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Anti-Poverty Strategies in Jerusalem

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Poverty in Jerusalem

Once a year the National Insurance Institute publishes a report on poverty that arouses a storm of public debate for a short while which then subsides. Since the early 90s, with the beginning of the publication of statistics on poverty according to city, the Jerusalem Institute has been concerned that Jerusalem holds first place as the poorest among Israel's big cities, largely because of two of its sectors — the ultra-Orthodox Jewish population and the Arab population.

The Institute emphasized this situation in its annual reports, in its evaluation of Jerusalem's role as an important component of Israel's strength, and in various proposals that it has brought to the attention of policy makers.

Since the years of Jerusalem's economic crisis and with the growing concern for the human suffering that poverty engenders, the Institute has been making efforts to find ways to contend with the problem of the city's poverty. The assumption here is that there are no simple or isolated solutions, and that systematic and integrated approaches must be found; therefore there have been and now are "packages" of projects that encompass a variety of aspects of the problem: sectors that are particularly affected (for example, single ultra-orthodox mothers), innovative ways to strengthen Jerusalem's economy and employment possibilities among particular sectors and in particular fields of work (for example, the European Union's project for Jerusalem's renewal), studies of other cities and foreign countries and the adaptation and application of their policies to Jerusalem (for example, Dr. John Gal and Dr. Idit Weiss' work), and the preparation of local, social groups to confront poverty (for example, the strengthening of existing, internal forces in different neighborhoods and among different communities).

The work of Drs. Gal and Weiss is a part of the project on poverty, and one that also summarizes and analyzes literature and experience from other places

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as opposed to Jerusalem's. As is usually done at the Institute, the study includes recommendations and policy proposals.

We hope this work will provoke public debate, arouse the awareness of policy makers, and facilitate the creation of wide circles among the public and the philanthropic community that will do whatever is possible to extricate the needy from the cycle of poverty and lessen the suffering associated with it.

We thank all those who assisted, and particularly the Pratt Foundation, and the Charles H. Revson Foundation for helping in the execution of this project on poverty in Jerusalem.

Ora Ahimeir
Institute Director

Abstract

Jerusalem is one of the poorest cities in Israel. In 2003 the proportion of families living below the poverty line in the city reached 33%. The goal of this paper is to explore options for the adoption of local anti-poverty strategies in Jerusalem. The recommendations in this paper are intended to complement efforts to combat poverty and exclusion on a national level. Clearly the brunt of the responsibility for combating poverty in Jerusalem, as elsewhere in Israel, must be borne by the state and its agencies. Nonetheless, a review of literature from other welfare states as well as data from Jerusalem and other cities in Israel indicate that local anti-poverty strategies can contribute to an alleviating of poverty.

It is recommended that the municipal authorities in Jerusalem adopt the following principles and guidelines for an effective anti-poverty strategy:

- ◆ Adopting the issue of alleviating poverty and social exclusion as a formal and central goal of the municipality:
- ◆ Creating an organizational structure which includes: a public advisory board comprising the relevant community actors; a municipal steering committee headed by the city's mayor, that will set municipal policy in the form of a coherent and comprehensive plan of action; and an executive committee for poverty alleviation situated within the welfare department and charged with implementation.
- ◆ Corporate cooperation: a successful anti-poverty strategy requires cooperation with other state- and local- level agencies. It is recommended that the municipality strengthen its ties with these agencies, preferably under the auspices of a national authority for dealing with poverty.
- ◆ Creating strategic partnerships with the different community actors involved in this field, both from the business community and third sector including advocacy and support groups. This effort will require a clear-cut formulation of the nature of these partnerships and will necessitate the establishment of a mechanism for efficient overseeing, which will allow for effective monitoring of non-governmental bodies.

