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## **The Employment Situation of Ethiopian Israelis**

The Adva Center prepared this report in cooperation with the UJA-Federation of New York as a basis for consultations with groups and organizations involved in the absorption of Ethiopian immigrants in Israel. The Adva Center is solely responsible for its contents; we welcome your comments.

We would like to thank the UJA-Federation of New York, especially David Mallach, Managing Director, Commission on the Jewish People, UJA-Federation of New York; Stephen Donshik, Executive Director, Israel Office, UJA-Federation of New York; and Ilan Halperin, Senior Overseas Executive of the Israel office, for their initiative, close cooperation and input in the process of preparing the report.

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Barbara Swirski  
Director, Adva Center

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## The Employment Situation of Ethiopian Israelis

### THE ADVA CENTER SEEKS

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The above want-ad was publicized via the Shatil website, via social change organizations, and via the Student Administration at the Ministry of Absorption.

The Shatil ad resulted in about 100 inquiries, only one from an Ethiopian Israeli. The Student Administration ad resulted in the coordinator, Shimon Salomon, faxing the Adva Center a list of about 20 Ethiopian college grads. He was asked to send the candidates' CVs, after which the three candidates whose academic and work records were deemed most appropriate for the job received invitations to a job interview. All three, equally self-possessed and articulate, passed the interview with flying colors and were invited to a second interview. The choice was not easy; all three appeared highly qualified; in the end Kefalea Yosef, the candidate with the most direct experience in the field of employment, was chosen.

The above process revealed a veritable gold mine of potential employees that many Israeli employers do not know anything about.

The head interviewer pressed the button, turning off the tape recorder. The interviewee, head of the Human Resources Department of a bus company, leaned over his desk to get closer to two interviewers.

"Now I have a question to ask you."

"Go right ahead."

"Do you have any Ethiopians for me? I will take 50, even 100 right away and train them to be bus drivers at my own expense. And I will promise to give them jobs for at least three years."

One month later, the same scene was re-enacted at the end of an interview with the head of the Human Resources Department of another bus company.

In the authors' opinion, it would be wrong to conclude from these examples that Ethiopian Israelis are desirable as bus drivers because they have a special penchant for driving buses. The interviews indicated that Ethiopian Israelis require, on average, a longer training period than other drivers. Why, then, are two rival companies so eager to hire them? The answer, we believe, is that experience has shown that the investment pays off.

## **Introduction**

Most of the Ethiopian immigrants came to Israel without much formal education and without skills relevant to the Israeli labor market. Those facts made their integration into the work force no simple matter, but not “mission impossible” either. Realizing that the key to success in modern society is education, Jewish communities abroad and Israeli agencies responsible for immigrant absorption made a concerted effort to enable young Ethiopian Israelis to get a college education. This is probably one of the biggest achievements of all the bodies concerned with integrating Ethiopian Israelis into the mainstream of Israeli society.

Attention is now turning to the issue of employment as another important key to integration; the present study attempts to shed some light on the problems and to suggest some ways of dealing with them.

### **The Labor Market**

The bulk of the Ethiopian immigrants came to Israel at a time when the labor market was undergoing polarization into two distinct parts: one for persons with a college education and the other for persons with a high school education or less. The wages of the latter experienced erosion relative to the wages of the former, to the point where many persons without special skills now find it difficult to make a decent living.

To make matters worse, many workers are inadequately protected. The Histadrut lost most of its assets in the 1990s and now concentrates on protecting the stronger sectors of the labor force. The state does not enforce its own progressive labor laws, such as the Minimum Wage Law, and employers make increasing use of subcontracting arrangements, which often circumvent collective wage agreements. Employers have also learned to exploit competition among nonimmigrant workers, new immigrants, Palestinians from the Palestinian Authority and migrant workers; some have moved their production lines to the JET countries, Jordan, Egypt and Turkey, and others are looking towards China.

## **The Policies Adopted**

Aware of these developments, absorption agencies created special strategies for the new immigrants from Ethiopia, options designed to give them an advantage over Palestinian and migrant workers: vocational training, mostly for men; assistance with job placement, through special projects employing mediators between the employer and the potential worker; and income support payments. Regarding vocational training, experience has shown that the best labor policy for new immigrants is to channel them directly into the labor market, rather than referring them first to vocational training courses (King, 2003: 7). Common sense tells us the same: over the last 15 years, hundreds of thousands of migrant workers have been employed in agriculture, construction and personal services. Born and raised in countries that are typified as “agrarian” and socially “traditional,” these workers had no trouble creating a niche for themselves in the Israeli labor market. Still, vocational training is the order of the day, not as a prerequisite for work in Israel but in accordance with the principle of “life-long learning,” alongside work.

Job placement projects employing mediators have been successful in helping thousands of Ethiopian Israelis to find work, and they need to be continued. Income support may compete with low-paying jobs, but the solution is not to lower or abolish income support but to raise wages, restructure certain jobs, enforce labor laws, and provide protection to Ethiopian Israeli workers.

An Adva Center study, based on the 1999 Labor Force Survey (Swirski and Swirski, 2002) found that the most important factors in determining whether or not an Ethiopian Israeli of the primary working age (25-54) was gainfully employed were years of education and length of time in the country. Among the nearly 15,000 Ethiopian Israelis aged 25-54 living in Israel, over half were in the labor force (either employed or actively looking for work), compared with 76% of all Israelis. Women worked less than men: For the 25-34 age group, 74% of Ethiopian Israeli men were in the labor force, compared with 81% of all Israeli men; for women, the corresponding figures were 46% and 66%. Gender gaps were found for older age groups as well. For persons aged 35-44, 61% of Ethiopian Israeli men, compared with 86% of all Israeli

men; and only 35% of Ethiopian Israeli women compared with 69% of all Israel women were in the labor force. The gap was greatest for persons aged 45-54: 76% of Ethiopian Israeli men, compared with 87% of all Israeli men; and a mere 18% of Ethiopian Israeli women, compared with 69% of all Israeli women were in the work force (ibid: 17).

Employment surveys of Ethiopian Israelis were conducted in a number of localities by the Brookdale Institute. The latest survey, of 241 immigrants living in Haifa, found that the gender gap remains wide: 50% of men were found to be employed and an additional 24% looking for work, compared with 19% of women who were employed and 17% more looking for work (King, 2003: 2). The Brookdale study also found that employment rates increased with length of time in Israel, but that among women, the increase was significant only after 10 years (ibid.). Other findings of the same study add support to trends identified in earlier Brookdale studies: a significant proportion of Ethiopian Israelis work in skilled jobs (40% in the 2003 study), many unemployed Ethiopian Israelis face barriers to employment (lack of Hebrew language skills and little education), many possess significant resources (moderate language skills and moderate levels of education), and unemployed persons need help in integrating into the labor market (ibid: 5-6).

The present study looks into the employment situation of Ethiopian Israelis, focusing on four major groups:

### **1. College graduates:**

How many Ethiopian Israelis are college graduates? According to Shimon Salomon, Employment Coordinator for Ethiopian College Graduates, no definitive figures exist. What we do know is that at this juncture (2005), approximately 2,400 Ethiopian Israelis are studying at Israeli universities and colleges. We also know that every year between 250 and 300 Ethiopian Israelis graduate with college degrees. If we assume that this process has been going on for some ten years, then there are now between 2,500 and 3,000 college graduates from the Ethiopian Israeli community in the labor market.

The Adva Center study (2002) found several hundred young people employed in “academic, liberal and clerical professions” in the public services. Most of them were working in projects designed to help members of the Ethiopian Israeli community. We surmised that this type of employment of Ethiopian Israelis (most of whom were college grads) might provide them with knowledge that would help them integrate into the larger job market at a later date. However, we were cautious, “. . . [T]he 1999 figures may indicate that these Ethiopian Israelis are engaged in temporary positions and do not have a stable foothold” (Swirski and Swirski, 2002: 23).

In the present study, we analyze the phenomenon more in depth.

