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“Kept my mouth shut again and again. Today it all comes out...”¹

Women from Marginalized
Communities – Discrimination and
Exclusion in Israel’s Labor Market

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INTRODUCTION

Achoti (Sister) for Women in Israel in partnership with the Shutafot (“Partners”) Coalition embarked on a mission to collect testimonies of women experiencing multiple forms of discrimination and exclusion in Israel’s labor market, with the support of the European Union. The testimonies presented in this report, given by dozens of women, shone a light on some of the life experiences of women from marginalized groups who, despite their vast differences, face many common pains and challenges. In addition to presenting these challenges, this document offers ideas for just and progressive social change as voiced by the participating women.

1 Ziona Meshulam

We believe that every person has a right to financial security and decent work conditions, as well as dignity, safety, and independence. In recent years, the economic policy in Israel has been moving towards reduced regulation, increased privatization, precarious and insecure employment, wage gaps, degrading working conditions, and slashing of social benefits. As a result, the majority of Israelis in all gender, age, or ethnic groups, find themselves worse off in terms of work and financial security, but the more marginalized the person, the more s/he is affected. In addition to experiencing the effects of the general economic climate, these marginalized people encounter discrimination and few opportunities.

Those who belong to more than one marginalized community are hit the hardest. Women within marginalized groups are most affected, due to the intersection of racism, sexism, and various barriers and forms of discrimination. This report explores the issues that stand in the way of the full financial and employment security of women from a number of such communities – Ethiopian, Mizrahi, Palestinian, Bedouin, and Russian-speaking (all Israeli citizens).

Research and advocacy efforts on these issues are often focused either on racism towards a particular group or on sexism and gender discrimination in general. Both of these approaches ignore the effects of the intersectionality on the individuals and the groups harmed. We believe it is important to emphasize that the issues raised here create a “multiple-barrier” and need to be addressed simultaneously, with a more complex approach and interventions.

Some of the issues we address, as became clear from the myriad testimonies, are shared by many women from all strata of society, such as the double burden of family and work, sexism and sexual harassment in the workplace, and tracking to “pink collar” or “women’s professions.” And yet women from marginalized communities often experience the barriers in a harsher, more complex manner due to a lack of resources, vulnerability, and stereotypes of women from particular communities. Some of the problems are shared by men and women of various origins who work in low status jobs – the lack of social benefits, low salaries, monotonous and physical labor, and a lack of professional development or promotion. But again, the likelihood of an Ethiopian-born woman, for example, finding herself in such a job is much higher than of an Israeli-born Jewish man. Some barriers are also particular to certain groups, such as Russian-speaking, Ethiopian-born, and Palestinian women finding it challenging to be accepted to the jobs listed for “native Hebrew speakers.”

This research is based on a number of focus groups from the six communities mentioned above, and is limited in scope. There are many themes we were unable to address in this report to avoid having an overly long text. The findings are not meant to present a statistically valid portrait of reality, but rather to raise themes and issues that are relevant to women from these communities as they seek to achieve financial security, self-realization, and, dare we say, social justice.

What was most important to us, though, was to give readers the opportunity to hear the women describe their experiences in their own words.

Our goals are to describe and raise awareness to the racism and sexism that impede women from achieving economic security and dignified employment, and to describe specific practices that allow continuous, systemic prejudice and discrimination.

We also believe in the necessity of collective effort to change the existing situation in order to create a more egalitarian and safe society for everyone. This effort is particularly important as a way to bring together women (and men) from various backgrounds to achieve common goals.

This report is based on analyses of the transcripts from the focus groups led by six facilitators with women from the different marginalized communities we chose to focus on. Most sessions were conducted in the women's native tongue, in order to facilitate the safest and most comfortable setting for sharing the experiences of the women who participated.

RACISM, SEXISM, DISCRIMINATION

We often use the words racism or sexism, but sometimes they remain rather abstract concepts. Our question is, how exactly are racism, sexism, and discrimination expressed in the field of employment.

BARRIERS TO HIGHER WAGES, JOB SECURITY, AND STATUS

Even at the starting point, women belonging to minority groups have less chance of achieving higher wages, economic security,

job opportunities, or the status and respect associated with one's work. Their gender, accent, skin color, country of origin, looks, ethnicity, and/or religion are often seen as inferior and undeserving. Moreover, in some cases the women can be perceived as threatening, such as those wearing a hijab, which significantly decreases the likelihood of their being hired. Potential employers or colleagues often abuse their power and block their way. These women are less likely to be accepted to a job than Ashkenazi men, less likely to be promoted, they often receive a lower salary for the same job or worse job conditions. It is often assumed that they are capable of working only "in their own sector," not with other people from other communities. Racism is also expressed on the state level, e.g., the lack of (or limited) public transportation in Palestinian villages blocks women's access to places of work and study.

