

**The Challenges of Reducing Educational-Developmental Gaps Among
Status-less Children in Israel.**

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Declarations of interest: none.

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Children in Israel.

Abstract

Israel today is home to approximately 70,000 asylum seekers who are living under a group protection policy - 2A5 visas that shields them from deportation (The Department for Policy and Strategy, 2023). This diverse population includes about 31,000 citizens from Eritrea and Sudan, as well as 35,000 Ukrainian citizens, with approximately 14,000 of them having arrived in Israel post-February 24, 2022. Although the 2A5 status protects them from deportation, it fails to provide them with basic rights and services. While adults possess this status, their children reside in Israel without a recognized status or identification number, making them effectively "status-less" within the country (HCJ 6312/10).

As a signatory to the International Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), Israel is committed to upholding three fundamental rights for children: health, well-being, and education. This commentary will focus on the right to education, particularly the obstacles professionals encounter in narrowing the educational and developmental gaps experienced by status-less children in Israel. Key challenges include implementing segregation policies for status-less children within local communities, inadequate allocation of resources, and the need to effectively address the complexities of cultural synchronization in integration efforts. These challenges are derived from a thorough examination of legal documents, an evaluation of the existing services available in Israel, and insights derived from the authors' professional expertise.

Finally, the commentary will suggest up-to-date interpretations of the challenges

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discussed. The conclusions derived from the current commentary may be relevant to
professionals – educators and social workers in educational institutions; and policymakers

1 seeking to formulate consistent policy that provides adapted services to children from diverse
2 communities, some of whom are excluded and oppressed.
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4 **Keywords:** children’s rights, asylum seekers, minority oppression, early education,
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6 integration.
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8 9 **Navigating Early Childhood Education Gaps in Israel: The Right to Education**

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46 “Status-less” children face significant developmental, educational, and health
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48 disparities due to their unstable legal, environmental, and economic circumstances. From a
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50 young age, many are placed in substandard, unlicensed preschool environments known
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52 colloquially as "babysitters." These informal frameworks, often run by uncertified individuals
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54 from the asylum-seeking and immigrant communities, are marked by poor conditions that
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56 pose risks to children's safety and well-being.
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1 The State Comptroller's reports (Meir & Sloan, 2016) and data from Mesila (2020;
2 2021) highlight the grim reality of these settings: overcrowding, inadequate care, poor
3 nutrition, and lack of stimulation, all of which hinder the children's cognitive and motor
4 development. Tragically, in 2015, five infants died in these unregulated daycare centers
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6 (Matthieussent, 2015).
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10 Parents seeking alternatives to these informal "babysitters" can turn to supervised
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12 daycare centers operating under the Unitaf model, as mandated by government decision
13 #2487. Unitaf facilities are housed in municipality-approved buildings, adhere to safety
14 protocols including fire safety measures, CPR training, appropriate staff-to-child ratios, and
15 nutritional guidelines mandated by law. However, access to Unitaf daycare centers remains
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17 limited, leaving the majority of children in the care of unregulated "babysitters."
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25 As these children grow and transition into the formal education system, their
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27 circumstances fail to improve. Local authorities' reluctance to enroll asylum seekers' children
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29 in educational institutions, or the practice of segregating them within these institutions,
30 further compounds their isolation, perpetuating social stigma, impeding their educational
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32 progress, and hindering their overall development. (Aviel, 2023)
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38 This situation underscores not only the systemic challenges within Israel's education
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40 system but also the broader issues of intolerance and discrimination facing the asylum seeker
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42 community. It calls for urgent reforms to ensure that all children, regardless of their legal
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44 status or background, have access to quality education and the opportunity to realize their full
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51 The State Comptroller's reports (Meir & Sloan, 2016) and data from Mesila (2020;
52 2021) highlight the grim reality of these settings: overcrowding, inadequate care, poor

53 **Obstacles encountered by professionals in reducing the educational and developmental**
54 **gaps**
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56 The Israeli education system is confronted with the challenge of addressing the
57 multifaceted needs of asylum seekers' children. These children often arrive with backgrounds
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1 marked by complex trauma experienced both in their countries of origin and upon their
2 arrival in Israel. (Bachem, 2024) They face numerous obstacles, including emotional strain
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5 on families due to a scarcity of quality time with parents, dangerous living conditions,
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7 poverty, experiences of racism and discrimination, and health issues. Many of these children
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9 enter the educational system with untreated conditions like skin diseases, and some lack
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11 medical insurance, compelling parents to send them to school even when ill. Moreover, they
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13 exhibit developmental delays affecting comprehension, expressive abilities, motor skills,
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15 social interactions, and play, alongside emotional and behavioral issues.
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20 Despite these significant challenges, the State of Israel does not allocate sufficient
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22 resources or provide the specialized attention necessary to meet the unique needs of asylum
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24 seekers' children within its budgetary considerations. This oversight underscores the pressing
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26 need for a comprehensive, systemic approach that includes research, planning, and the
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28 development of tailored programs to support these children effectively within the educational
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30 system. Given the complex political landscape, it is crucial to recognize that asylum seekers'
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32 children are growing up in Israel, becoming integral members of both the educational system
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34 and society at large. (Aviel, 2023; Meir & Sloan, 2016)
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39 The current situation in preschool settings, municipal kindergartens, and elementary
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41 schools has profound implications. Children and youth from asylum-seeking backgrounds are
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43 at high risk, and without timely and adequate intervention, the likelihood of their referral to
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45 more costly special education settings increases. This situation not only bears economic
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47 ramifications but also severe social consequences. Education serves as the foundation for
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marked by complex trauma experienced both in their countries of origin and upon their arrival in Israel. (Bachem, 2024) They face numerous obstacles, including emotional strain socialization (Horgan et. al, 2022), and without proper educational and social integration, the risks of dropping out, wandering, and other adverse outcomes escalate.