## **2. Women, and Especially Solo Mothers**

Our 2002 study found that 90% of employed Ethiopian Israeli women worked in blue-collar jobs, mostly in the services sector. While the vast majority of the women employed in manufacturing (69%) and in banking and business (100%) were unskilled workers, almost 30% of the women employed in the public services were in the liberal or technical professions. While no breakdowns were available, it can be assumed that most of the women with college degrees worked in the fields of education (but not as teachers) or social work.

As for the majority, who are unskilled, the problem is that they work in the low-wage part of the economy. As such, they are caught in a vicious circle: in order to work, they need childcare, but existing childcare options are often too expensive.

## **3. Recently Demobilized Soldiers**

This group was chosen because we wanted to ascertain whether or not they had difficulties finding jobs and what their plans were for the future.

## **4. Persons Aged 55 to 65**

In Israel today, it is almost impossible for persons aged 55 or older to find jobs, unless they have connections or very special qualifications. But the retirement age is 62 for women (and will rise gradually to 64) and 65 for men (and will rise gradually to 67).

To make matters worse, the trend in most sectors of the economy is to retire workers early – between the ages of 50 and 60. In this situation, persons without savings and without pensions (or without early retirement arrangements) become dependent on social security (Bituah Leumi) support payments.

We expected the problem to be especially grave among Ethiopian Israelis, due to their disadvantages in the labor market. The problem is one experienced by men; women who today are over the age of 55 were 35 or older if they immigrated during Operation Moses and over 42 if they immigrated during Operation Solomon. As work outside the home was not the norm for married women in Ethiopia, and as women of the above ages were not given any encouragement to work by the absorption authorities, they remained and still remain at home.

## Method

Two sets of interviews were conducted for this study. Firstly, in-depth interviews were conducted with thirty-three informants – 21 representatives of employers and employer associations, 8 government and JDC officials, and 4 leaders of Ethiopian Israeli NGOs.

Secondly, one hundred Ethiopian Israelis between the ages of 20 and 65 were interviewed concerning their employment situation and experience by means of a questionnaire. Interviewers were asked to interview 25 persons in each of the following localities – Hadera, Rehovoth, Lod and Netanya – and in each locality to interview an equal number of persons who were employed and unemployed, from each of the four categories listed above: college graduates; women, especially solo mothers; recently demobilized soldiers, both male and female; and persons between the ages of 55 and 65. Among the 100 persons interviewed, 51% were men and 49% were women; 45% were married, 17% were separated, divorced or widowed, and 38% were unmarried; 58% were parents of children. As for age, 23% were 24 years old or less, 59% were between the ages of 25 and 54, and 18% were between the ages 55 and 65. All were born in Ethiopia: 29% immigrated to Israel in the 1980s, 70% in the 1990s and only one in 2000. The number of employed persons interviewed was 67, and the number of unemployed was 33. Regarding the last school attended, the breakdown is as follows: 26% reported having no schooling at all, 6% cited primary school, 14% cited high school, 24% reported finishing high school with a matriculation certificate (bagrut), 6% cited post-high school institutions that were not academic, and 24% mentioned academic institutions.

A more detailed description of the methodology of the study is provided at the end of the report.

## **Major Findings**

### **The Employment Situation of Ethiopian Israelis as a Whole**

1. Ethiopian Israelis, college grads included, are not well connected to the mainstream channels through which jobs are found.
2. Wherever they are employed in sufficient numbers and for a sufficient amount of time, Ethiopian Israelis are recognized as desirable employees. Most employers are unaware of the potential of Ethiopian Israeli employees and they are unaware of how to recruit them.
3. Most Ethiopian Israelis of working age want to work; they were raised on the idea that there is no free lunch. But they do not want to be exploited or mistreated.

3a. In the present situation, in which there is a large supply of unskilled workers and a small demand for their services, Ethiopian Israelis without special skills are at a disadvantage vis-à-vis other jobseekers, due to lack of Hebrew language skills (especially newcomers), due to lack of Israeli “chutzpah,” and due to the stereotypes often harbored by employers (“Ethiopians, that’s Africa, backward”).

3b. Due to certain trends in the job market – hiring and employment by perm temp agencies and subcontractors (most interviewees use the terms interchangeably); the competition of migrant workers from other countries, to whom employers can get away with paying less than the minimum wage; and what is euphemistically called “job flexibility,” that is, short-term, part-time jobs, some of which are hardly jobs at all - some Ethiopian Israelis who work cannot make a decent living.

3c. For Ethiopian Israelis without a college education (as for other Israelis without special skills), the minimum wage is often a glass

ceiling. The unavailability of sufficient hours of work, or, on the other hand, absence from work due to illness or any other reason, result in take-home pay that is even less than the minimum wage (NIS 3,300, or about \$767 for a 43-hour week).

## **College Graduates**

4. The key to the integration of Ethiopian Israelis into the mainstream of the Israeli job market is the stratum of college graduates. However, the employment of college graduates in special projects serving the Ethiopian community does not appear to act as a stepping-stone into the mainstream. Rather, as a revolving door that swooshes them from project to project, it holds them back rather than spring-boarding them forward.

4a. A good proportion of Ethiopian Israeli college graduates have degrees in the social sciences. This choice is connected with the lower entrance requirements in the social sciences and with lack of awareness of the trend of downsizing the public services, where many had hoped to find employment.

4b. The failure of Ethiopian Israeli college graduates to break through into the mainstream may have a negative effect on youngsters' motivation to pursue college studies.

## **Women, and Especially Solo Mothers**

5. The young generation of Ethiopian Israeli women shares the aspirations of other young Israeli women: career + family. They are often held back by lack of Israeli chutzpah, on the one hand, and by employer stereotypes, on the other.

5a. Another obstacle for Ethiopian Israeli women with children, as for other women with children, is the absence of childcare or, more often, the expense of it.

5b. For Ethiopian Israeli women without special skills, the options are limited mainly to cleaning work through subcontracting agencies, care work for the elderly through nursing care agencies, and cashier work, jobs that rarely enable them to make a decent living.

### **Recently Demobilized Soldiers**

6. Recently demobilized soldiers (both male and female) often find employment as security guards, due to the fact that there is a critical mass of Ethiopian Israelis in this area of employment.

### **Older Working-Age Persons**

7. Working-age Ethiopian Israelis over 55 want to work, just like their younger counterparts, but they have a harder time finding jobs – just like other Israelis of the same age. Older Ethiopian Israelis have the additional problem of lack of Hebrew language skills.

## Discussion and Recommendations

### Employment Situation of Ethiopian Israelis as a Whole

#### **1. Ethiopian Israelis, college grads included, are not well connected to the mainstream channels through which jobs are found.**

“It’s a matter of knowing your way around . . . others just open their computers and send their CVs around. I don’t think every Ethiopian college grad knows how to go about finding a job.”

Ethiopian Israeli NGO leader

Cognizant of this problem, the Ministry of Absorption created employment projects around the country, partnerships with local governments in which mediators help working-age Ethiopian Israeli immigrants in the community find jobs. According to Dov Ohayon, director of Absorption Centers in the Ministry of Absorption, between 1,000 and 1,200 placements a year are made by mediators under his supervision. *Fidel*, an organization created and run by Ethiopian Israelis, operates a similar service, which in 2004 found jobs for 500 persons. Mediators work with Ethiopian Israelis who are not college graduates; they look for jobs with respectable establishments, preferably in industry or in public service. It is no easy task: such employers are not to be found in every locality, and if they are, they may not be hiring.

The work of mediators is especially important for working-age newcomers who do not yet know the language – or the ropes. It is also useful for employers, who may have communication problems with Ethiopian Israelis for cultural as well as language reasons.

One of the observations made most often in our study was that Ethiopian Israelis do not have connections, and that this constitutes a big disadvantage, as often jobs are obtained through connections. This is just as true for college grads as for

others. One Ethiopian leader offered his own experience as an example. He found a job in a hi-tech company thanks to some of the men he served with in the IDF. Without that connection, he is doubtful whether he would have been able to make the breakthrough into the mainstream job market.

