

HIDDEN FIGURES

How the Coronavirus Has Affected Women and Men in Israel

Status Report Number 4 - March 2021





One year after the outbreak of the Corona pandemic in Israel, it is abundantly clear that the crisis has been a gendered one, impacting women and men differently. Moreover, we have experienced a crisis of care, as the epidemic has shown the universal dependence on care work performed mainly by women – being as they are the majority employed in inadequately paid essential services, as well as the persons doing unpaid work involved in maintaining the home and caring for family members. Furthermore, this work that women do is crucial to the country's economic recovery.



In recent months, international agencies such as the World Economic Forum¹ and the OECD published analyses of the gender implications of the crisis, stressing the need to respond to them as an integral part of policies designed to cope with the socio-economic crisis and recover from it. This conclusion was drawn against the background of studies showing that economic crises have long term negative impact on gender equality, **especially in relation to:**



1 Invisible Work: Care for Home and Family

The world over, women are involved more than men in unpaid work, such as housework and childcare. This work is not "counted" in the system of national accounts, nor does it figure in economic models of policy planning. In countries in which efforts have been made to estimate its economic value, it has been found to be the largest economic sector.²



Women are involved in housework and the care for children and other family members at a rate three times that of men.³



The frequent lockdowns and social distancing requirements led to the downsizing and shutdown of entire economic sectors. As a result of the time spent at home by all family members, home production increased (cleaning, meal preparation, etc.). Some of the duties and services formerly performed outside the home (for example, lunch at the workplace) or outsourced (cleaners, babysitters, etc.) were performed at home – mainly by women.



In other words, the Corona crisis transferred economic costs from the formal economy to the unpaid household economy.



A study carried out by the Berl Katznelson Center after the second lockdown found:⁴