These practices not only limit the income, security, and status that women can achieve; their very sense of self-worth is undermined by such daily experiences. The message the women get from society is that they do not deserve more because of who they supposedly are, rather than pinpointing the inherent racism and sexism of the state systems.

In spite of various barriers, many women manage to obtain academic degrees, find a fulfilling job, and achieve financial stability, but it often means greater sacrifices and many years of strenuous effort. As one participant put it, "We need to talk about racism and sexism even if it sounds depressing, because understanding all the barriers we overcame makes us really appreciate what we have achieved."

Women are required to change how they tied their headdress, if you noticed, like this, toward the back, especially when there were problems in Jerusalem. The manager of the supermarket delicately asked the women to change how they dress so the customers won't notice they're Arab, especially the ones at the cashiers.

I moved up in the job from stock to cashier to supervisor, then one day the boss called me over and asked me to wear a white or colorful hijab, but not black, and also to tie it up like the settler women. I don't have a problem with the color, but according to religion, the chest and neck have to be covered. I felt as if he wanted me to undress. I'm 45 years old, and have never shown my neck or chest. I didn't agree to it, and found myself no longer a supervisor or cashier, but sent back to the storeroom to restock the shelves. (Na'am: Palestinian women)

I worked at a meat restaurant for which the military paid me a grant. During that period, things were very good. So I continued to work there, but he [the manager] wanted me to work for minimum wage. I worked there for a year, and then someone else started working there and was paid a high salary. I argued with him, I told him it was illegal. I told him that all the dark-skinned people were getting less than she was. He said I was crass and it would cost me, but I left. [Women's Courtyard, women of Ethiopian origin]

I work in social services, and when I'm offered a job, it's always with "Russian projects." As if I can't run general

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projects, which are kept for Israelis who were born here, mostly Ashkenazim. And I'm in Israel almost thirty years. [Liga: Russian-speaking women]

The color of our skin here – everything black is considered bad. “I saw black” [=things looked bleak], “black work” [=illegal work]. We always have to prove ourselves a little more, and always keep up. It's exhausting. They doubt our identity, deny our Jewishness. [Ehete: women of Ethiopian origin]

HASLALA — TRACKING

Even before they enter the labor market, many women from some minority groups are routinely tracked to the lowest level jobs – hard, tedious physical labor with no potential for career development, low pay, often lacking the most basic rights and social benefits – such as cleaners, kindergarten assistants, caregivers for the elderly, etc. At best, it would be some kind of “pink collar jobs,” such as telemarketing or a secretarial position.

It begins in schools (for those who studied in Israel), and often continues all the way through women's working history. For example, when the state creates training courses for Palestinian and Bedouin women, it is often limited to such options as cosmetic treatments or “the art of tying a headscarf.”

Bedouin women report that despite achieving a higher education they are not able to find suitable employment in their geographic area. Immigrants from the former Soviet Union, an especially high percentage of whom hold university degrees and have professional

experience in their countries of origin, are unable to find relevant jobs and have to settle for the most difficult and unrewarding jobs such as cleaning through employment contractors. Even secretarial jobs are often not an option, as the wanted ads state that the employers are seeking “native Hebrew speakers.” This is especially true for many women who immigrated to Israel as adults.

Palestinian women who do want an academic degree are often tracked to teaching jobs. It closes off other career paths and creates a surplus of teachers, who are often unable to find a job opening in their area, and the Jewish school system, despite suffering a severe lack of teachers, refuses to hire them.

Employment is often presented as a way for women (especially from marginalized communities) to achieve financial independence, self-respect, realization of her potential, etc. But while striving to increase women’s employment, we need to ensure not only that the women get a job, any job, but that the conditions under which these women are working are decent. Government agencies tend to pride themselves on increased employment rates, while a closer look at these previously highly unemployed sectors shows that many of these jobs are part-time, with abusive working conditions. On the other hand, sometimes the situation of women is so dire that even the most degrading job with the lowest pay is better than nothing at all. Some Palestinian women mentioned that having no money of their own makes them completely dependent on their husbands, which can lead to abuse and violence. In that case, having even a little money gives them a little more power in the domestic relationship. Similar sentiments were voiced by some of the single mothers from various backgrounds - dignity becomes secondary to sheer survival for her and her children.

