

The Demographic Threat: Israelis Abandon the Negev and the Galilee

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Background

Since the State of Israel was founded, spatial planning by its successive governments has included a strategy of population dispersal. This policy initially aimed to protect a geographic area against invasion by Arab armies as part of a spatial defense concept in which the communities in the outlying areas played a key role in the border defense system. At a later stage, this policy was designed to influence the demographic balance between Jews and Arabs in the outlying areas. In the framework of this policy, large budgets were allocated to build new communities and strengthen older ones in the Galilee, the “Triangle” (in the eastern Sharon area), the Negev, and other regions. Despite these efforts, and as with corresponding demographic patterns throughout the world whereby population groups migrated to large cities in their countries’ economic and social centers, the preference of the Israeli population for living in central Israel has grown stronger in the past three decades. This trend is reflected in a massive move of Negev and Galilee residents to the center and in an ongoing preference among residents of the center to remain there (table 1).¹

Table 1. Internal Migration, Central District, 1985-2015

	1985	1992	2000	2008	2014	2015
Entering	34,100	56,900	62,800	73,700	74,400	74,100
Leaving	30,100	48,900	47,600	62,000	62,300	63,300
Balance	+4000	+8000	+15,200	+11,700	+12,100	+10,800

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This trend has resulted in a concentration of 40.6 percent of Israel's population in the greater metropolitan Tel Aviv area, a region constituting 7 percent of Israel's physical space. This region includes the central and Tel Aviv districts (from Netanya in the north, to Maccabim-Reut in the east, and to Rehovot in the south). On the other hand, 8 percent of Israel's population lives in the Negev (the Beer Sheva district), stretching from the Beer Sheva valley to Eilat and constituting 60 percent of Israel's area. Similarly, 15 percent of Israel's population lives in the Galilee (the Tzfat, Kinneret, Acre, and Jezreel districts), stretching from the border with Lebanon to the Jezreel Valley, which constitutes 16 percent of Israel's area (table 2).²

Table 2. Population Dispersal in Israel

	Central Israel (Central and Tel Aviv Districts)	Negev (Beer Sheva Sub-District)	Galilee (Tzfat, Kinneret, Acre, and Jezreel Sub-Districts)
Proportion of the country's land (20,770 sq km)	7% (1,479 sq km)	60% (12,918 sq km)	16% (3,319 sq km)
Proportion of the total population (8,380,100)	40% (3,407,400 people)	8% (687,400 people)	15% (1,322,600 people)

The "Abandonment" of the Negev and the Galilee: A Strategic Threat to Israel

The Social-Environmental Level

The main reason for the migration of residents of the Negev and the Galilee to greater metropolitan Tel Aviv and the continued desire of residents of greater metropolitan Tel Aviv to remain there lies in the district's social and economic strength. This in turn has spawned the damaging idea about the link between residing in this region and the ability to acquire an education and become wealthy. Due to the high cost of living in central Israel, however, it is mainly the wealthy families from the Negev and the Galilee who migrate, while the economically disadvantaged remain in the geographically outlying areas. This process is liable to aggravate the socioeconomic gaps in Israeli society, increase inequality, exacerbate the feeling of alienation and division, and perpetuate an imbalanced distribution of resources between different parts of Israel.

At the same time, the excess demand among the Israeli population for living in central Israel is likely to have a negative impact on the quality of life there.³ First, it may lead to massive construction and to establishment of supporting infrastructure on a large scale, which in turn causes the gradual loss of open space. These processes have already resulted in the destruction of seacoasts and agricultural areas, the elimination of green vistas and spacious areas for the population, and the inability of water to penetrate to the groundwater levels. This excess demand also affects the central region's ability to treat sewage and waste, which will have a negative impact on water quality and the extent of ground pollution. In addition, the excess demand is likely to cause an ongoing rise in housing prices in central Israel (thereby increasing the cost of living), due to the difficulty in meeting this strong demand.

Second, excess demand will significantly increase population density in central Israel, which by Western standards is already extremely crowded.⁴ This density is liable to cause the collapse of the local transportation system. As of 2016, Israel's roads were rated the most crowded of the developed countries (over 2,500 vehicles per kilometer of road).⁵ In the absence of suitable public transportation, the excessive use of private transportation (a natural increase of 500,000 vehicles a year) causes 700,000 vehicles to enter metropolitan Tel Aviv daily (a 55 percent increase since 2000), at an average speed of 11 km/hr on its roads. In this context, the filling in of open space in central Israel threatens the ability to expand the existing roads. The demographic changes will therefore necessarily lead to a worsening of the traffic jams, which will negatively affect the ability to reach workplaces, and will damage economic growth. The burdening of the transportation system in the center also has additional consequences in the form of irritating noise and air pollution emissions that cause an increase in mortality and morbidity.