Although these children have been part of the Israeli education system for over a decade, there remains a disconnect between their specific needs and the resources and support

1 mechanisms currently in place. There has been a lack of strategic thinking and planning at
2 both governmental and municipal levels to accommodate the unique characteristics and risk
3 factors of this population (Meir & Sloan, 2016). Without immediate and thoughtful action to
4 address their educational, developmental, and social challenges, the broader communities—
5 both the asylum seekers and the Israeli society—will face the long-term consequences of this
6 oversight.

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15 The education system has a critical role to play in initiating the necessary change. It is
16 imperative to devise and implement a pedagogical and systemic strategy that not only
17 acknowledges the growth rate of the asylum-seeking population but also ensures their
18 successful integration into the educational framework. This approach should aim to transform
19 the current reality, offering these children the care and support they need to thrive, thereby
20 benefiting society as a whole.

21 **Bridging Cultural and Educational Gaps: An Integrative Model for Early**

22 **Childhood Education in Israel**

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34 The importance of establishing a multicultural and integrative approach to early
35 childhood education in Israel has become increasingly evident after 19 years of observation
36 in South Tel Aviv. The adverse effects of community differentiation on children underscore
37 the urgent need for a new reality—one that aligns with the principles of the Convention on
38 the Rights of the Child, to which Israel is a signatory. This vision calls for a community
39 framework that embraces children, ensuring equal education opportunities for all, irrespective
40 of their origin or civil status. This model is designed to bridge the developmental gaps
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mechanisms currently in place. There has been a lack of strategic thinking and planning at

observed in children from the asylum seeker community by fostering daily interactions that

nurture a safe and inclusive environment.

Benefits of Integration

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1. **Developmental Advantages:** Integration plays a critical role in supporting children with language delays by exposing them to peers with typical development. This exposure is crucial not only for bridging language gaps but also for enhancing cognitive and social skills. Studies highlight the importance of bilingual exposure—balancing mother tongue and Hebrew—for children expected to continue their education within the Israeli system. Early years, especially the first three years, are pivotal for brain development, with language acquisition playing a significant part in shaping future social and cognitive abilities. (Ager & Strang, 2008; Kohnhert, 2010; Zhao et. al, 2021).

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2. **Community Model Rationale:** The community model is founded on two pillars: promoting humane values: equality and multiculturalism, and fostering the optimal development of preschool children. An integrative framework that mixes children from various backgrounds enhances linguistic and social interactions, offering every child the chance to thrive. Key elements of the model include a culturally diverse framework team to reflect and honor the different cultures of the families, and an inclusive attitude towards children, ensuring a balanced representation of the community's socioeconomic and cultural diversity. (Achituv & Hertzog, 2020)

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3. **Cultural Sensitivity:** Daily interactions and structured activities must be sensitive to the linguistic and cultural nuances of the community. The social composition of an educational framework significantly impacts the cognitive and social mobility prospects of children. Providing an educational setting that respects and incorporates

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1. **Developmental Advantages:** Integration plays a critical role in supporting children
various cultural backgrounds is crucial for fostering an environment conducive to
optimal development. (Buchner et. al, 2023; Horgan et. al, 2022)

Implementing the Integrative Model for Early Childhood Education

For successful implementation, the model must include:

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3 the educational staff should serve as positive role models and cultural representatives.