In the present Adva survey, nearly one-third of persons with jobs reported finding them through friends. Unemployed persons reported seeking jobs mainly through the government employment service (probably because they had to register in order to receive income support) and through temp agencies.

At present, the Student Administration at the Ministry of Absorption (funded jointly by the Ministry and the Jewish Agency) is the place where Ethiopian college grads file their CVs. The Student Administration consists of one full-time official. Shimon Salomon, an Ethiopian Israeli, has held the position since July 2003. Salomon reports that he has on file 450 Ethiopian college graduates. Between September 2003 and April 2005, he found jobs for 57 college graduates. In addition, he reports that 29 college graduates are presently undergoing special training, at the completion of which they have been promised jobs. Salomon's method is to search for jobs primarily through newspaper ads and through the internet. He then sends prospective employers the CV's of college graduates whose education and experience are relevant to the positions open.

In July 2004, Salomon created a special forum of successful Ethiopian Israelis with high-level positions in both the private and the public sector. The goals of the forum are to counter negative stereotypes of Ethiopian Israelis, to help find jobs for college graduates, and to engage in lobby activities whenever relevant.

(In a telephone interview, Salomon revealed that since the 2005 budget was passed on March 31, 2005, no monies have been allocated to the Student Administration and he is presently working without a salary. The problem evidently lies somewhere between the two partners, the Jewish Agency and the Ministry of Absorption.)

More work needs to be done. As the number of Ethiopian Israeli college graduates is estimated at between 2,500 and 3,000, and as finding jobs for these graduates will pave the way for those who come after them, what we have before us is a problem that can probably be solved by means of a concerted effort that can be phased out within a relatively short time.

***Recommendation # 1: Create a National Employment Clearinghouse for Ethiopian Israeli college grads, with sufficient resources to engage in extensive outreach work with potential employers.***

One possibility is to expand the existing Student Administration. The advantage is that some of the machinery is already in place; the downside is the danger of government agencies utilizing the funds for other purposes. Another possibility would be to create a non-government project that might attract some government funding but would not be completely dependent upon government.



**2. Wherever they are employed in sufficient numbers and for a sufficient amount of time, Ethiopian Israelis are recognized as desirable employees.**

“I know they are conscientious workers and considered conscientious workers . . . no, I don’t think they have trouble finding a job because of their origin; they are considered conscientious, and that makes things easier for them.”  
Director of Human Resources Department, public hospital

“From my own experience, I can tell you that generally, wherever Ethiopians are employed, they have a better record than other employees. . . I have never heard anything bad about an Ethiopian employee.”  
Director of Human Resources Department, communications firm, past factory manager

“Ethiopian drivers are very good. They are loyal almost to the point of slavery, I’m embarrassed to say. They feel they are part of the organization and they care about it. . . Their public service ethic is very high.”

Director of Human Resources Department, bus company

“They are devoted and anxious to learn . . . In general, Ethiopians are very desirable employees.”

Director-General of a non-profit that provides nursing care services

“Ethiopian workers are preferable to Russian workers. They are more loyal; they won’t run out on you if someone offers them a shekel more than you. They don’t have a drinking problem either.”

Operations Director of a subcontracting agency for cleaning workers and security guards

We present several testimonials here, as prior to undertaking the present study, the first author had heard a few negative comments about Ethiopian Israelis as workers but no positive ones. The latest Brookdale Institute study (King, 2003: 3) mentioned that some common complaints among the eight Haifa employers with whom they conducted in-depth interviews were coming to work late, frequent absences and slow work. None of the employers we interviewed said anything about Ethiopian employees being slower than others. The only mention of slowness that we came across was a monthly report by a *Fidel* mediator operating out of Haifa: he noted that Haifa employers (number unspecified) with whom he had found job placements for Ethiopian Israelis complained that their work pace was too slow.

The director-general of a nursing care agency reported that her local branch heads identified the following shortcomings among the Ethiopian Israeli women they employed: requiring more guidance than others, coming late to work, and failing to report in when they were absent from work. At the same time, the women’s work habits were said to improve with time. Despite the shortcomings, the director-general stated unequivocally that in her organization Ethiopian Israeli women were considered desirable employees – and excellent care workers.

The only other employer who had anything to say about the shortcomings of Ethiopian Israeli employees was the resource director of a bus company; he prefaced his remarks with the statement that he was very satisfied with 99% of his Ethiopian

Israeli drivers. The shortcomings mentioned: they do not like to be spoken to insultingly (!), they require more training, and they are sometimes unduly influenced by leaders. Despite these shortcomings, he added, “if you invest in them, you get a near-perfect product: They simply do marvelous work.”

If hospitals, bus companies, care work agencies, security guard and cleaning worker agencies, industrial plants and at least one large communications firm have experience with Ethiopian Israelis as employees, the banks do not. We interviewed Human Resources officials in three major banks and found near zero employment of Ethiopian Israelis. The officials were aware of the under-representation of Ethiopians Israelis in their companies; they attributed this to the fact that Ethiopian Israelis rarely applied for bank jobs.

The banks are presently upgrading their personnel: they are looking for college graduates, especially, but not only, in economics and business administration. From our discussions with the bank officials, it was clear that they are not aware of the fact that the last mass immigration of Ethiopian Jews to Israel occurred more than ten years ago, and that Ethiopians Israelis now entering the job market are products of the Israeli school system. They are also not aware of the fact that Ethiopian Israelis are not in the habit of sending out unsolicited CVs by fax or email – which is the way many job candidates come to them. If the banks were aware that they could train “near-perfect products,” they might advertise job offers in Amharic-language media, which Ethiopian Israelis are more likely to follow. Conversely, if Ethiopian Israelis were aware that the banks were seeking new employees with academic credentials, they might apply.

***Recommendation # 2: Conduct a public relations campaign on behalf of Ethiopian Israelis of working age. Make a film showing success stories in different occupational areas. Air it on TV and at conventions of the Chamber of Commerce, the Manufacturers’ Association, the Association of Local Authorities, etc.***

The forum of successful Ethiopian Israelis organized by the Student Administration would be a ready source of success stories.

*Recommendation # 3: Give Ethiopian Israelis more career counseling so that they choose fields of study more likely to lead to jobs. Involve representatives from the hi-tech industries, the banks, and the insurance companies in the counseling efforts. If more economic support is required for students of economics or technological fields, it should be made available.*

*Recommendation # 4: Seek out additional employers, like the banks, that do not employ Ethiopian Israelis at present but could potentially do so. Involve them in the production of the public relations film about Ethiopian Israelis. Also, involve them in new career counseling efforts developed for Ethiopian Israelis.*

In other words, make sure that the effort is a concerted one.



**3. Most Ethiopian Israelis of working age want to work; they were raised on the idea that there is no free lunch. But they do not want to feel exploited or mistreated.**

The value of work is evinced in the proportion of persons in the Adva survey reporting that they derive satisfaction from their work: 73% (30) of unskilled workers reported that their jobs gave them satisfaction. Notably, 63% (12) of persons employed by perm temp agencies or subcontractors reported deriving satisfaction from work. “Notably,” because these are menial jobs with low pay and poor working conditions.

Ethiopian Israelis appear to be quite optimistic about their future in the labor market; asked how they think they will be positioned 10 years hence, only 4 out of 67 with jobs did not foresee any improvement – two of them because they would then be too old to work. Unemployed persons expressed a lesser degree of optimism; still, 55%

(18) foresaw that in ten years' time they would be either earning a decent wage or continuing their studies or professional development.

**3a. Ethiopian Israelis without special skills are at a disadvantage vis-à-vis other jobseekers, due to lack of Hebrew language skills (especially newcomers), due to lack of seniority, due to lack of Israeli chutzpah, and due to stereotypes harbored by employers.**

“In Ethiopia even if we weren't educated, we worked and made a decent living. But in Israel, because we have problems with the language, they all think we're “defective.” When I go out to look for a job, the moment they hear my Hebrew they think I don't know how to do anything and they don't hire me.”

