

Executive Summary

Back and Forth: Commuting for Work in Israel

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The subject of commuting has attracted more and more public attention in Israel in recent years as road congestion levels continue to rise with the increasing number of commuters. Over the last 30 years, the number of employed persons working outside their residential area has risen from 42 percent to 54 percent (as of 2016) among Israelis of working age (25-64). The main mode of commuting is by private car and the number of rides has grown faster than road expansion — creating the traffic jams that have become all too familiar.

Commuting distance, time, and mode of transportation

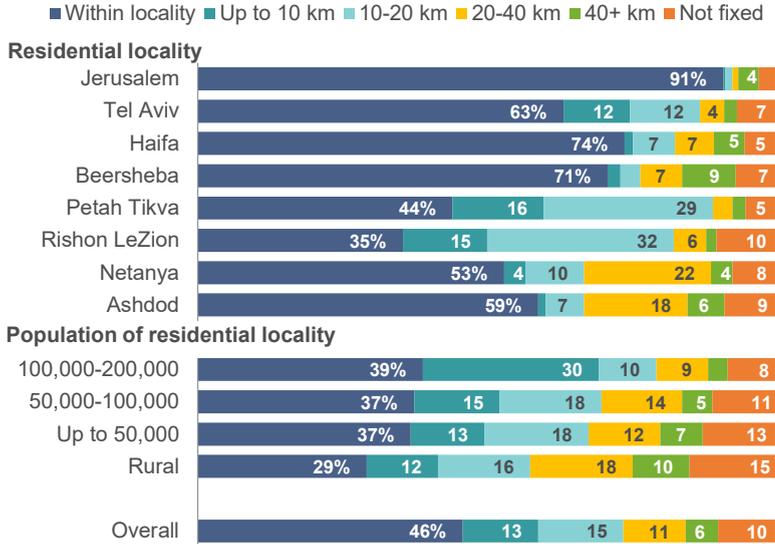
Most trips to work are short. Three out of every four workers ages 25-64 travel 20 kilometers or less to reach their workplace, mostly in private vehicles (for 2014-2016). About 60 percent of workers travel for no more than half an hour, 30 percent between half an hour and an hour, and about 10 percent travel for over an hour in each direction. Regarding the choice in mode of transportation — 62 percent commute to work by car (including shared rides) and only 17 percent commute by public transportation. About 10 percent commute by bicycle or by foot and 8 percent commute by work-organized transportation.

There are large differences in commuting patterns in different parts of the country. For example, in both Jerusalem and Petah Tikva many commuters travel between half an hour and an hour, but in Jerusalem (where 91 percent of residents work within the city) this seems to be due to the extensive use of public transportation and large city size while, in Petah Tikva, a higher percentage use a private vehicle and commute distances of up to 20 kilometers, indicating that the travel time is a result of traffic congestion. In contrast, Tel Aviv has a high rate (68 percent) of workers with short commute times, and the city is also characterized by a high percentage of commuting by foot or bicycle.

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Figure 1. Distribution of workers by length of daily commute to work, 2015-2016

Workers ages 25-64



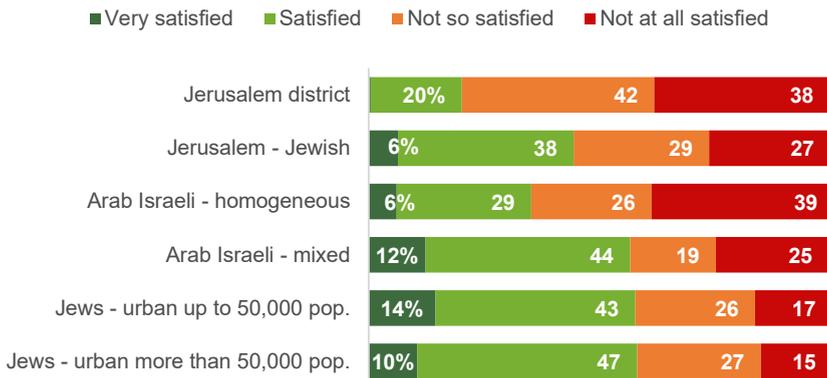
Source: Haim Bleikh, Taub Center | Data: CBS, Labor Force Survey

The choice among modes of transportation for commuting is influenced by various economic, social, and geographic factors. Among Arab Israelis living in Arab localities, the infrequent use of public transportation is notable, stemming from a low supply due to the lack of adequate public transportation infrastructure. The topography of some localities creates natural constraints that impede mobility as well. This is evident from responses on satisfaction surveys. A high percentage of residents of Arab Israeli localities reported low levels of satisfaction with the state of the roads in their area while Arab Israelis living in localities with a Jewish majority and Jewish residents outside of Jerusalem reported higher levels of satisfaction. Among those who use public transportation, 82 percent of Jews are satisfied with the location of the nearest bus stop to their home, compared to only 63 percent of Arab Israelis.