The percentage of women who ceased paid employment to care for children

First lockdown

11%

Second lockdown

6.6%



The percentage of men who ceased paid employment to care for children

2%

1.8%

2

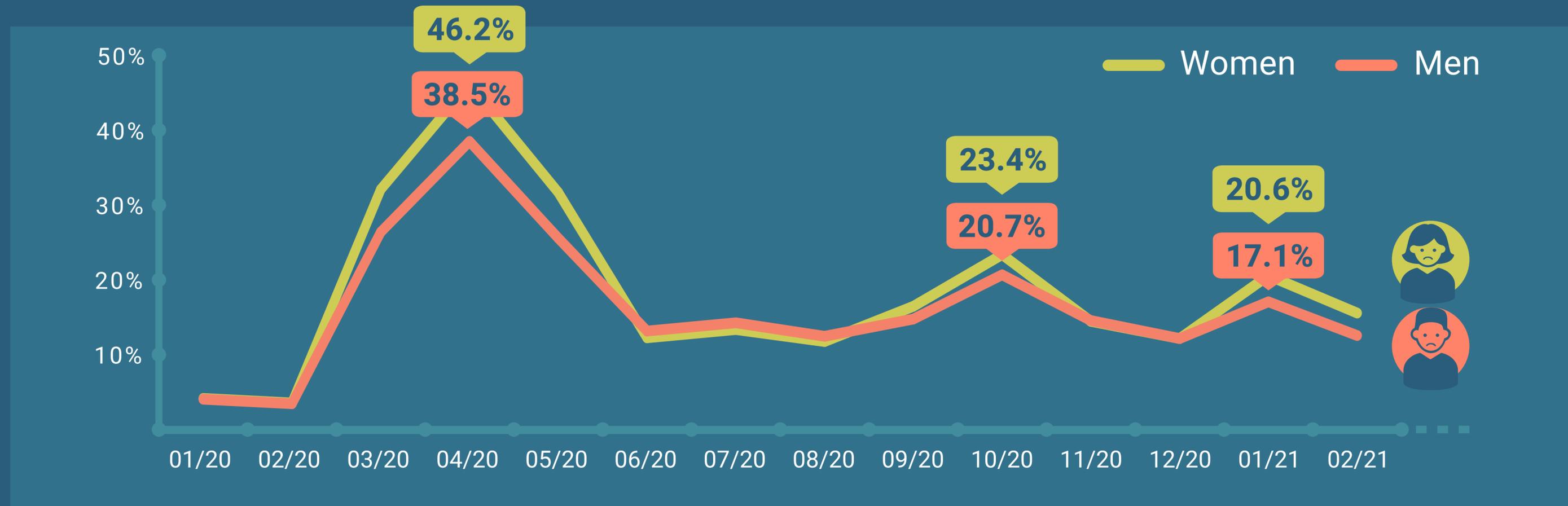
Employment and Unemployment

The current crisis is a crisis of care due to the unique aspects of the pandemic and Israel's response to it. A gender segmentation of unemployment data published in recent months reveals higher fluctuations in employment among women than among men, in direct relation to the gendered structure of the labor market, lockdown policy, and the partial functioning of the education system.



Israel Central Bureau of Statistics figures indicate fluctuations from lockdown to lockdown:

Unemployment Rate: Unemployed persons and persons temporarily absent from work due to circumstances connected with the Covid-19 virus (aged 15 and over), by gender⁵



During the first two lockdowns, the unemployment rate increased, especially for women. During the third lockdown, unemployment rose once again, for women more than for men.

Throughout the Coronavirus pandemic, **women have constituted the majority of unemployed persons** registered with the Israel Employment Service (IES). The highest percentage was in September 2020.



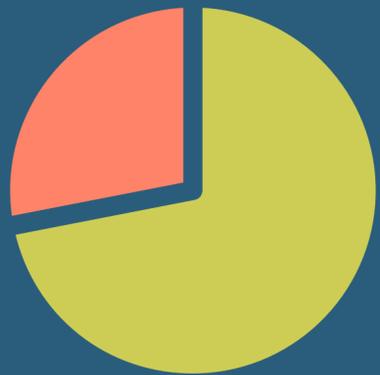
The shutdown of educational institutions, especially those for early childhood, apparently contributed to the increased registration of women at the IES. In contrast, the reopening of the education system enabled women to go back to work faster than men (in May 2020, women constituted 63.5% of persons returning to work and in October 2020, 65.6%).⁶

The fluctuation between employment and unemployment, along with the frequent quarantine of children, threatened to further entrench the division of labor between women and men in the labor market as well as in the home.

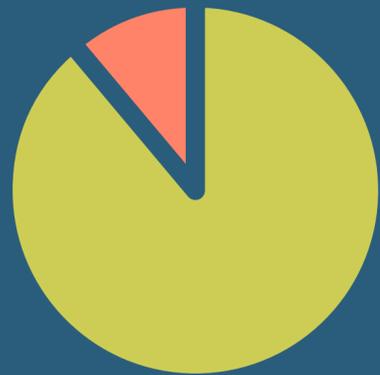
3

Essential Work

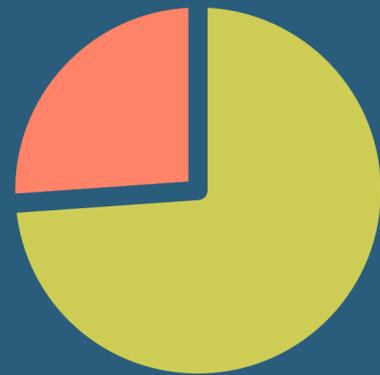
The occupations considered essential during the Coronavirus pandemic were those in which women's representation is high:



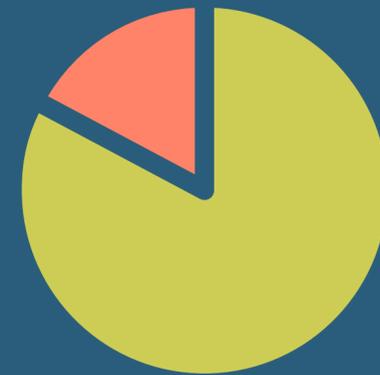
 **72%**
Health
service
workers



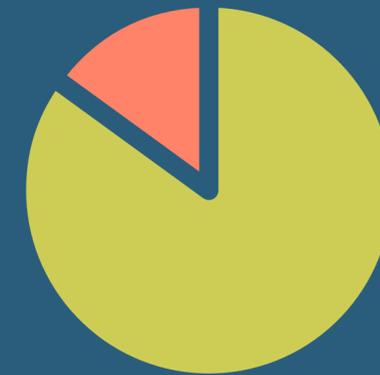
 **89%**
Welfare
service
workers



 **74%**
Cleaners



 **83%**
Cashiers at
supermarkets



 **85%**
Nursing
workers

These occupations require face-to-face interactions and cannot be performed from home.



