

## Salaries of Childcare Workers in the Arab Sector

### Introduction

The Israel government service for Children and Youth, in cooperation with the Branch for Women's Status in the National Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare, jointly support the provision of family-run childcare centers. On the local level, these services are brokered by Community Service departments, within the local governing authority—in municipalities, towns or villages. The actual childcare is provided by women who have received training as childcare workers by the local Community Service. Today, there are 600 Arab women who are childcare workers, running home-based nurseries for infants. Their relation to the local governing authority is as self-employed persons with whom the authority contracts for service. There is no employee-employer relationship between them.

Each family-run childcare center takes in up to 5 children, aged 6 months to 3 years. Fees that are to be paid for each child range from 1,280-1,333 I.S. The payment for childcare in a family-run center is split between three parties:

- Parents—who pay from 30-100% of the fee, depending on their income level
- Local governing authorities—that subsidize welfare children, and pay up to 25% of what is left unpaid by parents
- The Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare—that pays what is left unpaid by the local authority, and by working mothers.

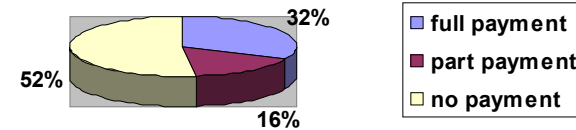
Kayan—a feminist organization, first learned that there was a serious problem of non-payment to childcare workers by the local authorities, when Kayan lead several women's empowerment groups with childcare workers. The problem was that there were inconsistencies and late payments to workers from both the Ministry of Social Welfare, and from the local governing authorities. In some locales, the backlog in payments was as long as several months. This situation left the women without any form of income, while the women continued to be responsible for all of the everyday expenses of childcare, in most of cases.

As a result of the above, Kayan took the initiative to take a survey, to assess the extent of the phenomenon, and its severity in those locations that were most problematic. In a pre-survey effort, Kayan was assisted with information from the social workers who supervise childcare workers, in the local offices of the Ministry of Social Welfare. Kayan first determined in which localities the problem was most acute, and the early findings showed that the extent of the problem was greater than anticipated. The social workers were asked to fill out questionnaires giving details about how and when payments were made. Of 330 questionnaires distributed to supervisors, 173 were filled out and returned.

The second survey was taken in April 2002, among childcare workers from 20 different Arab communities. The goal of the survey was to examine the extent of the problem and its severity, and search for possible solutions and alternatives to the current situation, taking the vantage point of the childcare workers, and the supervisors.

**Questions posed by the research survey were:**

- Did payments from the Ministry of Social Welfare, funneled through the local authorities, reach you? (childcare workers)
- Are payment dates protected by an agreement, and if so, is the agreement respected by the local authorities?
- What actions did you take to alleviate the problem, and what additional measures, do you think should be taken?



*Chart #1*

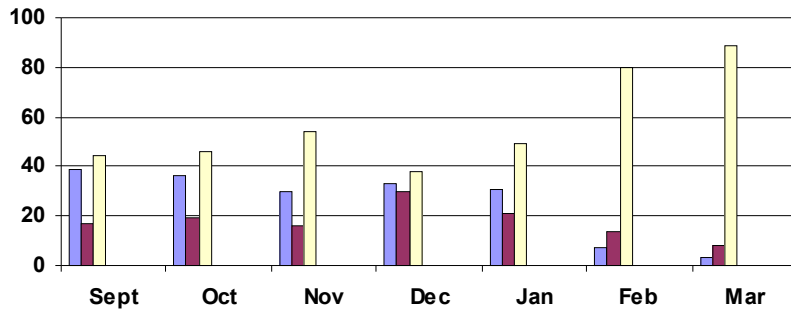
The results of the survey reveal numerous irregularities in payments to the childcare workers from the Ministry. It appears that only a few workers were paid on time, payments that are in actuality worker's salaries. In the majority of cases, workers were not paid for several months, and when finally paid, the payments were not made in the right way. For instance, in many instances, payments were inconsistent. When there were several payments past due, the local authorities then redistributed the overdue amount into a number of unequal monthly payments. The local authorities would pay the salary for two current months in several installments, when at the time of payment, there was a much larger previous outstanding payment overdue; that was simply overlooked and remained unpaid.

**Are funds from the Labor and Social Welfare Ministry paid to ChildCare Workers?**

Covering the period between September 2001-March 2002, 7 monthly salaries were due to childcare workers. The survey's statistics show that only 32% of these payments were made in full, 16% were partially paid, and the remainder, 52% were not transferred at all.