Netanya man unemployed for 6 months

“Most Ethiopians are employed in industrial plants. Unfortunately, many plants were closed and a lot of people were laid off. As they say, last hired, first fired: Ethiopians don't have seniority.”

Ethiopian Israeli NGO leader

“An Ethiopian goes to a job interview. The employer asks, ‘Can you do this, can you do that.’ The Ethiopian will never say, ‘Sure, of course I can.’ He won't talk that way out of politeness. . . . Instead, he'll say, “Yes, I will try.”

Ethiopian Israeli NGO leader

“Only 20 years have passed since Operation Moses and Israeli society still harbors stereotypes and prejudices [regarding Ethiopian immigrants]. At the workplace, too, there are stereotypes regarding Ethiopian Jews, and this presents a serious obstacle . . . . Despite the desire on the part of the [Ethiopian] community to integrate into the Israeli labor market, without openness on the part of Israeli society . . . . without willingness on the part of various workplaces to give the immigrants a chance to be accepted – we can't bring about assimilation all by ourselves. Israeli society is not open enough.”

Ethiopian Israeli NGO leader

The language problem of new immigrants from Ethiopia is no different from the language problem of new immigrants from other lands. However, since most of the Ethiopian Israeli immigrants are unskilled, they find themselves competing with migrant workers. Although migrant workers have the same disadvantage of lack of language skills, they have an advantage as well: employers can get away with paying them less than the minimum wage – not by law, but in actual practice. With time, Ethiopian Israelis will overcome the language barrier.

Language acquisition – and an improvement in the economy – will also assuage the problem of “last hired, first fired.” As employers learn the advantages of Ethiopian Israeli employees, they will be less inclined to let them go. Public relations initiatives (*Recommendation #2*) could speed up the process.

Lack of Israeli chutzpah is another matter. While employment projects operated by *Fidel* and other organizations and agencies do provide crash courses in how to apply for a job, including how to “sell” oneself to prospective employers, we are not really convinced that *Pygmalion* is the order of the day. Perhaps efforts need to be made to inform employers about the modesty and good manners of Ethiopian Israelis.

Questioned about whether, in his opinion, Ethiopian Israelis ought to adopt Israeli chutzpah (which not all Israelis exhibit, of course!), the director of a human resources department of a government corporation replied that like the Yemenites before them, Ethiopian Israelis have to learn how to use their elbows, but there was no need for them to adopt chutzpah (he himself was of Yemenite origin).

Lastly, stereotypes of Ethiopian Jews cannot be expected to dissipate automatically. Work needs to be done to counter them (*Recommendation #2*).

**3b. Due to certain trends in the job market - hiring and employment by perm temp agencies and subcontractors; the competition of migrant workers from other countries, to whom employers can get away with paying less than the minimum wage; and part-time jobs, some of which are hardly jobs at all - many Ethiopian Israelis who work cannot make a decent living.**

....

**3c. For Ethiopian Israelis without a college education (as for other Israelis without special skills), the minimum wage is often a glass ceiling. The unavailability of sufficient hours of work, or, absence from work due to**

**illness or other reasons, result in take-home pay that is even lower than the minimum wage (NIS 3,300 or about \$767 for a 43-hour week).**

In the Adva survey, of the 67 interviewees that were employed, 48% (32) worked full-time, 19% (13) ¾-time, 19% (13) half-time, and 13% (9) only a few hours a week.

Twenty-eight percent (19) worked for perm temp agencies or subcontractors, 28% (19) worked in the private sector, 10% (7) worked in the public sector not in projects designed for Ethiopian Israelis, 31% (21) worked in projects for Ethiopian Israelis, and one person was self-employed.

The gross month salary for slightly over half of the interviewees was less than NIS 3,500; 31% (21) earned between NIS 3,500 and 4,999; 12% (8) between NIS 5,000 and 6,999, and only 3% (2 persons) NIS 7,000 or more. NIS 7,000 is the average monthly salary (about 25% of employed Israelis earn the average salary or more). Not surprisingly, 65% (22) of the employed women interviewed reported earning less than 3,500 a month, compared with 36% (12) of the men.

Thirty-four percent (23) of the interviewees reported that they had jobs defined as permanent.

“Employers exploit the workers. Then there is no motivation to work. How can a person be motivated to get up in the morning and go to work, if he doesn’t get paid more [than he gets as social assistance]. Bituah Leumi gives him NIS 2,800, the employer gives him NIS 2,800. So why should he get up in the morning? That’s what I’ve been hearing. . . . [The worker] would like to see a difference of at least 500 shekels, to make the effort worthwhile.”

Employment coordinator, Absorption Center

“My employer didn’t pay me for two weeks’ work due to a reporting error. I had to leave the job because I felt he was stealing hours and exploiting me.”

Unemployed Hadera woman with two small children having trouble finding a new job

A recurrent comment among our interviewees was that they could not find work or could not find enough work. Unemployed persons expressed the desire for a job, and persons employed in part-time jobs expressed the desire to find full-time positions.

The only unemployed persons who did not seem to be looking for work were those with serious health problems.

On the other hand, we noted that *Fidel* mediators stationed in Jerusalem commented that unskilled jobseekers were too choosy and unwilling to take just any job offered them. Examples of jobs refused: nursing care for the elderly and work as hospital auxiliary workers. Similar complaints were expressed in an interview with the human resources director of an abattoir in Kiryat Malachi. The director contended that he had job openings for unskilled workers, but that many Ethiopian immigrants did not want the jobs because the work was too hard. (He added that those who did take the jobs – 25 out of the 150 workers in the plant were Ethiopian Israelis – performed very well.). In answer to a question about wages, he replied “minimum wage plus premiums,” claiming that a worker could gross as high as NIS 4,000 a month.

How can we reconcile the value of labor in the eyes of Ethiopian Israelis and their insistence that they want to work with the refusals to work noted above? Perhaps an insight into this matter can be found in informal talks with workers employed in another plant in an industrial park near Kiryat Malachi. The workers told the interviewer that they were unhappy with their jobs because they felt the employer was exploiting them. There were fluctuations in their monthly paychecks, and no one bothered to explain the reasons for those fluctuations. We have no way of knowing whether or not these workers were, indeed, being exploited; what we do know is that they perceived themselves as such. Now, if the fluctuations were justified, a little more attention to the workers would go a long way towards dissipating their feelings of being exploited. And if they are, indeed, being exploited, there ought to be an address for redress of grievances.

There is no doubt that because they lack language skills and acquaintance with labor laws, some working Ethiopian Israelis - like other unskilled Israelis or migrant workers - are being exploited by employers. The written report of a *Fidel* mediator stationed in Haifa clearly states that there was a tendency on the part of employers to exploit the workers by having them work longer hours for the same pay. It is clear from the reports of all the mediators that their main concern was with finding jobs. They did not appear to have the time or wherewithal to deal with pay or working

conditions. The employment coordinator at the Absorption Center at Kiryat Malachi cited exploitation as one of the three main problems he encounters (the others: absence of job offers and the immigrants' lack of education). He told of one immigrant who has been working for 4 years at the same place at the minimum wage who failed to receive the cost-of-living increment mandated by law. Another case: a group of mothers who worked for a few months and never got paid: they quit of course. Yet another: two women were docked NIS 300 each for an "advance" they never received. The coordinator reported that he felt his hands were tied: if he pressed complaints on behalf of the workers, employers would not offer the immigrants any more jobs. In answer to the interviewer's question whether exploitation was the exception or the rule, the coordinator replied that it was the exception and that the main transgressors were cleaning work contractors.

It appears from the foregoing that finding jobs and protecting workers' rights are two separate functions.