I work in a large supermarket with many branches as a Tnuva food salesperson. I studied special education and did a sewing course (because I love to sew). I applied several times for a job in my field of study, special education, but was always rejected, never accepted. [Amerat of the Desert: Bedouin women]

I don't have a job right now. I worked in factories and cleaning. I tried to work, but I myself see that I'm better qualified for work in other places. And the problem is that Arab women – they have them cleaning bathrooms. The Employment Office forces those who sign in to work in specific jobs. I passed a course in business management, but unfortunately, it was like “ink on paper” and didn't help, though they promised [help] in setting up a business and being mentored. I matriculated, I worked as an assistant teacher in a kindergarten, and I worked as an assistant teacher for first to sixth grades [Amerat of the Desert: Bedouin women]

Forget it, they fire me every year, switch people around, go there, come here. This summer I went to the municipality to sign up again to be placed in a preschool. They told me they need assistant teachers, but for the Jewish preschools. I said, no problem, I speak Hebrew very well. They said no! We don't mix, each sector has its assistant teachers! So what if we have too many assistant teachers and the preschools in the Jewish neighborhoods don't have enough – you still prefer not to give us a job? That's the law they say. What law? Where is that law? [Na'am: Palestinian women]

SEXUAL HARASSMENT

Being a woman at a workplace often means being exposed to sexual harassment. Many women of all backgrounds encounter sexual harassment at work. But for women from marginalized communities, especially those living in poverty, this situation can be even more difficult. Since these women have less power, depend more on their particular job, and have fewer alternative options, they are viewed as easier prey by men in their workplaces, and find it more difficult to protect themselves. Many choose to remain silent and avoid bringing the issue up in the workplace, out of fear of making the situation worse. Russian speaking women are hit particularly hard, as the prevalent stereotypes regarding their sexuality create situations where just mentioning that you immigrated from the Former Soviet Union immediately exposes you to sexual harassment. Those who are new to the country often do not know how to manage these situations – whether they can complain and to whom.

I'm a lawyer. I was brought to Israel when I was a little girl. I have no accent. Once, in a conversation with another lawyer, I mentioned that I'm Russian. He said to me, "Now I don't know how to treat you – like a lawyer or a whore." [Liga: Russian-speaking women]

Lots of girls work in the supermarket, like Arab girls, from Lod and Ramle, and lots from East Jerusalem. The girls from East Jerusalem, from Shuafat and Beit Hanina, are the worst off. They have nothing else. They come on organized buses and have to stay until the very end. They also travel with those guys who harass them on the job

and the bus, but they have to work because there are no jobs in East Jerusalem, and they're learning Hebrew little by little. So in the beginning they work in the stockroom, and the shift manager abuses them, especially the new, young girls, but they keep their mouths shut. [Na'am: Palestinian women]

I'm 63 years old and immigrated two years ago from the Ukraine. I was an engineer there, but the only work I could find here at first was taking care of an 80 year old man. One day he suggested that I give him "sex services" and he'll consider it overtime. I refused and left, so he found a foreign worker, whose situation was apparently worse than mine. [Liga: Russian-speaking women]

Never mind what I experienced in my childhood – sexual assault, violent marriage, and divorce. Until the divorce, I ran away to a shelter... There were offers, but I learned how to avoid them, which is not at all trivial. If someone comes and says to my mother, who doesn't have food in the refrigerator, "Come, give it to me, and you'll have baskets [of food]," I don't judge her. These are manipulative men who know how to find your weak spot. [Achoti: Mizrahi women]

I kept my mouth shut again and again and again. Today it all comes out... In the story of my life, I erased my own humanity. And now I'm trying to see where I am. [Achoti: Mizrahi women]

MOTHERHOOD AND WORK

Society overwhelmingly presents motherhood as the peak of a woman's life, a sacred vocation. But motherhood is not sufficiently protected by state policy and regulations. Child care and home responsibilities fall overwhelmingly on women. This has a significant effect on women's ability to work. It hinders women from marginalized communities even more. Working in jobs that don't have social benefits or sick leave means that women have no solution for a sick child. Low family income means that the option of having a babysitter is often not available, leaving women to give up work or choose a part-time job. The cost of childcare is often more than a woman's salary.