Population density in itself is not the problem. In New York City, for example, whose area is less than half the size of the Tel Aviv and central districts, two and a half as many people live in relative comfort. The difference between the two cases lies in the municipal infrastructure in New York City, which is designed to accommodate this size population, while the corresponding infrastructure in the greater Tel Aviv metropolitan area was neglected for years. For example, work on the light rail project in Tel Aviv began only in 2015, even though the plans were approved in 2001. Furthermore, three months after the work began, the Ministry of Finance

ordered a reassessment of the project, claiming that it could not meet the load stemming from the unanticipated rate of population growth in the metropolis. In tandem with continuation of work on the light rail, the current disputes between local authorities about a considerable part of the route are liable to delay completion of the project still further.

As a result of the infrastructure gap, population density in central Israel is likely to increase, followed by a decline in the quality of life and social deterioration that may be reflected in demonstrations, non-enforcement of the law, and a decline in the sense of personal security. This situation is likely to result in apathy to the country among residents of central Israel whose way of life, economy, and expectations are similar to those of people in Western countries, and lead them to invest overseas at the expense of the local economy, and perhaps even to leave Israel.⁶

The National Level

The massive migration of residents from the Negev and the Galilee to central Israel over the past three decades is prominent almost entirely among the Jewish population, while at the same time, these regions have experienced substantial growth in their Arab population. These changes are undermining the demographic balance between Jews and Arabs in the Negev and the Galilee, which together comprise 76 percent of the area of Israel. In the Galilee, starting in 1961, the proportion of the Jewish population began to fall consistently, reaching 43.1 percent in 2015 (table 3),⁷ while in the central Galilee highland (the Nazareth Illit, Misgav, and Karmiel region), the proportion of the Jewish population has dropped to 20 percent.⁸

Table 3. Demographic Balance, Northern District, 1948-2015

	1948	1961	1972	1983	1995	2008	2014	2015
No. of Arabs	90,600	142,800	218,200	329,000	486,400	693,300	770,700	784,400
Percentage of Arabs	63.0%	42.4%	46.1%	50.2%	51.4%	56.7%	56.8%	56.9%
No. of Jews	53,400	194,300	255,700	327,000	460,500	548,800	587,900	596,000
Percentage of Jews	37.0%	57.6%	53.9%	49.8%	48.6%	43.3%	43.2%	43.1%

This trend is expected to continue, given the annual rates of natural increase of the Jewish population (1.4 percent) and Arab population (1.7

percent) in the Galilee,⁹ and in view of the continued migration from the area by the Jewish population (table 4).¹⁰

Table 4. Internal Migration of Jews, Northern District, 1985-2015

	1985	1992	2000	2008	2014	2015
Entering	14,400	25,200	17,800	21,000	22,100	23,600
Leaving	15,400	28,300	19,800	20,500	23,300	23,700
Balance	-1000	-3100	-2000	+500	-1200	-100

The Negev is experiencing a similar phenomenon. Starting in 1995 (following the waves of Jewish immigration from North Africa and the former Soviet Union), the proportion of the Jewish population began to fall gradually, reaching 59.7 percent in 2015 (table 5).

Table 5. Demographic Balance, Beer Sheva Sub-District, 1948-2015

	1948	1961	1972	1983	1995	2008	2014	2015
No. of Arabs	13,000	18,300	29,800	43,700	95,800	219,500	270,400	279,700
Percentage of Arabs	91.6%	18.9%	18.5%	15.9%	22.8%	36.4%	39.8%	40.3%
No. of Jews	1,200	78,900	171,400	231,300	323,100	383,000	409,200	415,600
Percentage of Jews	8.4%	81.1%	81.5%	84.1%	77.2%	63.6%	60.2%	59.7%

In addition, besides the migration of the Jewish population from the southern district (table 6),¹¹ the annual rates of natural increase among the remaining Jewish population (1.6 percent) are more than 60 percent lower than the corresponding rates among the Arab population (3.7 percent), which result from polygamy in the Bedouin communities.¹²

