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One in Three Israeli Families Receive Welfare Aid, Statistics Show

Data from the Central Bureau of Statistics and the Social Affairs Ministry show that 28% of Israeli families sought aid in 2011, an increase of 20% since 2009.

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The economic situation of families in Israel is declining rapidly, according to a cross-comparison of Central Bureau of Statistics data and Social Affairs Ministry reports. About 28% of Israeli families sought help from welfare bureaus in 2011 – marking an increase of 20% from 2009 and about 75% from 1998.

The proportion of families needing help has increased even though the average number of children per family remains virtually unchanged, at 3.7 children per household.

In 2011, there were some 1.83 million families in Israel, and about 520,000 of those have applied for help or are under the care of the Social Affairs Ministry, according to Central Bureau of Statistics figures released for Family Day (February 6). In 71% of cases, the welfare bureaus are treating all of the family's members. In 2009, the ministry cared for 435,500 households – about 20.2% of all households in Israel that year, while in 1998 the caseload was 298,000 households – or about 18% of households.

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In 2011, about 15% of the families registered at the welfare bureaus were headed by a single parent; in about 17% of these cases, the head of the family immigrated from the former Soviet Union (from the 1990s onward) and in about 4% of cases the head of the family was of Ethiopian origin.

There has been a nearly 60% increase in the number of single mothers, from 8,400 in 2000 to 13,500 in 2011. In that year 5,050 single Jewish women gave birth, as compared to 2,600 in 2000. According to the statistics bureau data, about 92 percent of single-parent families with children under the age of 17 are headed by a woman.

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The main reason families apply for welfare services relates to the aging of one of the family members (33%). In most cases, these are households where elderly people live alone. About one-quarter of families apply due to inadequate functioning by parents or teens. Another 21% apply for aid because of medical issues or disabilities and about 16% apply to due to poverty or difficulties earning a living.

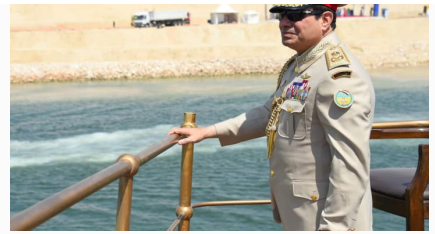
In 2011, the average monthly household expenditure on goods and services was NIS 13,967. In a family with three children the monthly expenditure was more than NIS 16,000. The greatest expenditure was for housing, followed by transportation and, in third place, food.

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The statistics bureau data indicate that in Israel, as in Europe, the status of the family as a key element in society has eroded. In 2000 there were 1.5 million families living in Israel and today there are 1.83 million. At first glance it would appear that there has been an increase of 22% but the increase in the total number of inhabitants is higher – 25% (6.3 million in 2000 as compared to 7.9 million today).

Since the average number of people in the Israeli family has dropped to 3.73 (relative to 3.76 in 2000), it can be deduced that there are more people living outside a family household in Israel than in one. A family, as defined by the statistics bureau, is “two or more people living in the same household and related to one another as a married or unmarried couple or as parent and child.”

Among the parts of the country, the Tel Aviv district is characterized by the highest proportion of couples without children (34.4%) and the lowest proportion of couples with children up to the age of 17 (37.55). The Jerusalem district and the southern district are characterized by the highest proportion of single-parent families with children up to the age of 17 (7.4% and 7.9 percent



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with children up to the age of 17 (7.4% and 7.0 percent, respectively), compared with 5.8 percent nationwide.

In 2011 the average number of people in an Israeli family was 3.6 in a Jewish family and 4.8 in an Arab family. This difference stems from higher fertility rates among Arab families as well as from the aging of the population among Jews. About one-third of Arab families in Israel consist of six or more people – three times the rate of families this size among the Jewish population (about 10%).



Single mothers dependent on government stipends have until now had little incentive to look for work. Credit: Nir Kafri



Tali Heruti-Sover

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