Some Bedouin women mention that there are no kindergartens for the children in the proximity of their home. Many from the former Soviet Union have no extended family in Israel and therefore cannot count on family support to help care for the children. Due to the lack of available public buildings, many Palestinian villages do not have state sponsored kindergartens, only private ones, which can be much more expensive and often have lower standards. Other villages and towns have kindergartens that close at 2 pm, thus forcing women to work at part-time jobs.

Another issue is the cultural expectation of the Palestinian women to stay home and take care of the children. After the children grow up, the woman begins to explore possibilities of employment, but she is starting her career at 35, with no previous work experience, which puts her at a disadvantage compared to women and men who begin to work in their twenties.

On the other hand, many women (such as Mizrahi women) believe caring for the family is a vocation in itself and should be remunerated by the state. Taking care of children, cooking proper food, having a well-kept home often seem a more meaningful and dignified way to live than working a degrading job under appalling conditions.

Motherhood isn't paid work, so from the outset we get used to volunteering – and those around us became used to that and expect us to volunteer. Also, the salaries are lower, that's another expression of the fact that this is our natural place. [Achoti: Mizrahi women]

The problem with finding a job is the hours. I have a baby and am unemployed. I looked for a job, and am still looking. But I have a problem: Who will take my son to preschool in the morning and bring him home in the afternoon? I fully matriculated, I want to continue to study, but there's no way I can get the money. [Amerat of the Desert: Bedouin women]

In Russia I was a bookkeeper; here I'm a cleaner, no pay slip [or benefits]. My kid is 5, and if she's sick, I simply can't do anything about it ... [Liga: Russian-speaking women]

I'm the mother of a young boy. For me it's not worth working because it doesn't matter what shift I'm on, I still have to take the boy to preschool or bring him back and it doesn't work out. If I had to pay someone or find day care, then why should I work? It's just not worth it

for me. [Women's Courtyard, this woman receives a state disability allowance]

For the Ethiopian woman who was not born here and didn't grow up here, almost all odds are against her. She has to fight to break down the hierarchy in her home, in which the man earns a living and makes decisions, and she's responsible for the household. And she has to cope with the Israeli mentality that has no culture of tribalism. So who can even think about self-realization? (Ehete: women of Ethiopian origin]

**BAD CONDITIONS, LOW SALARIES, LACK OF BENEFITS,
ABUSIVE TREATMENT, LACK OF PROMOTION**

Many women report that they are forced to work in low status, low salary, dead-end jobs, like cleaning, nursing the elderly, etc. These jobs often have zero-hour contracts, i.e., women are expected to show up on demand, but sent home when not needed. More often than not, these jobs are without pensions and social benefits. The women are treated in a disrespectful way, the bosses' attitudes are often degrading.

Even women who work in professional jobs mention that they are the last to be promoted, better positions going to Israeli-born Ashkenazi men. Lacking economic support from their families, they need to take second jobs and find themselves in the constant struggle to survive.

There are state funded programs meant to increase the number of employed Palestinian women (which is notoriously low). But they usually end up offering part-time jobs, often splitting one job among three women, thus showing supposedly increased employment rates. Another problematic state strategy is offering financial incentives to employers for hiring Palestinian or Bedouin women. The problem is that these programs are short term, the women are paid the minimum wage, and the ones who profit from this arrangement are the employers, not the employees.

I'm divorced and living with my parents. I'm a mother of three. I work in Oz [a chicken factory in Segev Shalom] 12 hours a day, from 2 PM until 2 AM. I earn only 210 shekels a day. I have to work, even though I'm not getting what I'm entitled to by law. [Amerat of the Desert: Bedouin women]

There are always problems with the salary. Some of the girls get a regular wage, some get paid at a Shabbat rate, some in the middle. If I work only on Shabbat, like a "Shabbes goy for writing," why don't I get a Shabbat wage? The contractor, the one who organizes the young women and the transport, she decides everything and, of course, her salary is astronomical. Once, we tried to go to HR in the hospital, but they said they had nothing to do with it, that it's the contractor who's in charge. The contractor said that we're Arabs, so why should we get a Shabbat wage or a night wage? [Na'am: Palestinian women]

In the factory, I work even when I don't feel well or sick, and sometimes even without a salary slip, it's exploitation.