***Recommendation # 5: Undertake efforts to inform Ethiopian Israelis of their employment rights.***

The idea is to encourage existing workers' rights organizations (*Kav La-oved, M'huyavoot*), in cooperation with Ethiopian Israeli NGOs, to make special efforts to reach Ethiopian Israelis, teach them their rights, and redress grievances. Tapes about the basic rights of workers could be distributed in Amharic, at workplaces as well as at offices of the government employment service around the country. Just as they targeted migrant workers as a group in need of outreach, workers' rights organizations could target Ethiopian Israelis.

There is probably no reason to create a separate workers' rights organization for Ethiopian Israelis: just as efforts need to be made to integrate them into the mainstream labor market, efforts need to be made to protect their rights, alongside those of other workers. The existing workers' rights organizations have gained valuable experience in coping with employer abuses, and outreach can be done to make that experience accessible to Ethiopian Israeli workers.

***Recommendation # 6: Advocate for the enforcement of the minimum wage for all employees in Israel.***

If the minimum wage is enforced for migrant workers, it will level the playing field for Ethiopian Israelis competing with them for jobs.

***Recommendation # 7: Advocate for implementation of an amendment to the Temporary Work Companies Law, which requires employees working for temp companies to become employees of their workplace after nine months of work.***

***Recommendation # 8: Advocate for the establishment of standards and regulations for subcontracting companies; these are the main employers of cleaning workers and security guards.***

While the Ministry of Labor has set regulations for temp agencies and there is a law pertaining to their operation, there are no standards or regulations for subcontracting companies, some of which are known to operate in violation of workers' rights.

## **College Graduates**

**4. The key to the integration of Ethiopian Israelis into the mainstream of the Israeli job market is the stratum of college graduates. The employment of college graduates in special projects serving the Ethiopian Israeli community does not appear to act as a stepping-stone into the mainstream.**

Of the 67 employed persons interviewed in the Adva survey, 20 had attended college: 13 of them (62%) worked in projects serving Ethiopian Israelis. Eight of them contended that their present job did not contribute in any way to their professional development.

“I don't see any disadvantage in Ethiopian college grads working in projects, if they are full-time jobs. The problem, I know, is that most of the jobs are half-time. The job market is full of project-jobs. In hi-tech, you have recruitment for two-year projects.”  
Ministry of Absorption official

“I don’t think that work on projects is a bad option for Ethiopian college graduates.”  
Ethiopian Israeli NGO leader

“I think we brought this situation on ourselves. I think every Ethiopian college graduate, as soon as he graduates, whether he has a B.A. or M.A., automatically looks for work at the JDC, the Ministry of Absorption, the Jewish Agency, or local governments, because these are considered good workplaces that want to employ Ethiopian college grads and automatically put them to work with members of their own community . . . . We need to be part of Israeli society, an integral part. If you study law, you should be a lawyer for everyone [not for Ethiopians only].”  
Ethiopian Israeli NGO leader

“I am not happy with the job because when the project is over, they’ll tell me to go home, just like what happened to many of my friends.”  
College grad with a B.A. in Social Work

“I want to be integrated into Israeli society, socially and work-wise. I see that today many college grads are employed to assist members of their own community. That’s wrong; it limits the development of the college grads and of the Ethiopian community as a whole.”  
Unemployed college grad who plans to apply for a permanent job in the IDF.

“Ethiopian college grads are stuck on the margins, because they are ‘sentenced’ to work in their own immediate surroundings . . . . The phenomenon will not contribute to the integration of Ethiopian immigrants into Israeli society and it will result in bitterness.”  
College grad unemployed for 5 months, after quitting a job in the private sector.

Here, too, we quote a number of interviewees in order to reflect the differences of opinion expressed in our study. Ministry of Absorption and JDC officials, as well as Ethiopian Israeli leaders, were asked why, in their opinion, most Ethiopian Israeli college graduates are employed in projects serving their own community. In contrast, rank-and-file Ethiopian Israelis were not asked this question; those who expressed an opinion on the issue brought it up because they wanted to say something about it.

Some (but not all) officials responsible for the projects went on the defensive when the question was asked; after all, they have a vested interest in the projects: the projects are of their own creation and they bring in funding. There is also logic in their description of project work as a stepping-stone to employment in the mainstream, as a way to gain experience that will help Ethiopian Israeli college grads find jobs elsewhere. However, some Ethiopian Israeli leaders, and several of the

college graduates we interviewed, saw things differently. The most common perception was that the projects acted as a revolving door rather than as a stepping-stone. When one project came to an end, laid off mediators sought employment in another project, as they could not find – or thought they had no chance of finding – employment elsewhere. They may have become experts at mediation for Ethiopian Israeli immigrants, but this is an area of expertise not widely sought in the mainstream workplace (notably, one interviewee with an entrepreneurial bent said he planned to establish a business offering mediation services). Several interviewees stated that the job does not generally contribute to career development; nor does it require knowledge beyond fluency in Hebrew. They viewed project work as circumscribing the world of Ethiopian Israeli college grads rather than enlarging it.

Unfortunately, there is no research on the matter. We do not know how many Ethiopian Israeli college grads employed in projects succeeded in finding jobs in the mainstream. We suspect that project work may indeed be a dead end or a job that holds back college grads rather than propelling them forward. Granted, it provides them with jobs, even if many of these are part-time. But perhaps it is time to do some re-thinking about project employment.

We are not saying that mediators are not doing valuable work. After all, the various projects do find jobs for hundreds of immigrants every year.

We also recognize that many mediators are highly motivated to serve their own community and that they derive a lot of satisfaction from their work.

And we are cognizant of the fact that project jobs have served as a “safety net” for college graduates, who for all the reasons analyzed in this study, seem to have a hard time finding employment in the mainstream labor market.

What we are saying is that this may not be an appropriate job for all college graduates. Even if the job is full-time (and it usually is not), it ordinarily pays no more than NIS 5,000 (\$1,163) a month. For the sake of comparison, this is the starting salary of bus drivers, who need no more than 12 years of schooling. Moreover,

although mediators are expected to visit employment sites, they are not usually reimbursed for travel expenses.

In short, Ethiopian Israeli college graduates are probably over-qualified and under-paid for jobs as mediators; surely this is the case for holders of M.A. degrees.

Some mediators are not college graduates, and for them, the job provides valuable experience and suitable remuneration.

As the saying goes, it isn't easy to kill two birds with one stone. As mediators, Ethiopian Israeli college grads may be able to solve the employment problems of quite a few unskilled immigrants (and other problems as well, in the framework of education projects), but in so doing, they are putting off the solution of their own.

***Recommendation # 9: Redesign the employment mediation projects, to include the following elements:***

- A. Promote excelling mediators to the job of full-time project managers whose function is to plan new strategies and supervise mediators. They have the knowledge and the experience to take over leadership positions.***
- B. For new projects, hire demobilized IDF soldiers as mediators; give them scholarships so that they can work part-time and study part-time. Make sure they get career counseling.***
- C. College grads currently working as mediators should be a target group for concerted efforts (Recommendation # 1,2,3,4) made to find new employment opportunities for Ethiopian Israelis.***



**4a. A good proportion of Ethiopian Israeli college graduates have degrees in the social sciences. This choice is connected with the lower entrance requirements in the social sciences and with lack of awareness of the**

**trend of downsizing the public services, where many had hoped to find employment.**

“There are more people with college educations in the Ethiopian community today than there were in the past. They should be integrated into the public sector and government jobs so that they can serve as an example for others.”

Unemployed Netanya man with training as a practical engineer whose last job was in a project

It is difficult to argue with the contention that Ethiopian Israelis ought to be more numerous and more visible in the public service. Firstly, as an example to others, and secondly, because public sector employees (excluding teachers) have strong unions and better job contracts than employees in some other sectors.

The fact is that quite a few Ethiopian Israelis have degrees in education (this information was obtained from the in-depth interviews). However, they are not employed as teachers, and they are conspicuously absent from local education departments, even in communities that have a large contingent of Ethiopian Israelis, like Netanya. Efforts need to be made to integrate them into schools and education departments, through public relations campaigns (**Recommendation # 2**) at the national and local levels.