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- ◆ Genuine inclusion of poor residents in the anti-poverty effort by way of their participation in a public advisory committee, in advisory bodies on a local level, or in particular fields of activity that will enable the residents to track the implementation of plans and to serve in an advisory function. In addition, the evaluation of projects should reflect the views of the residents regarding the effectiveness of the various activities.
- ◆ As anti-poverty strategies need to focus on a variety of diverse populations with different demographic characteristics, the cooperation of residents is crucial in designing programs, as is the use of cultural mediators in seeing to their successful realization.
- ◆ Since poverty is not divided evenly geographically, policies should be targeted on particularly deprived area.
- ◆ Alongside the targeting of resources on deprived areas, a successful strategy must also take into account the fact that poverty is not concentrated solely in specific geographic areas and thus there is also a need for comprehensive city wide anti-poverty policies and services.
- ◆ It is crucial that local anti-poverty strategies be accompanied by research to evaluate and assess the work undertaken. The research should serve as a basis both for crystallizing the goals and analyzing the specific outcomes of the policies.

Following are a number of possible fields of activity for combating poverty:

- ◆ **Income maintenance** — given the presumed low level of take up of benefits and services, local authorities should engage in case advocacy aimed at raising awareness to rights and increasing take-up levels among excluded populations.
- ◆ **Income maintenance** — in addition to case advocacy, local municipal authorities should actively challenge existing policies and advocate social policy change.
- ◆ **Employment development** — the Jerusalem municipality can play a key role in the creation of new employment opportunities. A department for employment development could serve as an important source of up-to-date information on the labor market, could coordinate efforts among different

parts of the community, and could run a network of employment centers and employment plans for bringing people into the workforce.

- ◆ **Employment development** – assuming that a good portion of the city’s residents – especially those who will be working only part-time – will have to take jobs close to home, it will be critical to help develop new sources of employment within city limits.
- ◆ **Employment development** – the city should monitor the implementation of the welfare-to-work program recently created in Jerusalem. The local authorities must ensure that promised services are indeed provided, that rights are upheld, and it should be willing to offer additional employment assistance beyond those required by the program. Finally, the municipality can serve as a provider of support services that may assist the program participants, such as child care, training courses, or adult education.
- ◆ **Employment development** – the local authorities should establish employment programs for those parts of the population who do not fall into the categories addressed by government welfare-to-work programs. Being familiar with the needs of the population, with the local demand for employment, and with local employers, the municipality has an important function to fill in this arena. Coping with employment problems should include a widening of the network of neighborhood employment centers throughout the city, working with community-based organizations and with the third sector, and the recruiting of local employers into the effort to bring new employees into the workforce and to offer in-work programs or employer-financed programs to ensure the successful integration of employees into the workplace.
- ◆ **Employment development** – another means of increasing the labor market participation rate, especially among women, is the expansion of pre-school child care facilities. The development of child care services at affordable rates will not only facilitate the inclusion of parents of young children into the workforce, but will also be an important way to enrich the children’s development and increase their chance for social mobility.
- ◆ **Personal social services** – local social services can contribute to anti-poverty efforts through psycho-social interventions. Case-management and the adoption of a broad strategy to provide psycho-social support for families

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in need can provide the foundations for better social inclusion of poor families and individuals.

- ◆ **Personal social services** — social workers, and especially community social workers, should seek to build up social capital in poor communities. These efforts should support the natural leadership of the different communities in the city and develop cooperative efforts for confronting poverty that will include the local leadership in planning and running services and programs.
- ◆ **Personal social services** — it is recommended that the Jerusalem municipality define a “basket” of personal social services to be offered residents in need. It may be possible to begin this initiative in a given geographical area or in one of the specific fields of activity of the welfare department. This “basket” should define the services and assistance to which each resident is entitled, the obligations of the Jerusalem municipality to provide them, and accessibility conditions relevant to each of these services and aid. This strategy should serve as a catalyst for changing the law for welfare services.
- ◆ **Dealing with special needs** — it is proposed that a special fund be formed for special needs and financing debts. This fund will be overseen by a public committee, which will define clear criteria for granting aid. The fund will have the right to provide low interest loans for various purposes, and even to offer grants where deemed necessary.
- ◆ **Dealing with special needs** — a special unit for coordinating the work of voluntary organizations that offer different sorts of assistance in the city should be established. This unit could be a source of information for many aid organizations in Jerusalem, could disseminate this information to professionals and to the general public, and would set guidelines for relations between these organizations and municipal agencies.