In health services, women constitute the majority among essential workers who experienced frequent exposure to the Covid-19 virus.⁷



Occupational therapists



Nurses



Laboratory technicians



Psychologists



Physiotherapists



Pharmacists



Physicians



The first months of the epidemic revealed the discrepancy between the low status of women essential workers in the labor market and their crucial role in efforts to cope with the epidemic.

Some of these female workers, for example social workers, caregivers in daycare services, assistant teachers and mayoral advisors on the status of women in local authorities, had to fight to be recognized as essential workers or to preserve their working conditions and salaries.



4

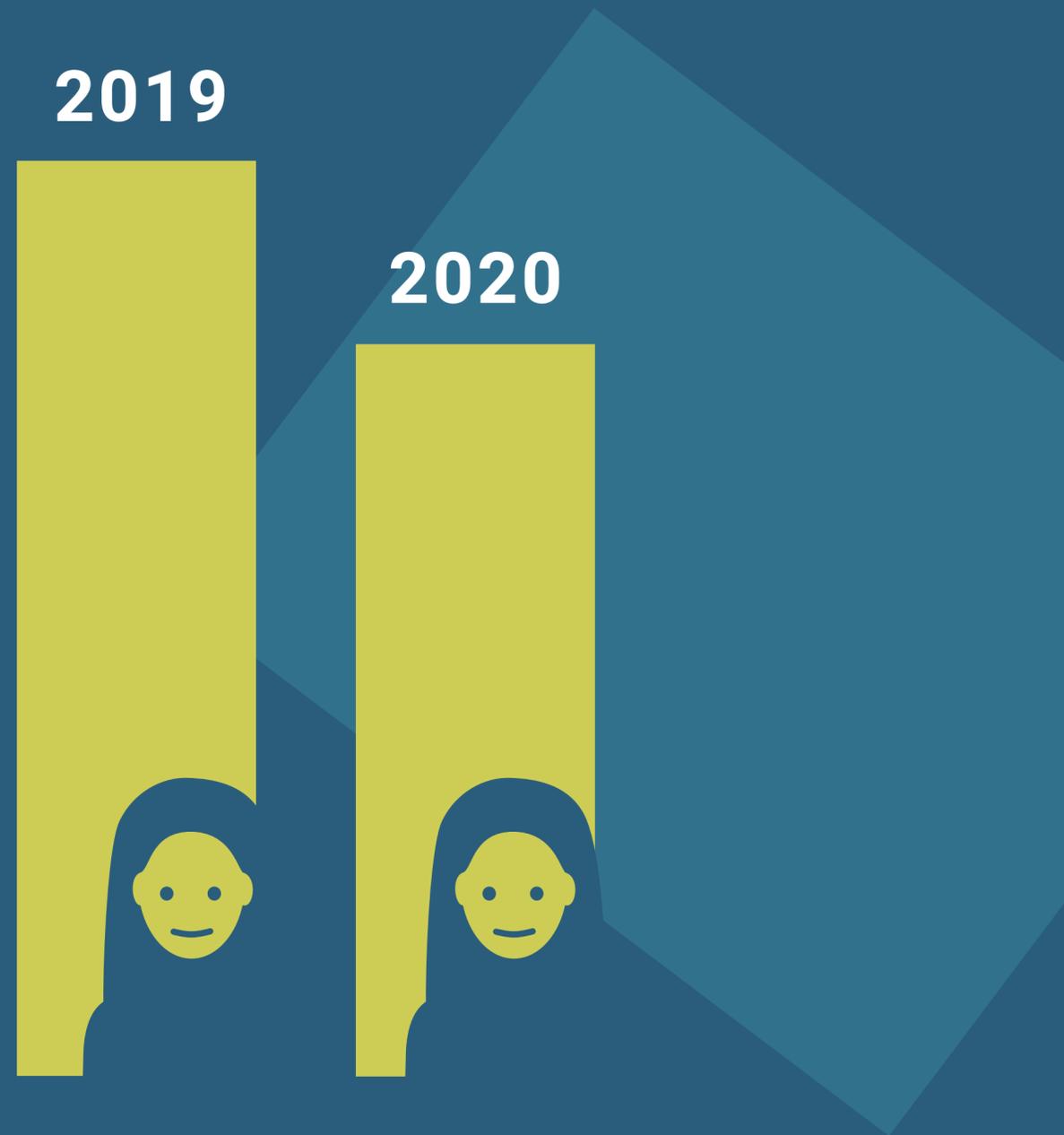
Women from Diverse Social Groups

Employment of Arab Women

Even before the Corona crisis, Arab women's participation in the labor force was relatively low – 38% -- and they were at the bottom of the salary scale in comparison with other groups, with an average monthly wage of NIS 6,251 (\$1,953).

According to the Department of the Chief Economist at the Ministry of Finance, Arab women's participation in the workforce decreased by 20% in 2020, compared to 2019.⁸

About 40% of young Arab women (18-24) are employed in retail sales, an economic sector hard hit by the economic crisis resulting from the pandemic.



The situation of Bedouin women in the Negev is yet worse.

Only a fourth of Bedouin women were employed prior to the Coronavirus outbreak and their pay was very low. Thus, for example, the average monthly pay of a woman residing in the Bedouin town of Rahat was (in 2017) NIS 4,086 (\$1,277). Low educational achievements and low digital literacy, geographical distance, and the fact that many Bedouin women were