On the other hand, Ethiopian Israelis have managed to break into several public service areas: the armed services, the police, the prisons authority, public hospitals (as nurses and auxiliaries) and the railroads. Salaries, fringe benefits, and job security are better in these services than in the private sector.

While the above services (with the exception of public hospitals) are undergoing expansion, they are the exception rather than the rule: education and health services, social welfare services, environmental services, and research and development services have all been downsizing, with the result that either they are not hiring at all or they are hiring via temp agencies under less advantageous terms of employment.

In other words, at this juncture, the public services should not be promoted as the best or the preferred career option. While our interviews indicate that some Ethiopian

Israelis are aiming for viable career options: the army, the police, computer science, statistics, and economics, **career counseling is still our main recommendation**, especially for women. Judging from our interviews, social work seems to be the number one career choice of many Ethiopian Israeli women. It will probably not be long before supply outruns demand. In contrast, the technological sciences are conspicuously absent from the career plans of Ethiopian Israeli women, and that is where the demand is growing. While Ethiopian Israeli women may be predisposed to social work for cultural reasons, it makes sense to guide them in other directions.

***Recommendation # 10: Provide career counseling for Ethiopian Israelis with social science degrees and encourage them to take courses that will give them a better chance in the job market.***

**4b. The failure of Ethiopian Israeli college graduates to break through into the mainstream may have a negative effect on youngsters' motivation to pursue college studies and on the community as a whole.**

“ . . . every young person who finds a job serves as a model for others, and if he doesn't find a job, it sends out a negative message.”  
JDC project head (Ethiopian Israeli)

From the in-depth interviews it emerged that college grads who fail to find work in their chosen fields may provide a negative incentive to younger siblings and other young people in the community. If a youngster fresh out of compulsory military service works as a security guard together with a college grad who could not find a more suitable job, the former may conclude that a college education is just not worth the effort. Of course, this is true not only for Ethiopian Israelis.

Regarding project jobs, while college grads apply for them because they are there and because they are the only jobs for which they have a “natural” advantage, many do not consider such employment a bona fide job. Some are quite frustrated. This attitude may be contagious, and youngsters may be discouraged by the fact that older siblings appear unable to get a “real” job.



## **Women, Especially Solo Mothers**

**5. The young generation of Ethiopian Israeli women shares the aspirations of other young Israeli women: career + family. They are often held back by lack of Israeli chutzpah, on the one hand, and by employer stereotypes, on the other.**

**5a. Another obstacle for Ethiopian Israeli women with children, like for other Israeli women with children, is the absence or expenses of childcare.**

**5b. For Ethiopian Israeli women without special skills, the options are limited mainly to cleaning work through subcontractors, care work for the elderly through nursing care agencies, and cashier work, jobs that rarely enable them to make a decent living.**

“The jobs I find are not suitable for a woman with children; employers don’t take this situation into account and I find my self falling between the chairs.”

Solo mother from Netanya who wants to work but cannot afford childcare services and cannot find a job with suitable hours.

Project Director: “The women’s groups help the women to develop and advance on the job”

Interviewer: “How can a careworker advance on the job?”

Project Director: “For example, we had cases of women who began working just a few hours in carework. They advanced to working half-time.

Interviewer: “By ‘advance on the job’ you mean the woman gets more hours of work?”

Project Director: “Yes, definitely. . . . After that the woman might change her employer and work in an industrial plant, which is more acceptable work.”

Just like their sabra sisters, young Ethiopian-born Israeli women have no conflicts over family vs. career: they want both. The impediments they face regarding career development have to do with some of the issues already discussed: for college grads,

their chosen field; for many, including college grads, employers' ignorance of the contributions they can make to their organizations.

Another impediment that comes up in many interviews, whether with NGO leaders, government officials or the women themselves, is the absence or cost of childcare. In Israel as a whole, more than 70% of mothers of small children (3 months through 3.5 years) have some kind of childcare arrangement, whether unpaid (9.4% have unpaid arrangements with relatives or friends or manage to take turns with spouses) or paid (63.2% use private or public daycare or employ nannies). (Fictelberg-Bermetz, 2004:24). Nannies are the most expensive arrangements. For Ethiopian Israelis, it is not considered acceptable to ask persons who are not relatives to babysit, nor it is acceptable to offer to pay relatives or friends for babysitting services. Private childcare is generally too expensive. While public daycare is less expensive and tuition is on a sliding scale, the lowest tuition level is NIS 350 per month per child. This is expensive for a woman with one child earning no more than the minimum wage; for a woman with two children it is exorbitant. (Special programs for solo mothers set the minimum tuition fee at NIS 250 per child; this is still too expensive for persons earning the minimum wage or less). Expense is one problem, time is another: many cleaning jobs require women to work very early in the morning, before daycare opens, or late at night, after it closes.

For women with older children, the shortness of the school day is a serious impediment to employment, as is the expense of after-school childcare arrangements.

Finally, for Ethiopian Israeli women without special skills, as for their sisters from other backgrounds, a serious problem is that work options are limited mainly to cleaning work, care work for the disabled or elderly, and work as cashiers. As the first two are jobs that shunt workers from client to client, they rarely enable them to work enough hours to earn even the minimum wage. Recent newspaper reports have shown that cashiers also have difficulty getting enough hours to earn the minimum wage.

While women may express a preference for factory work, because of the fixed hours of such work, not many factory jobs are available (traditional manufacturing is experiencing very little growth), and they are not to be found in every community.

***Recommendation # 11: Encourage both Ethiopian Israeli and mainstream NGOs to initiate projects that encourage Ethiopian Israeli women to upgrade their childcare skills and establish income-producing childcare facilities for other women.***

While it is not considered acceptable to take money for caring for the children of friends and neighbors, this obstacle could be overcome both by upgrading one's skills, thereby professionalizing babysitting services, and by establishing care facilities outside one's own neighborhood. Loans need to be provided to women interested in setting up childcare services.

***Recommendation #12: Do advocacy work in government as well as among nursing care agencies, to change the structure of care and cleaning work.***

Instead of the work being defined as "an hour here, an hour there" and the workers defined as "stopgaps," the jobs need to be redefined as full or part-time jobs that enable women (and men) to receive a steady wage at no less than the minimum wage (for full-time work). This change is certainly do-able, but it will take some doing!

***Recommendation # 13: Encourage Ethiopian Israeli women without matriculation certificates to complete their high school studies and to acquire new skills, in accordance with the needs of the labor market. The notion of life-long learning needs to be adopted for all Israelis, and opportunities need to be expanded, not through special programs for Ethiopian Israelis, but rather for all citizens.***



## Recently Demobilized Soldiers

**Demobilized soldiers have no trouble finding employment as security guards, due to the fact that there is a critical mass of Ethiopian Israelis in this area of employment.**

The interviewee works as a bus security guard. She is satisfied with both the work and the pay. She grosses between NIS 5000 and 6999. About herself, she says, "My ambition is to join the Police. I served in the Border Police [in the Army]. I like the field of security and for these reasons I should be able to get a job with the Police. It's a large agency and a person can get along, and even pursue further study while working." (93)

Employment profile of a recently demobilized soldier

The reason so many Ethiopian Israeli young adults work as security guards has nothing to do with their natural propensity for this kind of work, but rather to the fact that a critical mass of Ethiopian Israeli young people are already employed in this area. Perhaps the recent vintage of the task made it more accessible to Ethiopian (and Russian) newcomers to begin with. As the most common way of finding employment is through friends, the moment there is a critical number of persons working in a particular field, it is very likely that they will bring friends to fill new positions that open up.

According to the operations director of a company that employs security guards, their average period of employment is two years.

Security work pays the minimum wage, and some jobs pay more. It is not a bad option for demobilized soldiers, as long as they plan to continue their education.

However, it should be noted that as the peace process progresses, the demand for security work is expected to decrease. This is all the more reason to start looking for new options.

