of children's lives and should be extended to all settings and to all types of rights. In the following sections we have chosen to analyze child participation in Israel in three domains; within the child's family, within the child's school and in the public and political arena.

### **The family**

On the one hand, love, affection and care of parents for their children render them obvious candidates for serving as the representatives of their children. On the other hand, such a situation can lead to the disappearance of children from the public's or the authorities' eye. It may also lead to a refusal of the authorities to interfere in family affairs. Child participation and citizenship within the child's own family does not necessarily entail conflict with the child's parents. Indeed, the enhancement of the child's democratic expression within his or her family is a goal and a challenge for the family as a whole. In Israel, to date, there has been no legal obligation for parents to listen to their children, to enable them to express their views or to consult with them before making decision concerning their lives. This is in spite of the fact that there are some cases in which consultation with the child is mandatory (i.e. adoption, HIV test, abortion and more). However, the obligation to hear the child's opinion is still limited and awaiting its expansion to important issues such as changing one's name, changing one's school, changing one's place of residence and changing one's way of life (i.e. from religious to secular or vice versa).

Nevertheless, children are entitled to express their opinions on matters concerning them, such as parents' visitation rights, custody and guardianship, when parents are living apart. Courts of law in the State of Israel assign great significance to the child's wishes. Court verdicts decreed that from the age of 10 or 11 a child's wishes must be taken into consideration, and that a child cannot be forced to remain with one of his or her parents against his or her will. Only in rare and very extreme cases, in which it is unequivocally clear that it is in the best interests of the child, will the court not comply with his or her wishes and impose its decisions on a child.

Children's participation in decision-making within their family is not without problems. First, there is the danger of children losing their 'childhood freedom', which is granted to them only during childhood and therefore can not be retrieved later on in life. In that regard, there is a reason to question to what extent children are influenced and by whom or by what, when they are making decisions; or how much relevant information they have when making these decisions. Second, it is not certain that a society can really legislate parenting methods. Hence, without giving up on the call for more child participation within the family, we would argue that child participation needs nurturing and learning and that one natural place for taking these first steps would be school.

### **School**

School is the place where children are prepared for taking decisions and for participating in democratic life. Hence, one can hardly exaggerate in describing the importance of child participation in the process of decision-making at school, both in regard to school life and to life out of school. School is also an excellent forum for hearing children's voices – their opinions on political and social issues. These issues do not directly concern the school alone, but since children are rarely heard in the public arena, school could serve as a substitute, even if only a partial one. Children's rights within the educational system are the outcomes of primary legislation (laws by the Knesset) and of secondary legislation, via instructions of the Director General of the Ministry of Education (circular).

### **Issues concerning school life and learning**

In 1997, a special circular of the Director General of the Ministry of Education declared that

‘...any student has the right for privacy, for receiving information, for freedom of speech and for due and honourable process... The school must enable the implementation of these rights as follows.

Any individual is free to express himself or herself orally and in writing in all aspects of life.

Any individual in school has the right to express his or her opinion, to criticize and to suggest how to improve life in school.

The school must guarantee an atmosphere and tools for each individual to express his or her opinion, to criticize and to suggest how to improve school life and to suggest ways to implement his or her suggestions.’

The new 'Student's Rights Act – 2000', ('Students' refer to children in the education system ages 5-17) states the student's right to be heard in any process concerning his or her removal from school and to appeal against a decision of permanent removal from school to a special appellate committee and further to an administrative court. Moreover, this law states that schools must encourage the establishment of student councils and that the term of reference for the work of these councils will be decided by the Ministry of Education upon consultation with the student councils. These student councils represent the students in public life and in the contacts of students with the authorities.

### **Issues concerning life outside the school**

Freedom of gathering and demonstration is one of the most obvious means for child participation. Yet, although there are no general legal constraints on such child participation outside of school, constraints are expressed in the general manager circular. The decision whether such political participation of children within the school premises will be allowed, is not in the students' hands, but rather in the hands of the representatives of the education system. With regard to child participation in such activities outside of school but during school hours, parental consent is necessary. Being held during school hours, such activities are registered as regular absence from school.

This situation raises a number of questions as to children's citizenship and to the extent to which the education system supports it. It is obvious that active citizenship demands political participation. If schools are to educate children to be citizens then they should encourage such political activities (as long as they do no harm to school discipline or to the academic achievements of the students) and not put obstacles in their way. It is especially important that the students are at least involved in the decision regarding their participation or non-participation in such political activities and that such issues are not decided upon solely by the parents or the education system.