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5 This diversity helps children develop a complete identity and self-confidence, free
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7 from inherent conflicts. The education system holds a critical role in facilitating all
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9 students' successful academic and social-emotional development. Research has shown
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11 that same-race representation between teachers and students can have significant
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13 impacts on various aspects of students' development, social-emotional development
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15 and academic achievement. When teachers share the same race or ethnicity as their
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17 students, they can utilize their shared cultural backgrounds to establish a more
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19 culturally responsive learning atmosphere (Gottfried, Fletcher) . This enables them to
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21 employ teaching methods that are culturally appropriate and relevant, thereby
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23 enhancing the educational experience for students of color (Achinstein & Ogawa,
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25 2011; Ladson-Billings, 1992).
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31 In the context of early childhood education, the role of same-race representation
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33 becomes particularly crucial as it lays the foundation for a child's academic and socio-
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35 emotional development. Studies indicate that young children are highly sensitive to
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37 cues of belonging and identity, and having teachers who reflect their racial or ethnic
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39 background can result in lower behavioral problems, particularly externalizing
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41 behaviors. (Wright et. al, 2017). Furthermore, same-race representation in early
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43 childhood education can also impact teacher-student interactions and communication
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45 patterns. (ibid, p. 96) Teachers who share a cultural or racial background with their
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students may possess a deeper understanding of their students' cultural contexts,
which can enhance communication, build trust, and facilitate more culturally
responsive teaching practices.

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□ **Adaptation to Community Needs:** Classrooms should welcome all neighborhood children, adapting to the varied characteristics that reflect the community's diversity.

Whether blending socioeconomically diverse groups or different cultural backgrounds, the framework should aim to create a social microcosm that mirrors the community's demographics.

When classrooms mirror the diversity of the neighborhood's community, students have the opportunity to interact with peers from various backgrounds, fostering cross-cultural understanding, empathy, and respect. These positive interactions are then extended beyond the classroom - to playgrounds and other public spaces in the neighborhood, and therefore lay the groundwork for a more inclusive community.

Munniksmä et. al (2013) for example, showed how just the existence of integrative schools reduced hostility towards Turkish refugees in the Netherlands, even amongst students who didn't form friendships with any ethnically diverse kids. This illustrates that aside from tangible pedagogical advantages of desegregated education (Ayscue et. al, 2017; Rumberger & Palardy, 2005), it creates a more profound shift of culture.

• **Enhanced Support Structures:** Emphasizing strong support for educational teams

and community engagement with parents is essential. Tailored programs and professional guidance in early childhood education and social work are vital to the framework's success.

Simply granting entry to existing schools falls short of ensuring successful integration; instead, there is a critical need to adapt the current school curriculum and

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- **Adaptation to Community Needs:** Classrooms should welcome all neighborhood children, adapting to the varied characteristics that reflect the community's diversity. structures to effectively address the needs of statusless children and their families. Research underscores the importance of moving beyond mere access to education equality and towards achieving education equity (OECD, 2008). Education equity entails not only ensuring equal opportunities for all students but also addressing

1 systemic barriers and tailoring educational experiences to meet the unique needs of
2 marginalized populations, including statusless children.
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5 Moreover, as previously mentioned, the presence of same-race representation
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7 between teachers and students has been linked to positive outcomes in student
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9 development. Extending this concept, it is equally crucial that students see their
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11 cultures represented in the curriculum. Academic research supports the notion that
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13 incorporating cultural representation into educational content and practices can yield
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15 significant benefits, both socially and academically, for all students. When students'
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17 cultures are acknowledged and integrated into the curriculum, they are more likely to
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22 feel valued, engaged, and motivated to learn (Ladson-Billings, 2009). Furthermore, a
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24 culturallyculturally relevant curriculum helps to foster a sense of belonging and pride
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26 in one's cultural identity, which can positively impact academic achievement and
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28 overall well-being. By grounding educational practices in cultural representation,
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31 classrooms can create more inclusive learning environments that honor the diverse
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33 backgrounds and experiences of all students. (Milner, 2010)
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36 **Conclusion** 37

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39 Adopting an integrative community model positions Israel at the forefront of
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41 cultivating a society rooted in tolerance and inclusivity. This strategic approach not only
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43 addresses the immediate developmental needs of individual children but also plays a pivotal
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45 role in enriching the broader social fabric, championing a culture steeped in equality and
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systemic barriers and tailoring educational experiences to meet the unique needs of
marginalized populations, including statusless children.

multiculturalism. By confronting these challenges directly and advocating for comprehensive
systemic reform, the commentary charts a course toward an educational landscape in Israel
that is both inclusive and fair. It underscores the imperative for educators and social workers
in educational settings to adopt customized strategies that not only bridge the educational and

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1 developmental divides experienced by children without recognized status but also cultivate
2 an atmosphere of inclusivity and respect for cultural differences.
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5 Policymakers are encouraged to take these insights into account when devising
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7 consistent policies aimed at providing tailored services to all children, especially those from
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9 marginalized and oppressed groups. The commentary calls for a thoughtful reassessment of
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11 how resources are allocated, along with the creation of systemic programs specifically
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13 designed to address the distinctive needs of the children of asylum seekers. Such policies
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15 should strive to close the existing divide between the current segregated state and a more
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17 cohesive, just educational system, paving the way for a future where every child has the
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19 opportunity to succeed.
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Social Service and Public Safety Authority of Israel

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