The "lesson to be learned" from the conspicuousness of Ethiopian Israelis in security jobs is the importance of getting a critical mass of Ethiopian Israelis into other sectors of the Israeli economy, so that they will create opportunities for others.

Another discovery: the interviewers were surprised to find that demobilized soldiers were generally quite optimistic. “That’s because they haven’t been around long enough to encounter real problems,” they warned.

An important task, then, is to prevent young Ethiopian Israelis from becoming disillusioned.

***Recommendation # 14: Pay special attention to young Ethiopian Israelis at the post-army junction of their lives. This attention should include career counseling.***

The authors note that a joint project of the JDC, in partnership with the municipality and several other government ministries, operates a youth center in Beer Sheba. The center aims to cater to youth before and after army service and after college graduation. There are plans to extend the service to three additional locations.

The authors also note that a number of agencies do have projects and organize events designed to assist demobilized soldiers to take the next step, including the IDF itself and some local authorities.

We were not able to examine the situation in depth in the context of the present project.

***Recommendation # 15: Undertake a study to map the projects and events designed for demobilized soldiers in general, and those from the Ethiopian Israeli community in particular. Ascertain to what extent Ethiopian Israelis utilize existing services.***

The question is what kind of outreach can be done to reach as many young people as possible and to provide guidance, including career counseling. Perhaps this is a project that can be undertaken by or in conjunction with existing Ethiopian Israeli NGOs.



## **Older Working-Age Persons**

### **8. Working-Age Ethiopian Israelis over 55 want to work, just like their younger counterparts, but they have a harder time finding jobs.**

The interviewee is an older person who immigrated to Israel in 2000. He goes regularly to the government employment service for work. He contends that the service gives him a lot of referrals, but he is rejected every time. He is unskilled and he doesn't know Hebrew. He explained to the interviewer that it is hard for persons his age (54-65) to find work. He is very unhappy with the fact that he is dependent on income support: he compares it to alms.

Profile of unemployed Netanya man

“I love my job for two reasons: It gives me an income, though it is not high. Second, time goes by pretty fast and if it were up to me I would like to work full-time and then I would not need income support . . . I hope G-d will give me the strength to work until I am 80.”

Lod man, aged 55-65

It is extremely difficult for Israelis over 55 (and even younger) to find work, unless they are well-connected. Ethiopian Israelis are at a major disadvantage: they lack connections, they are largely unskilled, they may lack Hebrew language skills, and they are subject to employer stereotypes.

While older Russian immigrants often find work as security guards, older Ethiopian immigrants do not.

Despite the disadvantages under which they labor (or not), older Ethiopian Israelis do not appear to harbor much bitterness (The interviewers were surprised at this). The fact that they are resigned to their situations does not mean that older working-age Ethiopian Israelis can be simply ignored.

Solutions are to be sought in two directions. One direction is government assistance. Such assistance can take many forms: In Holland, it takes the form of tax breaks for

employers hiring older people; in Sweden, wage subsidies for a period of two years; in the United Kingdom, a package dubbed “New Deal for 50+” including counseling, job placement services, and in-work training for persons over 50 (European Commission, 2003).

However, it looks like we will have to wait until the economy experiences a significant upswing before the Israeli government can be expected to turn its attention to the last in the employment line: older workers.

The other direction is a more limited approach: the creation of projects that benefit older, working-age Ethiopian Israelis.

***Recommendation # 15: Set up a task force to look into ways of providing part-time employment for older Ethiopian Israelis, through special projects located at community centers, schools, and unused city properties.***

Just as the *Almaz* sewing shop in Lod provides work for 15 Ethiopian Israeli women who work in the shop, as well as for several women (and men!) who embroider at home, similar projects can be created for small groups of older persons to assemble parts, to do cleaning work for local authorities, to do gardening work for public institutions, etc. - for pay. The model already exists for persons with disabilities.

Even part-time work would go a long way towards improving the quality of life of Ethiopian Israelis over 50.

## Methodology

The study utilized several sources and instruments.

1. The literature: All available reports on the employment situation of Ethiopian Israelis, including masters theses and minutes of meetings of the Knesset Immigration Absorption Committee, were summarized.
2. In-depth interviews of between an hour and an hour and a half were conducted jointly by the project coordinator (Kefalea Yosef) and the director of the Adva Center (Barbara Swirski) with 33 key informants: 21 employers or representatives of employers' associations, 8 government and JDC officials and project directors, and 4 Ethiopian NGO leaders. Interviews were conducted between November 2004 and April 2005. The organizations represented are listed in Appendix C. Most of the interviewees agreed to having the interviews taped, and these interviews were transcribed. (Due to time limitations, the interview with Shimon Salomon was shorter and conducted by telephone).
3. Interviews were conducted with 100 persons of working age in the Ethiopian Israeli community in four different cities: Rehovot, Netanya, Hadera and Lod. A variety of communities was chosen in order not to bias the findings with what might be the peculiarities of any one community. Interviewers were asked to interview about 25 persons in each community, half of them employed and half of them unemployed, and to attempt to interview an equal number of persons with the following characteristics: young people who had recently completed military service; college graduates; women, especially solo mothers; and persons between the age of 55 and 65. These categories were chosen because special problems had been identified for each.

For the purpose of the interviews, a questionnaire was constructed in Hebrew and translated into Amharic. Persons fluent in Hebrew were interviewed using the Hebrew questionnaire. After completion of the pretest, the interviews were conducted over a period of three months, from January 2005 through March 2005, by two Ethiopian Israeli college graduates, one a social worker (female)

and the other a man with a B.A. in sociology and political science employed half-time in an education project.

The sample was not one that allowed generalization, as it was neither random nor strictly representative; rather, after criteria had been set, interviewees were found by the “snowball method” – one interviewee recommending another. A statistical analysis was done of the answers to the questionnaires for purposes of adding to information obtained in other ways. More importantly, an employment profile was created for each of the 100 interviewees; a sampling of these is in Appendix D of the report. In addition to the closed questions, interviewees were asked if there was anything they wanted to add because they felt it was of importance to the study. The citations that appear in the report are taken from the answers to this question.

4. The interviewers themselves were interviewed by the authors of the report, regarding the interview process and their perceptions regarding the experiences reported by the interviewees.
5. Mr. Takele Mekonen, director of *Fidel*, allowed the authors to study the monthly reports written by all employment mediators working at *Fidel* over a three-month period.
6. Mr. Kefalea Yosef, the project coordinator, came to the project with a considerable amount of knowledge concerning the employment situation of Ethiopian Israelis, as he had previously worked as the director of the Hadera Absorption Center.

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## Appendix A: Occupations Reported by 67 Persons With Jobs

<b>Occupation</b>	<b>Number of Persons</b>
Unskilled worker	19
Mediator	10
Security guard	9
Tutor	5
Social worker	5
Armed Forces, Prisons Authority	2
Driver	2
Coordinator	2
Managerial job	2
Stock-room worker	2
Clerk	1
Lecturer	1
Technician	1
Welder	1
Group facilitator	1
Cook	1
Hairdresser	1
Librarian	1
Salesperson in department store	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>67</b>

**Appendix B: Job Preferences of Unemployed Persons**  
(Not including retirees and persons with serious health problems)

<b>Kind of Job</b>	<b>Number</b>
Any job	9
Factory job	7
Government	4
Army or Police	3
Serving Ethiopian Israelis	2
Agriculture	1
Hi-tech	1
Local government	1
Art	1
Electric company	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>30</b>