Table 6. Internal Migration of Jews, Southern District, 1985-2015

	1985	1992	2000	2008	2014	2015
Entering	16,800	37,200	26,300	26,300	27,800	28,200
Leaving	20,300	27,700	27,300	29,600	29,600	29,700
Balance	-3,500	+9,500	-1,000	-3,300	-1800	-1500

The undermining of the demographic balance in the Negev and the Galilee poses a geopolitical threat to Israel. This threat is highlighted by international history, which shows that minorities with national awareness and leadership that constitute a majority in their territory will take action to realize national aspirations through the use of demands, violent or peaceful, for autonomy (the Catalans in Spain), or alternatively for being annexed to another country, possibly with a common border (the Crimean peninsula).¹³ Consequently, it cannot be ruled out that the Arab society in Israel, which frequently expresses dissatisfaction with the political and social status quo in the country, will utilize the same measures taken by other minorities around the world. The continued convergence of the Jewish population in central Israel is therefore liable one day to turn greater metropolitan Tel Aviv into a city-state without a logistical rear. In tandem, Arab territorial continuity between the Galilee, Judea and Samaria, the Negev, the Gaza Strip, and Jordan will complicate military and civilian passage between different parts of Israel, and make the Jewish public, which will be concentrated in one place, very vulnerable.

This scenario, however, does not appear likely in the near future, as long as Israeli citizenship is the most attractive alternative for Israel's Arab sector. Yet the emergence of a substantial Arab majority in the Negev and the Galilee will gradually weaken Israel's essential sovereign borders and reduce its ability to enforce the law there. The government's difficulty in enforcing the law against illegal Bedouin construction in the Negev is a major symptom of this. In addition, the emergence of a substantial Arab majority in the Negev and the Galilee, with many cultural norms (e.g., polygamy among the Bedouin community), law, community format, religion, and language that are materially different from those of the State of Israel, is likely to have a critical effect on the character and identity of the state.

Why the Israel Population is "Abandoning" the Negev and the Galilee

A survey conducted in April 2015 shows that 85 percent of the population in central Israel are not interested in moving to the Negev and the Galilee, mainly because of the absence of jobs (27 percent) and the poor quality of life (15 percent).¹⁴ Not surprisingly, the survey shows that these very reasons are the main reasons that 78 percent of the residents in the Negev and the Galilee consider a move to central Israel.

In employment, for example, the average monthly salary in the Tel Aviv and central districts is more than double the corresponding salary in the Galilee and the Negev.¹⁵ A Bank of Israel report in 2015 found that for every 100 kilometers from Tel Aviv, the average household income was 15 percent lower.¹⁶ In addition, the unemployment rates and proportion of employees earning less than the minimum wage in the southern and northern districts were much higher than the corresponding rates in the Tel Aviv and central districts, while the rates of participation among residents in the labor force were significantly lower.¹⁷ These gaps are the result of differences in the types of economic activity between the districts. Thus, while employment in the Negev and the Galilee is based on conventional industries that have moved there in search of cheap land and government incentives, employment in central Israel is based on hi-tech and services sectors, such as banking, insurance, and software (table 7).¹⁸

This difference has a number of important consequences. First, while the Israeli service sectors compete among themselves for local clients, the conventional industrial sectors are forced to compete with overseas manufacturers (textile plants in China, for example). Second, while the number of jobs in the service sectors has grown enormously in recent years, the number of jobs in the conventional industries has grown very little, and the supply of jobs in the Negev and the Galilee has therefore remained small (and there is accordingly no competition for the employment of local workers). These figures, combined with low productivity in conventional industry (where there are constant demands for streamlining), are leading employers in the Negev and the Galilee to employ the local workers at low wages. Third, the reliance of the economy in the Negev and the Galilee on conventional industries poses a future challenge and creates employment uncertainty, given the processes of digitalization, automation, and artificial intelligence that are rendering many human jobs unnecessary. Furthermore, the conventional industry in the Negev and the Galilee suffers from a high degree of concentration, in which a limited number of very large enterprises, such as SodaStream and Israel Chemicals, employ most of the local residents. Therefore, if these enterprises encounter hard times, or choose to relocate elsewhere, this can pose an employment challenge to entire regions.