### **The public and political arena**

Child participation is crucial in the public and political arena. Since children cannot vote, they are considered as politically weak. Thus, politicians tend to ignore their views. Genuine child participation in this sphere can be the leverage of children's political power while enforcing the politicians to hear them. This is especially important for democratic societies wanting to include all citizens' opinions in the decision-making processes (Riepl and Wintersberger, 1999).

Nevertheless, children's political rights are the least acceptable of all children's rights. The relatively new idea of children's participation in the political decision-making process has already evoked much opposition.

Above all, this idea of child participation advocates the empowerment of children. It can, therefore be looked upon as a redistribution of power in a society (LeBlanc, 1995). Next, we will discuss some possibilities for such participation in the political and the public arenas.

### **Youth movements**

We would like to suggest that the informal frameworks for child and youth gathering hold great potential for the genuine political participation of children. The Israeli experience shows that throughout the history of the country, these informal frameworks have been one of the best means for child empowerment and political participation. Youth movements have served as outstanding places for learning citizenship. Within these movements, children have engaged in formulating their goals, in teamwork, in taking responsibility and in political demonstration. It seems that recently the influence of the youth movements has been declining. Considering their potential for educating children for citizenship, we might want to reconsider how we can enhance the youth movements and stop this decline.

### **The local municipality committees for the status of the child**

In 2000 the legislation concerning local municipalities in Israel was amended with the following statement: 'The local council will elect a committee whose task will be to plan activities to improve the status of children and youth, to protect them and to safeguard their rights, with the endorsement of the principles of the best interest of the child, the prevention of discrimination, the right for adequate development, and the right of children to express their opinions and to participate in decision-making in matters affecting them' (the Municipalities ordinance). By law, these committees must include the chairman of the local student council and a representative of the local youth movements. Clearly this new legislation bears considerable potential for child participation. However, we must wait and see whether these councils will indeed be implemented and, if so, what issues these committees will deal with, as well as the true extent of child participation in their work.

### **Knesset committees**

In Israel there is no legal obligation to invite children or to enable their participation in the sessions of the various Knesset committees. However, during the recent years, we are witnessing some new practices in the Knesset. Some of the Knesset committees invite children to their sessions on a regular basis (i.e. the education committee and the committee for children's rights). In fact some of the committees have established a routine of having youth representatives as observers in their meetings and discussions. This is usually done by inviting representatives of the national students council (an elected body of high-school students – administrated by the Ministry of Education) and involving them as participants in the discussions. This new practice should be encouraged.

### **Child participation and the media**

Recent years have brought great changes to the media. In particular we refer to the wide acceptance of electronic media (especially TV) as the leading media in Israeli life and the rise of the Internet as a media channel and especially its news web-sites.

We would like to suggest that the media can and should be used to encourage child participation. The Internet and web sites are other possible venues for child participation. Children seem to have a definite advantage over adults in this domain. They are the vast majority of media users and their abilities as such are much stronger than those of adults. We, therefore, see great potential in the media to enhance child political participation.

In the past media channels was used in Israel in a generational way to exclude children from joining the main public debates – this was done by using wide spread newspapers intended specifically (and only) for children. The new media world makes this much harder as the overall media channels are accessible by children much easier and in fact some of them (the Internet for example) are even harder to access for adults then for children.

## **Conclusion**

In this country study, we have tried to portray a picture of children's status in Israel and of their well-being. We have done so by employing a generational perspective, by focusing on their social and economic welfare and by exploring their access to and use of time and space. In particular, we have tried to untangle the multi-faceted correlation between children's social and economic status, their access to time and space, their rights and their civil status.

This country study clearly shows the direct correlation between children's rights and their well-being, and especially between child participation and well-being. It is also clear, that the question of child participation is focal to a generational perspective and serves well the analysis of children's role in society as compared to that of other age groups. We, therefore, conclude that in order to further advance children's well-being, the principal of participation should serve as a fundamental guideline for services and policies aimed at children.

It seems that this dynamic relation between status, rights, participation and well-being is especially important in the unique Israeli situation. Israel is a young country which has been absorbing mass immigration and whose child population is among the most diverse and heterogenic in the world. This multi-cultured social composition together with the national conflict and the extreme violence in the region enhance the importance of the above-mentioned relations. In that respect, we suggest that the concept of children's rights should serve as a tool for preventing discrimination between children. All discrimination should be abolished, not only in the formal granting of rights, but also in their actual implementation.

Naturally, each country is unique and its children's well-being is contingent on a variety of characteristics that differ among cultures, populations and time. Nevertheless, we hope this portrait of the Israeli children can serve as a basis for international comparison and for future studies on the well-being of children.

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