employed in jobs that excluded the possibility of long-distance work, together with the absence of internet infrastructure in many Bedouin localities, combined to exacerbate economic distress. To these should be added the fact that children remained at home, due to the fact that schools and kindergartens were not functioning and there was no access to long-distance learning.⁹

The employment of women aged 55 and over¹⁰ was impacted more than that of men of the same age, in comparison with the situation in 2019:

Workforce participation decreased by

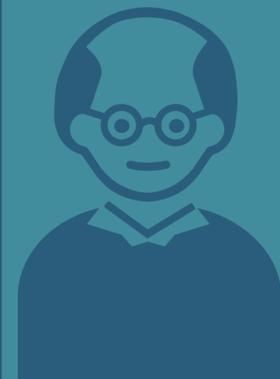
21%

for women aged 55 and over



15%

for men aged 55 and over



Education

5



As women do most of the childcare work, school shutdowns and child quarantines had a greater impact on them than on their spouses, both vis-à-vis their ability to make a living and vis-à-vis the burden of care work (invisible work) at home, including the support required for long-distance learning on the part of children and for adapting once again to schools when they reopened.

Long-distance learning required teachers to maneuver between their professional function and their function as mothers whose children were engaged in learning from home -- for which they were in need of ongoing assistance.



6

Poverty and Social Security



Women head 84% of single-parent families in Israel.¹¹ More than a fourth of single-parent families (26%) were poor prior to the Coronavirus crisis; in its wake, according to an estimate of the National Insurance Institute, their poverty rate increased to 31.4%.¹² These figures refer to income after taxes and transfer payments; without the latter, more than half of single-parent families would be poor.

7

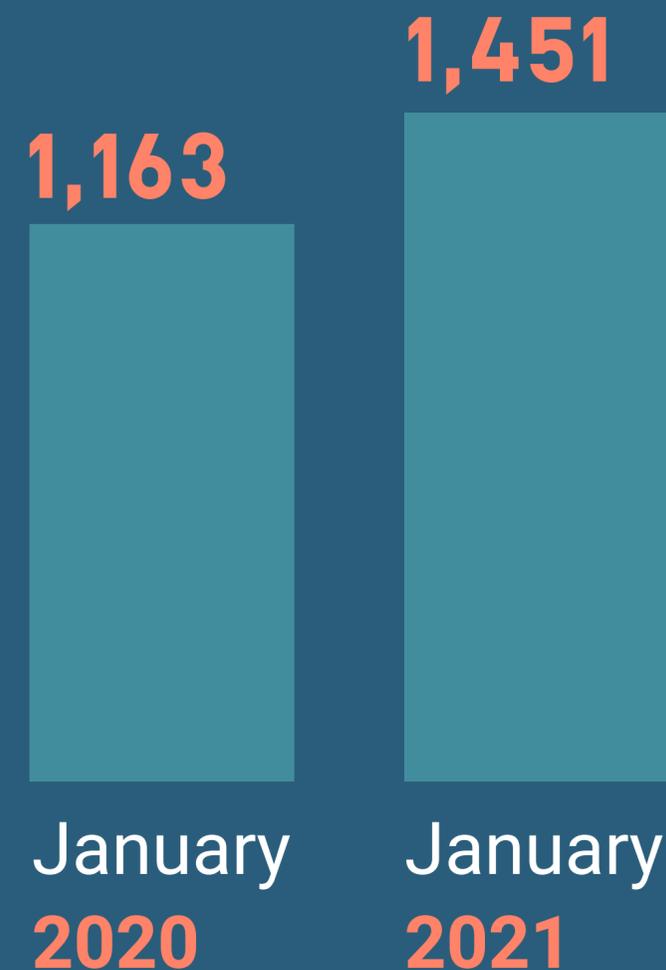
Violence against Women – The Shadow Pandemic