Even overtime, we don't get paid for it. We just have to work. [Amerat of the Desert: Bedouin women]

I'm a cleaning lady in a community center even though I'm sick and have a disk problem and 20% disability. Despite all that, the Employment Office makes me work this job. I have a date for surgery, and still they're making me work, and demanded I bring medical confirmation after the surgery and they'll look into the matter. [Amerat of the Desert: Bedouin women]

He would shout, curse, and we didn't know our rights, I just knew that he wasn't being fair, but I didn't know who to go to. He would give me very strong [cleaning] materials that made it hard to breathe. I couldn't clean the oven so I was fired. He wouldn't give us regular work, just extreme cleaning jobs. I even wanted to wash dishes, but couldn't. [Women's Courtyard: women of Ethiopian origin]

I'm 68 years old and work in a factory. I need dialysis, but my employer just doesn't let me go. [Liga: Russian speaking women].

Managers of a store want to have the last word. You have no rights, no vacations. If you take sick leave, even if you have a note from the doctor and they see you're sick, they act as if you got sick on purpose. And you keep quiet because you're afraid of losing your job. In a private minimarket where I worked, they can tell you to go home because there are no customers. And you

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don't get paid, but you can't say anything. They also don't pay overtime, you have to speak to them and sometimes it's hard because they get angry and don't want to pay – you're afraid they'll fire you... [Women's Courtyard: women of Ethiopian origin]

**GEOGRAPHIC PERIPHERY, LACK OF PUBLIC
TRANSPORTATION AND ACCESS TO PLACES OF WORK**

Women from marginalized communities often find themselves living far from the major cities, in remote areas with limited employment options. This is true for Mizrahi women, whose families were settled in so-called “development towns” – small towns in the geographic periphery, far from economic, political and cultural centers. Many immigrants gravitate to similar small towns, since they can't afford to buy or rent an apartment in the metropolitan areas. The situation is even more grave for Palestinian women – many Palestinian villages have very limited public transportation, thus women have no access to industrial centers and other places of work. Many families do not own a car, and if they do, it is often used by the husband, not by the wife.

NON - CITIZENS

Palestinian women who are married to Palestinian citizens of Israel, but who are not themselves citizens are not legally allowed to work, therefore they face even more difficult situations. In rare cases, there is a special permit for them to work, but the jobs are usually limited to cleaning and similar work, even if these women have an academic degree.

What about the Palestinian women who don't have papers? Poor women. Some need to put somebody else's name on their salary slip, someone who does have an ID card. And that one sits at home and gets half or a third of the salary because she's a citizen, and the Palestinian woman who works hard gets a pittance. And if she's injured or falls? What happens to her? There's no insurance or anything. Only God. Do you know how many women and men are in that situation?? They only have God. They and their fate are in His hands. [Na'am: Palestinian women]

LACK OF ALTERNATIVES AND FEAR TO COMPLAIN

Many of the women reported that they chose not to complain or report unfair employment practices, sexual harassment, racism or bullying at work, knowing that most probably they will be fired, and their chances of finding other employment would be extremely slim. The fewer options they have, the more they are likely to remain silent about abuses they suffer.

Sometimes I work 24 hours straight, and they don't pay overtime or a special wage rate. The girls who went to the management as a group were fired. Three girls from Ramla were fired. They don't have to actually tell you that you're fired, they just stop giving you shifts, and you get the message. [Na'am: Palestinian women]

Once my boss agreed that I bring my sister to work, too – I would work four hours and she four hours and that way we would finish earlier instead of me working eight hours.

At the end of the month, he paid [me] half a salary. He claimed that he didn't know about the agreement – that I'm registered for only four hours, and my sister isn't in the system. He stole thousands of shekels from me, and I can't do anything, because the card is mine and I didn't sign any agreement with him. He said to me, you don't like it? Get out! There are a thousand women waiting in line! In cleaning jobs, they take you on and off like shoes, so that you won't be working there long enough to gain any rights. [Na'am: Palestinian women]

We would work 15-16 hours on a shift. But it's a small town, and there were simply no other options. Even though I know that's not right, I won't complain. [Liga: Russian-speaking women]

RETIREMENT FUNDS

The troubles exacerbate as women from these marginalized communities grow older. Israeli pensions are based on the amount an individual managed to save throughout his/her life as a percentage of their salary, and as a factor of the average life-span. There is a difference in the factor based on gender, and since generally speaking, women's life span is longer than men's, women will earn a lower pension after retirement, because the amount they saved is divided into a larger factor. Since the monthly pension is based on the amount saved by an individual according to the number of years they were employed, many women see their pensions eroded even more due to the childrearing or housework years. For the six communities discussed here, additional factors come into play.