Table 7. Gaps between the Negev and Galilee and Central Israel in Employment

Comparison Index	Southern District	Northern District	Tel Aviv District
Average monthly wage	7,439 NIS (focusing on the Beer Sheva sub-district)	7,035 NIS	9,444 NIS
Unemployment rate	6.6%	6.2%	3.7%
Percentage of those earning less than the minimum wage	39.8%	42.1%	33.1%
Percentage of all residents of the region participating in the labor force	61.7%	58.3%	69.5%
Ratio of hi-tech industry jobs to all jobs in the district	22.4%	20.3%	30.15% (average for Tel Aviv and central districts)
Ratio of conventional industry and mixed-conventional industry jobs to all jobs in the district	56%	66%	53.5% (average for Tel Aviv and central districts)

There are also prominent gaps in education, with the average investment per student by the local authorities in the Tel Aviv and central districts more than double the educational investment by local authorities in the Negev and the Galilee.¹⁹ Accordingly, the average marks on the standardized tests are significantly higher in the Tel Aviv and central districts than in the southern and northern districts for all the subjects examined,²⁰ a meaningful difference that is also expressed in the gap between the proportion of those qualifying for basic matriculation and outstanding matriculation in the various districts (table 8).²¹

These gaps result inter alia from the government's budgeting process for education. Thus, other than the basic budget for education, which the government allots almost equally between the local authorities, the government applies a matching policy, in which the Ministry of Education helps supplement financing for educational projects initiated by the local authorities. In view of the inability of some of the disadvantaged local authorities in the Negev and the Galilee to provide a minimum budget for initiating these projects, however, the process generates inequality in the level of education provided in different regions. Nonetheless, some of the poor local authorities in the Negev and the Galilee have managed to bridge

the gap by raising donations and activity in the third sector. However, this pattern has created a large number of individual unsupervised and short term projects in their vicinity operated by non-profit organizations, thereby creating inconsistency in the system. Also, these projects are not measurement-oriented, and are not committed to output. The prominent gaps between the districts also extend to access to institutions of higher learning; the vast majority of universities and colleges are located in central Israel (table 8).²²

Table 8. Gaps between the Negev and Galilee and the Center in Education

Comparison Index	Southern District	Northern District	Average of Tel Aviv and Central Districts
Average mark in achievement exams in Hebrew sector (2012-2013 school year)			
Mark in Hebrew	64.3	64.3	71.1
Mark in English	64.3	67.6	76.2
Science and technology	44.5	48.4	53.4
Mathematics	58.7	60.9	72.3
Average investment in a student by the local authority (in the 2013-2014 school year)	Beer Sheva: 3,780 NIS Dimona: 2,877 NIS Yeruham: 3,572 NIS	Afula: 3,129 NIS Tiberias: 3,663 NIS Acre: 1,959 NIS	Tel Aviv: 8,504 NIS Herzliya: 7,608 NIS Kfar Saba: 7,196 NIS
Percentage of 17 year-old students qualifying for matriculation (in the 2015-2016 school year)	Beer Sheva: 70.5% Dimona: 63.8% Yeruham: 69.3%	Afula: 59.7% Tiberias: 60.7% Acre: 66.8%	Tel Aviv: 72.2% Herzliya: 85.4% Kfar Saba: 83%
Percentage of students qualifying for outstanding matriculation (in the 2015-2016 school year)	Beer Sheva: 3.8% Dimona: 3.4% Yeruham: 7.9%	Afula: 3.1% Tiberias: 4.6% Acre: 4.1%	Tel Aviv: 9.7% Herzliya: 14.7% Kfar Saba: 10.1%
Percentage of undergraduate students in higher education according to the district of the institution (in the 2015-2016 school year)	14.2%	9.7%	48%

In healthcare, the rate of doctors and nurses employed in the southern and northern districts is 50 percent lower than in the Tel Aviv and central districts, and there are also substantial differences in the number of available beds for general hospitalization, intensive care, children's wards, operating rooms, and emergency medicine centers. These differences lengthen the waiting time for medical treatment in the southern and northern districts, and create a difference in the medical standard from the one prevailing in central Israel. The result is a higher infant mortality rate and a shorter life expectancy in these regions. Recent surveys also indicate that a considerable portion of residents of the south and the north complain about the absence of emergency medical services where they live, and have to forego medical treatment due to considerations of distance; Such occurrences are much less frequent in the Tel Aviv and central districts (table 9).²³