Throughout the Coronavirus crisis, Israel Police reported an increase in the number of files opened monthly due to family violence, compared with the previous year.



In the month of January 2021,

1,451 such files were opened, an increase of **20%** over the number in 2020. About 20% of these files involved violence against Arab women.¹³



Summing Up

The Corona crisis began as a health crisis, but it revealed the weaknesses of Israel's social, economic, and political systems as well. It found a political system entirely devoid of gender sensitivity. Thus the decisions made, mainly by men, failed to reflect the needs of women. Moreover, the services essential to coping with the epidemic were under-budgeted and under-staffed.

What's more, the epidemic spotlighted the vital role of both paid and unpaid care work and the centrality of women to the economy.

The Corona crisis provides an opportunity for a paradigm change from neo-liberal capitalism, whose goals are efficiency, competition and economic growth, achieved through reduction of direct state investment in public services and the transfer of many of them to the market, to a feminist economic outlook that places the welfare of women and men centermost, guarantees a social safety net and quality public services for all, and recognizes caregiving and education, including services carried out at home, as vital infrastructure requiring investment and proper remuneration.



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Infographics: Lital Biton

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- 1 See, for example, International Economic Forum, [Are countries doing enough to support women through the pandemic?](#) October 2020.
- 2 Waring, Marilyn. 2018. [Still Counting Wellbeing, Women's Work and Policy-making](#) (Vol. 73). Bridget Williams Books.
- 3 Global Economic Forum. December 2020. [Unequal burden: How the COVID-19 pandemic is adding to women's workloads.](#)
- 4 Yaara Maan. December 2020. [Parents Working During the Corona Crisis.](#) (Hebrew)
- 5 Israel Central Bureau of Statistics, [Monthly Manpower Surveys](#) (Hebrew).
- 6 Israel Employment Service. December 2020. [The Pulse of the Labor Market.](#) (Hebrew).
- 7 Ministry of Health. 2020. [Personnel in Healthcare Professions 2019](#); Ministry of Finance, Salaries and Labor Agreements Department. [Report on Government Service and Security Agencies 2018.](#) (Hebrew).
- 8 Ministry of Finance, Department of the Chief Economist. 2020. [The Impact of the Second Lockdown on the Labor Market – Figures for October 2020.](#) (Hebrew)
- 9 Forum for Coexistence in the Negev and Amutat Sidra. 2020. [The Employment of Bedouin Women: In the Shadow of the Corona Crisis.](#) Position paper submitted to the Knesset Committee on the Status of Women and Gender Equality. November 16, 2020. (Hebrew)
- 10 Ministry of Finance, Department of the Chief Economist. 2020. [The Impact of the Second Lockdown on the Labor Market – Figures for October 2020.](#) (Hebrew)
- 11 [The Gender Index 2020: Gender Inequality in Israel.](#) Van Leer Institute, Jerusalem.
- 12 Endeweld, Miri, Oren Heller, Lahav Karadi and Nitsa (Kaliner) Kasir. 2021. [Standard of Living, Poverty and Income Inequality – 2018-2019 and Estimate for 2020.](#) National Insurance Institute. January.
- 13 Israel Police. Response to Freedom of Information Request number 113/21.