## Appendix C: Persons With Whom In-Depth Interviews Were Conducted

Name	Position
<b><i>EMPLOYERS and ASSOCIATIONS</i></b>	
Amir Glickman	Director Human Resources, Dan Bus Company
Meor Sasoon	Director Human Resources Egged Bus Company
Yitzhak Glick	Director Human Resources Bank Leumi
Yaakov Russo	Director Evaluation and Recruitment Department, Bank Leumi
Shmuel Finsler	Director Human Resources Discount Bank
Michal Brenner	Director Department of Strategic Development and Research, Human Resources Department, Bank HaPoalim
Gabriel Sabag	President and Founder ORS Temp Agency
Rami Avidan	Operations Director Mikud Security Services
Hila Adar	Recruitment Coordinator Teva Pharmaceuticals
Aliza Ofer	Director-General <i>Matav</i> Nursing Care Services
Michael Bashari	Director Personnel Chicken Abattoir
Micky Shapira	Director Almaz Sewing Shop
Joseph Gitenyu	Director Department of Labor and Human Resources Manufacturers' Association
Yisraela Mani	Director Economics Department Chamber of Commerce
Elana Arad	Director Human Resources Department Police
Yitzhak Zussman	Director Human Resources Department Prisons Authority
Pnina Lav-Arie	Manpower Planning Officer Prisons Authority
Aviva Patirsho	Director Human Resources Department Hillel Yafe Hospital (Hadera)
Ran Vardi	Director Human Resources Department Bezeq Communications Company

Yitzhak Seri	Director Human Resources Department Israel Railroad Company
Leora Shani	Director Department of Tutoring, Teaching and Learning Community Centers Company
<b>GOVERNMENT AND JDC OFFICIALS</b>	
Hanoch Zamir	Deputy Director-General Immigration Absorption Ministry
Dov Ohayon	Director Absorption Centers Immigration Absorption Ministry
David Yaso	Director Ethiopian Immigrants Depart. Immigration Absorption Ministry
Shimon Salomon	Employment Coordinator, Student Administration Immigration Absorption Ministry
David Maharat	Director, Steering Committee for Ethiopian Immigrants, Education Ministry
Arnon Mantver	Director-General, JDC-Israel
Ruth Yaron	Director “Eshet Hayal” and “Avi Hayal” Programs, JDC-Israel
Danny Pines	Director Department of Integration of Immigrants, Employment and Entrepreneurship, JDC-Israel
<b>NGO LEADERS</b>	
Nagist Mangesa	Director, National Project
Batya Ayub	Director, Israeli Association for Ethiopian Immigrants
Adiso Masala	Chair, Roof Organization for Ethiopian Immigrants
Takele Mekonen	Director, <i>Fidel</i>

### **Employers Who Refused to be Interviewed**

Israel Airport Authority  
 Israel Defense Forces  
 Israel Aircraft Industries  
 First International Bank of Israel  
 Mega  
 Amnir  
 Manpower Israel  
 Agudat Hashomrim Security Guards Agency  
 Security Guards Services Group  
 Security Guards Company Sh.A. *Moked* 2000

## **Appendix D: Employment Profiles**

### **College Graduates**

- Earned a B.A. in education without a teaching certificate. She works full-time as a boarding school coordinator. She is very happy to be working in the profession of her choice and has no complaints about anything. Her ambitions for the future: to get married and to advance professionally. She earns between NIS 5,000 and 6,999 a month.
- Has a degree in mediation from the Beit Berl College. He works as a mediator in Lod and Ramle, with schoolchildren and their parents. He likes his work and feels he is making a significant contribution to the community. His ambition is to improve his skills and advance within the profession. He earns between NIS 3,500 and 4,999 a month.
- Social worker employed half-time in a project. She is very unhappy with the conditions of her employment, because the job is only part-time and the employer is a project. She hopes that with time she will find a permanent, full-time job working for a local authority. She earns less than NIS 3,500 a month.
- Unemployed for 5 months, after resigning from a job in the private sector following “serious differences of opinion” with his employer. He says that college graduates ought to be employed in positions that fit their academic credentials. He would like to get a government job. Ten years from now, he sees himself as working in a public corporation, after having gotten an M.A. in business administration.
- Unemployed man who got his B.A. prior to doing compulsory military service. Since demobilization, he has had difficulty finding a job. So far, he has found only occasional work.

### **Women**

- Holds a matriculation certificate. After completing her army service, she took a course in hairdressing, and today she works full-time as a hairdresser in a salon. As for the future, “I dream of being self-employed, that is, first opening my own salon and later opening branches around the country.” She grosses between NIS 5,000 and 6999 a month.

- Uneducated woman going through divorce proceedings. She works part-time doing cleaning work in a school, a job she found through the government employment service. She does not like the job, because it requires a lot of physical effort, and also because it isn't full-time: she earns less than NIS 3,500 a month and also receives income support. Her ambition is to find full-time work, preferably as a cashier or in manufacturing or sales.
- A young woman with 12 years of schooling but no matriculation certificate. She married in Ethiopia and has four children. She works 1/3-time in cleaning work and earns less than NIS 3,500 a month. She does not like the work and she hopes to find another job, full-time, preferably in a factory.
- An unemployed woman without much schooling. She had a cleaning job but was dismissed due to cutbacks. She is looking for a half-time job rather than a full-time job because she has small children. She is of the opinion that a lot of women with children have trouble finding part-time jobs that allow them to be with their children when they need to be with them.
- Solo mother who is very frustrated concerning work. She contends that she can't find a job because she has no babysitting arrangement for her children. "Employers don't care whether you have children or not, the main thing is that you come in to work when they need you." She would like to work with children because she has experience in that field.

### **Demobilized Soldiers**

- Works as a bus security guard. He is satisfied with the job and the working conditions. He says he got the job thanks to his experience in an army combat unit. He earns between NIS 5,000 and 6,999 a month. His comment: "This is only temporary work. Next year I plan to study communications and human resources . . . I hope to succeed at the university and afterwards to find a job in one or both fields."
- Employed by a perm temp company as a stockboy in an industrial park near Lod. He got the job thanks to the fact that prior to military service, he worked as a stockboy for office equipment. His comment: "I like the job. What bothers me is why I have to work for the temp agency rather than the firm itself." Although he has a matriculation certificate, he does not intend to continue his studies. "My

only goal is to become a permanent employee of the firm.” He earns between NIS 3500 and 4999 a month.

- Demobilized about a year ago, the young woman has a matriculation certificate but she does not intend to continue her studies. She has a full-time, permanent job in a private firm preparing packages for delivery. She says she got the job because of her good coordination and she likes the job. Her ambition is to open a business selling bridal costumes and become a successful businesswoman. She earns under NIS 3,500.
- Works for the Prisons Authority. He likes the job very much and he wants to become an officer. He earns between NIS 3,500 and 4,999 a month. He says advancement depends on his making a personal investment in the job and he hopes to get a college degree, which will also help him to get ahead.
- Works as a security guard; he makes between NIS 3,500 and 4,999 a month. He is not happy with the job because “it’s a boring job with no possibility for advancement. My dream is to become a bus driver. I applied but was not accepted. Next year I will try my luck again.”

### **Persons Aged 55-65**

- Holds a permanent, full-time job at the airport and earns between NIS 3,500 and 4,999. He likes his work, about which he declares, “It’s a lot more than what some people have.” He intends to stay on the job as long as he can.
- Works full-time in a temporary job in a warehouse at less than NIS 3,500 a month. His employer is a temp agency. Asked if he liked the work, he replied, “I don’t like the job but I don’t think I’ll find anything better.” He hopes to keep the job until he retires.
- Never went to school. He used to work in manufacturing, through a temp agency. He left the job after a work accident; he can no longer do strenuous work. He receives a disability allowance. He would like to work part-time in the service of the Ethiopian community; he believes he could make a contribution, especially to the older people, and this kind of work does not require any physical effort.
- Unemployed man who says he has been looking for work, mostly on his own, but also through Ethiopian Israeli organizations, but he has been unable to find a job. He has not worked since immigrating to Israel.

- The interviewee is unemployed. He says he would like to work but can't find a job. He attributes this situation to his age and the problems he has with the language. He contends that older immigrants are capable of working, just as they worked in Ethiopia until an advanced age. For this reason they were healthier. In Israel, he says many are ill because they aren't working.