Table 9. Gaps between the Negev and Galilee and Central Israel in Health

Comparison Index	Southern District	Northern District	Tel Aviv District
Rate of employed doctors (per 1,000 people)	2.3	3.1	5.1
Rate of employed nurses (per 1,000 people)	3.3	4.4	6
Rate of beds for general hospitalization (per 1,000 people)	1.35	1.57	2.02
Rate of beds for emergency medicine (per 1,000 people)	0.09	0.16	0.14
Complaints about an absence of emergency medical services in the region of their residence	23%	29%	14%
Percentage of people reporting waiving medical treatment because of distance	17%	12%	4%
Infant mortality rates (per 1,000 people)	5.3	3.9	2.1

In all, it is unreasonable to expect the Negev and the Galilee to attract a massive influx of new residents while it is substantially inferior to central Israel in so many important aspects of life.

Governmental Efforts to Encourage Settlement in the Negev and the Galilee

The national effort to encourage settlement in the Negev and the Galilee is divided among a large number of government ministries.²⁴ However, despite some cooperation among them, a single agency for integrating all this activity is conspicuously absent. This role was originally designated for the Ministry for the Development of the Negev and the Galilee, but this ministry lacks in resources and exclusive authority, leading to duplication in its efforts with the other ministries and much confusion. In addition to the problems created by the absence of an integrating agency, the main argument expressed in this essay is that the principal reason for the government's lack of success in encouraging settlement in the Negev and the Galilee lies in the fact that most of the efforts are not designed to bring about a strategic, organized, and comprehensive change in the quality of life in these regions; they are based on two questionable strategies: providing economic incentives for development and settlement, and solving local problems.

The first strategy is reflected, *inter alia*, in the classification of most of the communities in the Negev and the Galilee as “national priority areas,” whereby people settling there are granted benefits in the form of reduced leasing fees for an allocation of land, subsidization of development costs for construction, and mortgage benefits. In this framework, residents of these communities receive tax benefits in the form of tax credits amounting to 7-21 percent of their monthly income. The Ministry for the Development of the Negev and the Galilee also offers 10,000 NIS to immigrant families moving to the Negev and the Galilee, and a grant for finding work or opening a business for returning residents. In addition, in order to encourage settlement by creating jobs, the Ministry of Economy and Industry grants monetary aid for establishing enterprises or moving them to the Negev and the Galilee, and substantial tax concessions for a number of years. Local businesses also enjoy reduced leasing fees for an allocation of land for industry, crafts, tourism, and commerce; subsidies for production in specific sectors; and a loan fund with a state guarantee.

The economic incentive strategy is likewise prominent in the housing sphere and in the attempts to attract students to the Negev and the Galilee. In the housing sphere, the Ministry for the Development of the Negev and the Galilee subsidizes rent for dozens of families and students in urban communities, and initiates special projects in rural councils. For example, the “Association Homes” project enables those considering settling to rent

apartments at a controlled rent and to buy the apartments at the end of the lease periods, while deducting the rent paid up until then from the price. Where students are concerned, the Ministry funds the first year of studies for military or national service graduates at colleges in the Negev and the Galilee, and initiates programs such as “Students Building the Future,” which offers a scholarship to students in exchange for employment in one of the local companies.

Despite this strategy, the demographic changes prove that the high price in employment and quality of life of living in the Negev and the Galilee makes the economic incentives offered by the government negligible, in comparison with the disadvantages. Furthermore, the monetary incentives strategy is perceived as “compensation” for moving to a place that is not good on its own merits, and reinforces the negative image of the Negev and the Galilee. This image persists despite the efforts to counter it through campaigns, fairs, and conferences, and also through the Negev and Galilee Settlement Information Center, which provides consulting for those interested in moving and puts them in touch with the various communities and councils.

Nonetheless, action taken by the government in the framework of the second strategy, solving local problems, has a positive, albeit limited, effect on settlement and development in the Negev and the Galilee. For example, in 2011, a faculty of medicine was inaugurated in Tzfat, followed by 600 students and 100 medical personnel moving to communities in the area. At the same time, even though this step was accompanied by financing for the purchase of advanced medical equipment for hospitals in the Galilee and upgrading of the medical infrastructure in the area, the medical standard in the Galilee remains far lower than in central Israel. As for other measures, the government is continuing its efforts to move some IDF units from central Israel to the Negev. As part of this measure, which is designed to involve the migration of 3,000 families of soldiers in the standing army to communities in the region, special neighborhoods were built in Yeruham, Meitar, and Omer. An administration was established for the southward move aimed at guiding and advising these families in their move. However, in addition to the fact that to date only some 100 families have moved, the move to the Negev by the IDF is liable to have the opposite effect, because the IDF is vacating 236,000 sq m of land in central Israel on which thousands of housing units are to be constructed. This is likely to lower housing prices in central Israel, thereby giving many people an incentive to live there.