Women from marginalized communities often work in “shadow employment” or for employment contractors – cleaning or washing dishes, where the contractors or employers violate their rights and do not make pension payments as required by law. These women therefore cannot save for retirement. Even saving independently without an employer’s contribution is often not an option for those barely managing on minimum wages.

The immigrants who came to Israel in middle age or older have few or no years of employment, meaning they will receive little or no pension besides their National Insurance allowance, which is not enough to survive. Therefore, many of these women are forced to continue to work through old age so they can put food on their table, despite their age and declining health.

I never worked in my life. I got a letter from Social Security and went to check it out. But I wasn't entitled to a pension. They told me that a woman who hasn't worked isn't entitled to money at all. [Amerat of the Desert: Bedouin women]

I have two elderly men that I take care of, four hours a week for each. This job pays pennies. How much do I get? Less than 2,000 shekels... There are no rights and no one assures that you will continue working. Or if the old person is hospitalized, you sit at home until you find someone else. The family [of the elderly] sometimes wants to take advantage of me to clean their house. They promise to pay me more, and then I discover that they added on the welfare hours. What can I do? Who can I tell? That's theft. You think I have a pension? Or anything

else? I have nothing. And if I'm sick or tired, I will simply have nothing. [Na'am: Palestinian women]

The children need support from their parents. Here we are living only off the old-age pension. There's no retirement funds. And we can't support them. [Ehete: Ethiopian women]

I'm 75 years old, still working because I don't have a retirement pension. I came to Israel late in life. I clean and take care of elderly people, even though I myself am already old and sick. But we have no choice. [Liga: Russian-speaking women]

DIFFICULTY OF CHANGING ONE'S SITUATION

One is often able to endure hardship if there is potential for change, a better future one can hope for and envision. Many women from Palestinian, Mizrahi, Ethiopian, and Russian-speaking communities feel there is no hope for change, no way out of their current financial and employment situation. Mizrahi women on welfare, for example, believe they cannot get a job because their social security payments will end or be reduced, hence their economic situation will not improve. Sometimes getting a job will leave them in more difficult straits as they will lose other poverty-based benefits, such as subsidized child care. Some end up looking for “shadow employment” – a job without a pay slip, thereby exposing themselves to exploitation, bad working conditions, and no social benefits.

I missed an opportunity to study. When I was young, they tested for gifted children, and I passed the tests and they were supposed to send me, but we had no money... Today I can't study because they'll stop paying income support. I want to study while I'm working, but they'll take away my social security payments. Now they changed the criteria for entitlement to study, but again the criteria are hard to meet. [Achoti: Mizrahi women]

Life is dynamic, and the disappointments...I'm struggling. I feel that I'm struggling because of not having studied. It stopped my life, today I should have been in another world, and I'm still in the same job that I wanted to leave. After all the investment and energy and everything, clipping someone's wings, it sounds illogical. Should be the opposite! One should give incentives, encouragement! [Achoti: Mizrahi women]

**LACK OF ECONOMIC SUPPORT AND GUIDANCE
FROM FAMILIES**

It is widely acknowledged that an academic degree is one way to obtain a quality job. Many women from marginalized communities lack the necessary family support to obtain higher education or a desired profession. Some of their families do not have higher education (especially the women in the family), and therefore cannot help the young women with the necessary skills, connections, and strategies. Many have parents with limited financial ability to help the women through college or university studies. That leads to many of those interested in higher education having to work to support themselves during their studies, and

unable to invest adequately in the academic studies. That is, a combination of racism, tracking, limited resources, and/or lack of higher education in the family often block women's way to a degree and professional work. For example, many Palestinian women hold academic degrees and have a career, but this often depends on them having an educated and financially stable family.

Also, those coming from well-to-do families can rely on family financial support during periods of unemployment as they wait for a suitable opportunity to emerge. Most women from marginalized communities, on the other hand, do not have a support infrastructure, and must therefore grab the first job opportunity, leading again to lower salaries, lower status, and often unsuitable jobs, with a good chance of losing them later on.

