The Municipal Accessibility Index in Israel - 2019
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Summary of Findings

This research examines public opinion of the Israeli population towards people with disabilities, as well as perceptions of Israelis with disabilities of accessibility in different areas of life. This is the fourth year this research has been conducted, which allowed for a longitudinal analysis of trends and developments in Israeli public opinion.

The research is comprised of two surveys. The first survey was conducted with a sample of 3,671 adults from 20 selected municipalities in Israel,\(^1\) as well as 1,509 respondents from other cities. The second sample was used as a reference group to compare the findings from the 20 municipalities. The second survey, conducted for the first time this year, examined perceptions of accessibility in different areas of life and satisfaction with life from the perspective of Israelis living with disabilities. A sample of 473 people with disabilities participated in the second survey along with 1,010 nondisabled individuals who served as a reference group. To allow for inclusive participation, the survey was administrated in Hebrew, Arabic, different gender pronouns, as well as a simplified language format.

Participants in the first survey were presented with a variety of measures that included: attitudes towards people with disabilities (including stereotypes, perceptions of out-group homogeneity, and perceived threat), emotions towards people with disabilities, behavioral measures regarding people with disabilities (such as willingness to engage in relationships, willingness to assist, support of anti-discrimination policies, and engagement in offensive behavior), and perceptions about municipalities’ effectiveness in dealing with people with disabilities in their territories. In the second survey, participants with and without disabilities were

\(^1\) The 20 municipalities selected are Tel Aviv-Yafo, Jerusalem, Haifa, Rishon LeZion, Shoham, Netanya, Herzliya, Hod HaSharon, Karmiel, Be’er Sheva, Ashkelon, Ashdod, Ramat Gan, Bnei Brak, Nazareth, Rehovot, Holon, Petah Tikva, Hadera, and Tiberias.
asked about accessibility of leisure activities, social life, the labor market, healthcare, municipal services and about their general satisfaction with life.

The research results show a steady improvement in perceptions, emotions, and behavior towards people with disabilities. In addition, compared with 2018, there was an improvement in 18 out of the 20 municipalities regarding the “municipal accessibility index,” which is comprised of multiple measures that allow the assessment of general attitudes towards people with disabilities in the municipality.

Specifically, there has been a decrease in the public view of disabled people as incompetent and as a homogenous out-group. With regard to emotions, there has been a slight increase in empathy, and also a decrease in embarrassment and admiration towards people with disabilities. The greatest statistically significant positive trend was found in the willingness of the public to form various relationships with people with disabilities (anything from becoming their neighbor, colleague, friend, romantic partner or engaging with them on social media). Another finding shows that more people recognize discrimination against disabled individuals and show support for governmental and social action to fight it. However, compared to last year, there was no increase in willingness to engage in individual action to promote the rights and welfare of people with disabilities.

With regard to the municipal accessibility index, despite the overall increase in levels of support of individuals with disabilities, 17 municipalities scored lower than the reference sample of people from all around the country. The three municipalities that scored higher than the reference group’s index score were Shoham, Rehovot and Rishon LeZion (with Tel Aviv-Yafo being very close, yet just under the reference score). These last three cities also had the highest index scores compared to the 20 municipalities. Ashdod and Netanya came in last in the index. Herzliya and Petah Tikva showed the greatest improvement in their score compared to last year.

The analysis of the accessibility perceptions in five major areas of life (leisure and social life, labor market, public transportation, healthcare, and municipal services) showed that, compared to what nondisabled people reported, most disabled individuals feel these areas are inaccessible to them and do not cater to their needs. The biggest gaps between the groups were related to perceptions of accessibility in the labor market and in healthcare. For instance, people with disabilities believed that employers in the private and public sectors are not likely to employ them. People with disabilities were also more likely to refrain from applying to jobs in the first place (compared with nondisabled individuals).

People with disabilities also tend to put less trust in medical providers and professionals, felt they could not talk with them openly about their needs, and that the providers do not believe
them when they say they are in pain (all compared to nondisabled survey respondents). Nevertheless, most people with disabilities reported high levels of satisfaction with life, though still at significantly lower levels than those reported by nondisabled people.

Other findings have shown that nondisabled individuals tended to rate systemic disability accessibility (that of governmental services and private businesses) worse than what disabled individuals reported themselves. However, when it came to the ease of creating interpersonal relationships, nondisabled people assumed it was much easier to make those bonds than what people with disabilities reported.

Findings regarding the impact of having interpersonal contact with individuals with disabilities on attitudes towards this population have shown that nondisabled people who reported having both close and distant relationships with disabled individuals had the most positive perceptions, emotions and behaviors towards people with disabilities (followed by nondisabled people who reported having only close relationships with disabled individuals). Those with both close and distant relationships with disabled people, for example, reported seeing much more importance in representing the interests of the disability community in the last general elections held in September 2019 (compared to other people with any or no relationships with this population).

Taken together, the findings from this research showcase the complexity of looking at disability both from an “inside view” (of people living with disabilities) and an “outside view” (that of nondisabled individuals). The findings provide an empirical basis that can be used for developing laws and policies designed to promote the rights and wellbeing of Israelis with disabilities.