With respect to small and medium-sized businesses, the Ministry of Economy and Industry is a partner in planning and building industrial parks, and also operates entrepreneurship centers for young people and business centers, both providing management, guidance, and market services at low cost. In addition, the Ministry for the Development of the Negev and the Galilee recently published an “aid procedure for companies” offering local companies budgetary assistance in return for hiring more workers. Similarly, a “BizNegev” portal was founded in order to leverage the procurement budgets of major institutions in the Negev for the purpose of increasing the economic activity of local businesses by enhancing cooperation between them. Nevertheless, the proposed solutions do not solve the many bureaucratic difficulties faced by small and medium-sized businesses in the Negev and the Galilee, such as obtaining permits for opening a business and filing for tenders, nor do they significantly improve the ability of those businesses to compete against their counterparts in central Israel.

In education, the government has initiated a number of projects for computerizing the educational systems in the Negev and the Galilee for the purpose of improving access to information technology for local students. Furthermore, the Ministry for the Development of the Negev and the Galilee operates five science and excellence centers, providing those students with exposure to a broad range of subjects. In informal education, the Ministry subsidizes enrichment groups and kindergartens for 80,000 children, and operates centers for local young people as a comprehensive and organized response to their needs in order to provide them with tools for personal and professional development. These measures, however, have not yet shown concrete results, and do not provide a solution for the inability of the local authorities in the Negev and the Galilee to invest as much in local students as their counterparts in central Israel. They therefore do not eliminate the need for supplementary programs operated by non-profit organizations.

In transportation, the Ministry of Transport is promoting a project to improve access to central Israel for residents of the Negev and the Galilee and access to the Negev and the Galilee for residents of central Israel. The southern part of Highway 6 is under construction in the Negev, and work is continuing on its continuation in the direction of Lehavim and Negev Junction. In addition, the frequency of trains from Tel Aviv to Beer Sheva has doubled. In the Galilee, the northern part of Highway 6 reaching Somekh Junction is under construction, and work will later begin on its continuation in the direction of Shlomi. In addition, an “eastern arm” has

been paved connecting Highway 6 at Yokneam, Amiad Junction, and the Galilee Panhandle. This makes it possible to travel directly, with no traffic lights or intersections, from the Negev through the central region to the northern Galilee. In another project, a Jezreel Valley railway has been built between Haifa and Beit Shean, and tracks have been built between Acre and Karmiel. At the same time, the effort to shorten travel times between central Israel and the Negev and the Galilee is liable to increase the phenomenon of commuting, by enabling people to continue living in central Israel even if they are employed in the Negev and the Galilee.

From a settlement standpoint, along with the Ministry of the Interior's measures to strengthen the local authorities in the Negev and the Galilee through equalization grants and development budgets, the Ministry for the Development of the Negev and the Galilee is budgeting the establishing and reinforcement of settlement cores in these regions, in which a group of people wishing to live together in an existing community or establish a new community settle in one of the regions. At the same time, the Ministry of Construction and Housing is working on a community planning program and a new city in the Negev and the Galilee. Constructing new communities has a number of prominent disadvantages, however, including the need to build expensive infrastructure from scratch, e.g., roads and electricity, and increase dependence on the use of private vehicles. In comparison with the major cities, these small communities are likely to suffer even more from an absence of employment diversity and limited access to health and educational centers. Their establishment is therefore liable to aggravate the gaps described in this essay. In addition, establishing new communities will exacerbate the dispersal of government budgets for the local authorities as part of the effort to develop the Negev and the Galilee. This dispersal already contributes to the weakness of many local authorities, especially in the Galilee. Note in this context that the effectiveness of the regional blocs plan currently promoted by the Ministry of the Interior, which is designed to provide an appropriate solution to this problem, is limited, because these blocs lack authority.

