**Community and professional initiative for integrating of the ultra-Orthodox population in the high-tech labor market in Israel**

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**ABSTRACT**

The ultra-Orthodox population in Israel constitutes about 12% of the total population and is growing at a particularly rapid rate. As a result of Israel’s conciliation policy in education and labor (Lijphart, 1969, 1977), the ultra-Orthodox, like a number of other minority groups in Israel, have been granted autonomy in their educational networks. The formal educational frameworks of the ultra-Orthodox rarely provide courses in core subjects such as mathematics and English. In addition, due to religious constraints, most members of the community lack internet access (by choice). These factors, combined with other religious and community values, have created a situation wherein a significant portion of the community members do not integrate into the labor market, especially Israel’s thriving high tech sector. Consequently, poverty has increased among the ultra-Orthodox, who suffer from particularly low levels of education and income.

To address the needs of those in this population, who are nonetheless interested in joining the Israeli high-tech labor market but lacks the necessary skills situation, the Ultra-Orthodox Institute for Policy Studies established a research group in collaboration with other professional, community and academic entities to study and promote strategies for integrating the Ultra-Orthodox population into Israel’s high- tech labor market. This article will describe the organizational process of this effort, including the composition of the Institute’s research team, and the partnerships formed with groups from the ultra-Orthodox community in Israel and professionals in the government and third sector.

Applying a qualitative and quantitative approach, the purpose of this research is two-fold. First, it examines what specific changes are needed to help members of the ultra-Orthodox enter Israel’s high-tech labor market and break the cycle of poor education and poverty afflicting them. This article reviews the Israeli labor market, the duration and objectives of the program’s process, the criteria for locating and screening potential employees, the development of a tailored training program (including studies to complete basic education, imparting personal and interpersonal skills, training content), the placement components at the end of training, the scholarships and mentoring required for new entrants into the labor market, and post-program monitoring and evaluation.

Second, based on insights drawn from the data gathered, this article makes concrete, targeted recommendations for policy proposals that can equip members of the ultra-Orthodox community with the skills needed to participate in Israel’s high-tech labor market. Ultimately, this can help them break out of their current cycle of lower educational achievements and increasing poverty.