Figure 2. Residents' satisfaction levels with residential area roads, 2014-2016

By locality type, ages 25-64

How satisfied are you with the condition of roads and sidewalks in your area? Consider the width of the roads, sidewalks, the provision of adequate lighting, signage, and so forth.



Source: Haim Bleikh, Taub Center | Data: CBS, Social Survey

Among both Jews and Arab Israelis, a large proportion of workers in the manufacturing industry commute by work-organized transportation, a mode of transportation also commonly used by Arab Israeli men in the construction industry. Within the Jewish population, there is widespread use of public transportation among Haredim (ultra-Orthodox) and new immigrants – especially women – in both large and small localities.

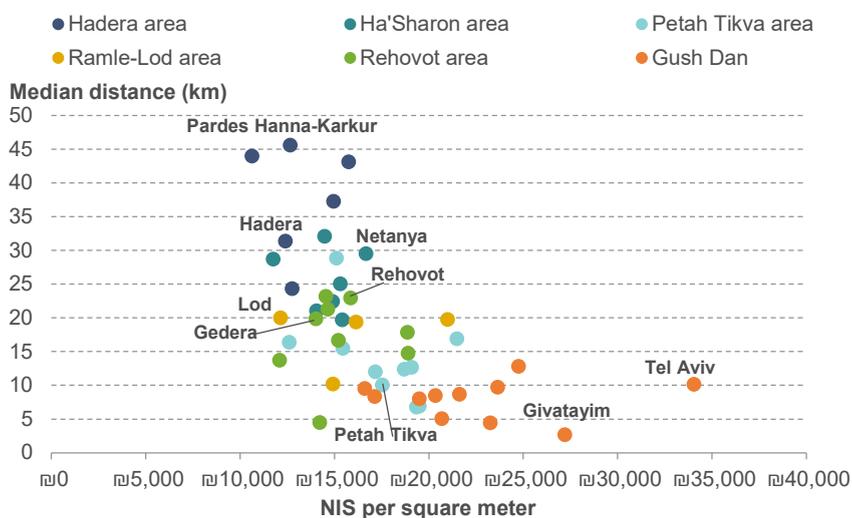
Commuting, migration and housing

Commuting should allow workers to live in their preferred location at an affordable price and to work in a place that suits them. The academic literature on commuting suggests the existence of a trade-off between the journey to work and housing prices; that is, the inconvenience for households living farther from employment hubs should be “compensated” by lower housing prices.

In an analysis of the commuting distances and housing prices among the Jewish localities in the “Gedera-Hadera” area (the Central region of Israel), the data show that those living in localities closer to central employment areas do indeed pay on average a higher price for housing, while workers who are forced to travel longer distances receive “compensation” in the form of cheaper housing prices.

Figure 3. The relationship between distance to workplace and housing prices

By area, median distance to workplace locality and housing price per square meter in locality, Gedera-Hadera district, workers ages 25-64



Source: Haim Bleikh, Taub Center | Data: CBS, Labor Force Survey; Madlan

The relatively short distances between localities in the Gedera-Hadera area may encourage choosing longer commutes over moving between residential areas. More generally, residents tend to prefer to remain in the living environment familiar to them. The internal migration rate between localities and within them in Israel stands at about 7 percent of the total population in recent years, and about 60 percent of changes in address were recorded within the same locality.

In terms of moving across regions, the data seem to reflect the limited ability of low housing prices in the periphery to attract residents away from the Central region, where there are a number of socioeconomic advantages (e.g., proximity to employment, cultural centers, and leisure areas).

Arab Israeli women: geography, commuting and employment

While the employment rate of Arab Israeli women has risen in recent years, further increasing their labor force participation rate is an important challenge facing policy makers. Over 70 percent of employed Arab Israeli women live either in the North or the Triangle (Hadera and the Central region) areas. About a third of the employed women from these regions work outside their residential area.

Of those who commute from their residential area, women in the Triangle area are more likely to commute to Jewish localities for work than women in the North. Also, the commuting distance among women from the Triangle is greater than among women from the North. In general, the North is characterized by more limited and less diversified employment opportunities and big employment hubs like Haifa are a considerable distance from Arab Israeli localities. However, for women from the Triangle, their relative geographic proximity to the center of the country, characterized by more employment opportunities, increases their “commuting tolerance.” Their willingness to travel farther distances may be due to a combination of two push and pull factors: a relatively long commute that is still considered reasonable due to increased employment opportunities, or a shortage of employment in the Triangle area, which forces many women to seek work farther from home.

Employment rates of Arab Israeli women in mixed localities (66 percent) are higher than in the Northern and Triangle regions (about 33 percent) but lower than those among Jewish women, indicating that, beyond the substantial geographic barriers, there are additional obstacles that affect the employment patterns of Arab Israeli women, such as mastery of Hebrew and English and social norms.