In addition, the breakdown of the amount of the monthly payment was examined, with out taking into account whether or not it was a late payment. The findings (see graph #2, below) show that from September 2001-January 2002, the percentage of childcare workers who received full payment during this period is a mere 31-39%. Those who received some form of partial payment were 16-19%, and the remainder of childcare workers who received no payment at all was between 44-54%. During February-March 2002, 80-89% of the childcare workers received no payment at all. As the survey was in April, it is most probable that these workers received their payments much later.

Graph #2



**The majority of payments were late, 1-3 months late, or longer.**

The survey's findings show that the promptness of payment during the period in question breaks down as follows: only 8% were paid promptly, 61% were 1-2 months late, and 31% were 3+months late or longer.

Chart #3

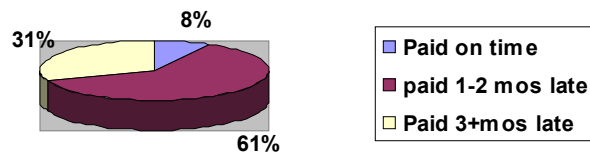


Table #1 gives a breakdown of late payments with each month shown separately. In September, for example, only **68 out of 173** childcare workers reported receiving any form of payment for their work in this month. Of these 68 women, only 5 were paid promptly, 42 waited for up to 2 months, and 21 waited for 3 months or longer. From the table it is apparent that this month is a typical one.

Month	Paid on time	1-2 months late	3+ months late	Total # of workers paid
Sept 2001	5	42	21	68
Oct 2001	3	17	40	60
Nov 2001	3	24	20	47
Dec 2001	6	41	7	54
Jan 2002	4	51	2	57
Feb 2002	2	8	0	10

Table #1

From the findings, we see a very problematic picture of payment schedules. When asked if there was an agreed upon time for payment, a relatively large number of women, 32%, stated that there was no agreed upon time between them and the local authorities for the payments. On the other hand, 68% stated that there was a formal time agreed upon for the payment from the local authority or municipality. In one locale, the women said there was an agreed upon time, but it was only a verbal agreement, and not binding. There is no doubt that is clearly apparent from the findings is the fact that even in cases where there is a binding agreement regarding when payment is due, it is not being respected.

**The Parents Role in the Problem**

Another issue surveyed was the payment of child care fees by parents. Statistics show that only 63% of the childcare workers reported having ever received any payment from parents. And of these workers, 60% of them reported that they were paid less than half of what was due to them; 15% of them received between 50-90% of what was due; and a mere 20% of them received 90% or more, of the fee due them from parents.

**Efforts by Childcare Workers to Solve the Problem**

Another question in the survey was "Whom did you contact about the late payments?" 86% of the respondents said they had approached at least one person in the local authorities-the accountant, head of the council, or the childcare supervisor. In fact, there were so many calls to the council that the women could not say how many calls they had made. Another interesting fact is that 48% of the childcare workers noted that they even approached people outside of the local authority, such as lawyers, regional supervisors, the worker's union (Histadrut), and some went so far as to contact members of Parliament.

**The Supervising Social Workers and their Perspective**

The final section of the survey asked the childcare workers for possible solutions to the problem of late payment. Most of the responses suggested alleviating the local governing authority the role of intermediary, and establishing a direct payment to workers, or selecting another and different third party. Of those who responded to the question, 64% gave this response. And 20% suggested establishing a professional association to unionize their rights and to consider joining with existing organizations.

The remainder of the suggestions included: to meet with people from the Worker's Union -the "Histadrut" (a suggestion that was in fact, tried in several instances); to appeal to the local Court for Labor Affairs to establish that an employee-employer status in actuality exists, including social benefits and compensation for late payment, to requests that local authorities purchase the equipment/toys for the centers.

And of course, a majority of the women who responded stated that the late payments negatively affect their ability to function, and affect the quality of childcare provided. In addition to the information collected from the childcare workers, there were 16 social-workers, who serve as local supervisors, who responded. When asked, "What they thought were the major problems for the childcare workers? Why? and If the women received payments on time?", 15 of the 16 said that they knew there were late payments, and they were caused by bank cash-shortages in the local authorities. In addition, there were 7 who said that payments to childcare workers were a low priority for local authorities, and of marginal significance.