What Can Be Done

The process of encouraging settlement in the Negev and the Galilee should encompass two stages. First, it is important for the government to make major investments in upgrading infrastructure that affects the quality of life

of residents in the Negev and the Galilee in order to prevent their continued migration from the region. This process requires the establishment of an independent agency under the Prime Minister's Office that will integrate the activity of all participating ministries, mediate disputes between them, and provide an organizing and guiding concept for developing the Negev and the Galilee. In addition, this agency must have the backing of influential political groups with a vital interest in developing the Negev and the Galilee. The absence of such groups has been felt deeply over the years, and is due in part to under-representation of these regions in the Knesset. The efforts should involve the development of three core fields, and should focus on the major cities in the Negev and the Galilee, such as Beer Sheva, Dimona, Karmiel, and Tiberias.

In employment, it is important to transfer public institutions and state offices to the Negev and the Galilee in order to enhance employment diversity and possibilities, and to bolster the municipal property tax payments collected by the local authorities. It is also recommended to establish substantial employment anchors in these regions, such as an international airport at Nevatim or in the Jezreel Valley, that will provide tens of thousands of jobs in the long term. In addition, it is important to map the small and medium-sized businesses in the Negev and the Galilee, study their needs, and change government actions accordingly. In this context, because of the bureaucratic difficulties encountered by the local businesses, money should be allocated for business development coordinators representing the Ministry of Economy and Industry in the local authorities, who will provide a solution for problems in real time. It is also recommended to consider amending the Mandatory Tenders Law in order to give affirmative action preference and credit points to small and medium-sized businesses from the Negev and the Galilee in everything pertaining to public procurement by government ministries and local authorities from all parts of Israel. In addition, the rate of corporate tax and other taxes that international companies are charged for activity in the Negev and the Galilee should be reduced in order to give them an incentive to operate in these regions.

In education, it is important to consider a differential budget policy for education in which the state takes into account the economic situation of the local authority and its ability to invest independently in the residents of its city, from kindergartens and schools to informal education. The extra budget, which does not require cutting the budgets of wealthier local authorities, will reduce the dependence of disadvantaged local authorities

in the Negev and the Galilee on third sector organizations, and enable them to provide supervised and measurement-oriented study programs and enrichment activities (in cooperation with the Ministry of Education). In this aspect, but not only there, the need to bolster cooperation between the local authorities in the Negev and the Galilee should be emphasized, and it is therefore recommended that the government take action to establish a common administration that includes representatives of the Ministry of Education and the heads of the education departments in the local authorities. In this forum, it will be important to make both formal and informal educational services provided in a specific local authority (such as specialized subjects) available to students from other local authorities in the region. Accordingly, the Ministry of Education should budget extra money for local authorities providing regional educational services. Cooperation in transporting students from one local authority to another is also recommended, and it is desirable to create another university in the Galilee and the Negev.

In healthcare, it is important to amend the State Health Insurance Law, so that it includes precise definitions for the section stating that a health fund member is entitled to obtain all the services included in the based of health services “with reasonable quality, within a reasonable period of time, and at a reasonable distance.” Over the years, efforts to create precise definitions of the term “reasonable” have failed, and the health funds are therefore allowed room for broad interpretation and varying medical standards in different parts of Israel. As a supplementary measure, it is best for the Ministry of Health to supervise the health funds’ budget allocations – which rely on health insurance payments by Israeli citizens – between the various districts and to demand transparency in the process. This measure can be made part of the national program for community health quality indices in Israel. Building another hospital in the Negev and the Galilee and substantially expanding the number of beds in the existing hospitals is also recommended. In addition, it is important to expand the system of emergency medical centers, attract medical personnel, and increase financing for patient transportation, treatment, and rehabilitation services. Government decisions in recent years seeking to accomplish these tasks were not implemented, due to the budget and management difficulties of the local authorities in the Negev and the Galilee.

When this stage has been completed, and the residents of the Negev and the Galilee themselves realize the potential of their locales and the value of

remaining in their regions, it will be possible to move to the second stage, and attempt to “attract” people from other parts of Israel to the Negev and the Galilee, not in order to benefit from a monetary incentive or a lower cost of living, but in order to improve the quality of their lives.

Notes

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- 23 Taken from reports by the Ministry of Health, <https://www.health.gov.il/publicationsfiles/inequality-2016.pdf>, and the Adva Center, <http://adva.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/health-gaps-november-20151.pdf>, dealing with inequality in health.
- 24 The government actions were taken from Freedom of Information Law reports by the various ministries during the past five years.