



## The 'Digital Divide' Amongst Bedouins in the Negev - The Case of Israel under COVID-19

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### Abstract

Israel is one of the world leaders in the percentage of its population that has internet access, which is 78% of Israeli households. However, focusing on Bedouin society in Israel presents a different and complex picture. In contrast to the high rate of internet access in the general population, in the recognized Bedouin settlements it is found only 34% of the households. Academic research confirms this digital divide between the Bedouin population and the general population in Israel, emphasizing that it is the result of poor general infrastructure, including only partial deployment of cellular antennas manifested by difficulties in reception and connecting to the network. Based on mapping the ownership of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) among young Bedouin women, this case study examined access and uses of internet among these women. Focusing on the group of young Bedouin women who were in various stages of their academic studies at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, demonstrates in miniature the complexity of the relationship between the Bedouin population and the State of Israel, as well as the policy trends regarding the Bedouins in the Negev.

The COVID-19 pandemic has forced nations around the world to defend themselves and impose social restrictions, including preventing gatherings and requiring social distancing, closing higher education institutions and moving to online distance learning. These restrictions posed quite a few challenges for the Bedouin students. As the findings of the current study show, the previously evident digital divide is further heightened, as is the particularly vulnerable status of Bedouin young women, in light of the pandemic.

**Keywords:** digital divide, Bedouin young women, COVID-19