I was a young woman without family in Israel, I had to survive, and I agreed to any job, even work that didn't suit me. As a result, they would fire me, and I felt like a failure. And the cycle repeated. [Liga: Russian-speaking women]

My parents earned a good living and led a dignified life in the Ukraine. Here they both worked in cleaning jobs and as security guards. They couldn't help me economically. I'm 43 years old and live in a rented apartment, always worried about my economic survival. So when colleagues of mine say, I flew to a conference abroad, I pay for supervision hours – I clearly can't afford that for myself. And it affects my professional development. [Liga: Russian-speaking women]

We're not evaluated on our professional skills. The children grow up in a home where the parents worked in an undesirable profession. [Ehete: women of Ethiopian origin]

LANGUAGE

Hebrew is not a mother tongue for Palestinian, Ethiopian, and Russian-speaking women, and this impedes their chances of finding suitable work. The vacancies advertised often state seeking “native Hebrew speakers,” thus effectively excluding these women from a pool of potential candidates. If those whose Hebrew is not perfect are accepted for the job, they spend a disproportionate amount of energy on the required writing and reading, often sacrificing their own free time. Many do possess full knowledge of Hebrew, but are perceived as lacking the necessary language skills, due to their names, accents or skin color, which affects their chances of being hired. In other cases, they themselves refrain from applying for jobs that state they require Hebrew as a mother tongue, despite being completely fluent. Some workplaces impose a “Hebrew only” speaking culture, where the workers are expected not to speak their mother tongue at work.

I studied in Israel. I have a bachelor's and a master's degree, and I work in the not-for-profit sector. Most of the job announcements in this field require Hebrew as a mother tongue. I don't even send in my CV, because it's clear to me that they prefer someone born here. [Liga: Russian-speaking women]

I immigrated two years ago at age 40. After Ulpan A, I began to work in cleaning jobs. Even for cleaning, Hebrew is a problem because you have to coordinate a time, know exactly where to clean and how. If the homeowner sends me a text message, I'm completely lost. [Liga: Russian-speaking women]

NAVIGATING AN UNFAMILIAR ENVIRONMENT, LACKING CONNECTIONS AND LACKING KNOWLEDGE OF THEIR RIGHTS

Many are ignorant of their rights as employees or national insurance entitlements. The immigrant women emphasized that it has been difficult for them to understand the employment market – their options and possibilities, what jobs are in demand, etc. Many note that finding a good job in Israel is very often a matter of connections. Class and race segregation often result in women from marginalized communities lacking the necessary acquaintances in “high places.” Having come to Israel as adults, many immigrants also lack the connections needed to even be aware of job openings or to be recommended for a particular position by someone they know.

I would like to work as a cashier in a supermarket – but I'm not allowed to. I would work if I knew definitely they won't take away my disability. [Women's Courtyard: Mizrahi women; this woman receives a state disability allowance]

When I arrived in Israel, I was an electronics engineer, but I didn't know anyone, I didn't know where to go,

or how to look for work. I met my husband and went to work in a factory simply because that's where my husband worked, and he introduced me to the place. [Liga: Russian-speaking women]

I want to open a daycare center. I don't have the certification and you don't need certificates, but they told me I do need certificates, but I don't know which certificates I need, what's allowed, and all that, I don't know where to find out either. [Women's Courtyard: Mizrahi women; this woman receives a state disability allowance]

SELF-PERCEPTION

Various forces that block a woman's path to economic sustainability and self-realization also have an impact on their self-perception. A job (or lack of it) is not only connected to financial security, it also often defines a person's status. Working in a low-status job, being denied promotion, living on welfare is often seen as shameful in Israeli society.

Having been tracked to low-status jobs, experiencing degrading remarks, forced to accept inhumane conditions, women begin to believe that something is inherently wrong with them. Since many expressions of racism and sexism have been normalized – viewed as “natural” – many women begin to blame themselves instead of seeing their situation as a result of built-in systemic failure. Some internalize a critical voice towards themselves, and begin to see their community as somehow inherently inferior. Some of the women, especially of Ethiopian origin, mentioned that there are precious few women from their community who

are professionally successful. Therefore, there are not enough role models to inspire the younger generation.

One of the results of such internalized sense of inferiority is that even if there is a chance to apply for a good and suitable job, women are reluctant to do so, afraid of rejection. This also leads to women's increased fear of losing their jobs, and therefore they hesitate to raise their concerns, to demand better conditions, to ask for a higher salary or promotion.

The problem begins when the child who grew up in a bubble in the home goes out into an entirely different world where he's supposed to gain skills and then there's a serious crisis. There are no Ethiopian teachers or managers and the only ones he sees are cleaning ladies or janitors. Ultimately the young people distance themselves from their parents [Ehete: women of Ethiopian origin]

I volunteer in a school. Without money. I don't dare ask for money because I feel embarrassed. They don't want to let me go, but I'm embarrassed to ask for money. [Women's Courtyard: Mizrahi women; this woman receives a state disability allowance]

My parents were important people in Belarus, and here they lived in poverty, working in cleaning jobs and nursing the elderly. I was embarrassed to bring friends home. Even if I knew the answer in class, they laughed at me because of my accent. It affected my self-esteem. I was a talented girl, but today I'm working as a clerk in a boring job. [Liga: Russian-speaking women]

EMOTIONAL ASPECTS

Many women, especially those in low-wage, dead-end jobs, report feeling numb, in despair, helpless, isolated, frustrated, and detached. Some mention that they experienced trauma such as sexual assault, domestic violence, or psychological crisis related to immigration. The scars left by these experiences are often felt years after the events, leading to periods of depression, PTSD, or anxiety attacks, which make them feel helpless and undermine their ability to work and function. They rarely have access to recourse or support from state institutions for these issues.

The blows I get from the state to this day are much more painful than his blows...I worked all my life and made a living, but after the violence, I couldn't go back into the workforce. [Achoti: Mizrahi women]

When the system wanted to have me in therapy, it was disconnected from what was happening in my life at the time. You sent him back to live near me! When he was released from prison, he was given public housing right next to me! As I was leaving the [welfare] office after therapy, he says to me, "I'll pour acid on you." When I ran away to the shelter, they didn't solve my housing problem. So in choosing where to die – on the street or at home – I chose to die at home. [Achoti: Mizrahi women]

LOOKING FORWARD: CAN THERE BE CHANGE?

This research sheds light on the issues that stand in the way of the full financial and employment security of women from the Ethiopian,

Mizrahi, Palestinian, and Russian-speaking communities in Israel. Women report experiencing racism or sexual harassment, many are tracked to the lowest level, dead-end jobs that provide neither dignity nor financial security. Mothers often find that combining motherhood and work becomes impossible, while older women are likely to find themselves with meager pension savings. Even those who do manage to obtain academic degrees and have a professional job report that racist and sexist attitudes impede their careers and undermine their sense of self-worth.

As part of this study, the participating women were asked, what would a more equal and just society look like, and what are the steps that need to be taken in order to make it a reality. Their answers to this question have become the basis of a policy paper the Shutafot Coalition is drafting these days - a paper which presents decision makers with concrete policy recommendations. Below is a summary of the women's replies:

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Kindergarten hours should be based on the days and hours of working mothers (and fathers)
- More state-controlled and subsidized kindergartens in Palestinian villages and towns
- Prohibiting the requirement of “Hebrew as a mother tongue” in job postings

- Regulating and enforcing basic employment conditions and rights on contractors – minimum wage, social benefits, overtime, etc.
- Abolishing contract employment, at least among state or state-funded institutions such as universities, hospitals, schools
- Retaining social security allowances even when a woman finds a part-time job
- Establishing and maintaining sufficient public transportation to and from Palestinian villages and towns
- Providing monetary compensation for housework and childcare
- Promoting affirmative action, with an emphasis on women from marginalized communities
- Offering state-funded professional training courses for in-demand quality jobs, and allowing women to study while receiving social security allowances
- Creating workplace support for women from marginalized communities to study and be promoted
- Awareness and knowledge

- Offering workshops for employers and HR professionals on the subject of proportional representation and affirmative action in the workplace, including skills for recruiting employees from various communities and managing multicultural teams
- Establishing a hotline/information center in various languages on employment rights, pensions, and social security
- Establishing an employment center for women from marginalized communities
- Raising awareness to the issues discussed in this study in social and mass media

GROUPS PARTICIPATING IN THE REPORT

Ehete Center: Women of Ethiopian Origin

(Moderator: Lakya Yardeni)

Women of Ethiopian origin aged 30-70.

Kiryat Gat.

The Women's Courtyard

(Facilitator: Nira Kaplansky)

Young women aged 18-25.

Netanya – women of Ethiopian origin.

Haifa – Mizrahi women.

Amerat of the Desert

(Facilitator: Nahala Amar)

Bedouin women aged 20-65.

Segev Shalom – Shaqib al-Salam.

Liga – Russian-speaking Feminists

(Facilitator: Assia Istoshina)

Russian-speaking women aged 25-70.

Haifa.

Achoti (My Sister) for Women in Israel

(Facilitator: Bat-Shakhar Gormezano Gorfinkel)

Mizrahi women aged 30-65.

South Tel Aviv.

Na'am: Arab Women in the Center (AWC)

(Facilitator: Samah Salaime)

Palestinian women aged 20-50.

Lod and Ramle.