

# Research Report Summary: Former Haredim in the Job Market: Challenges, Perceived Value, and Possible Solutions for Quality Employment

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This study examines the integration of former Haredim (“Yotzim”) into the Israeli job market. The main perspective in this study is that of the Yotzim themselves, as expressed by them in focus groups (a total of 25 participants with an average age of 27). This study also shows the perspective of career guidance counsellors from the nonprofit ‘Out for Change,’ derived from an analysis of 100 career guidance process summaries and a focus group of six counsellors.

**The findings of this study challenge the assumption that Yotzim are able to integrate into the job market naturally and without special assistance. The findings reinforce the position that we must actively assist Yotzim, mainly in transitioning from temporary unskilled jobs to high-quality employment.**

The first part of this study’s findings deals with the employment challenges faced by Yotzim. In this part, the findings show the background circumstances that contribute to these challenges. This includes Ultra-Orthodox society’s deeply held beliefs and preconceptions about work and money, such as the distinction between “respectable jobs” and “menial labor,” the disdain toward the latter, and the lack of occupational modeling in Haredi communities. With only limited exposure to the job market in the home and social environments, many Haredim lack direction, feel no personal connection to any professional development path, and have no concept of a dream job or desired career. Furthermore, the absence of core subjects (English and STEM) in the Haredi school curriculum leads to significant gaps in skills when entering the job market.

**As they enter the job market, Yotzim face numerous challenges: gaps in knowledge, cultural differences, emotional and psychological difficulties, and financial hardships.** In the context of knowledge gaps, Yotzim have many questions about various occupations, their entry-level requirements, and the professional development paths they should take to qualify for positions. Yotzim also lack knowledge about the jobhunting process, such as how to write a CV or prepare for job interviews, and about their rights as employees—from employment contracts to labor laws and benefits. The cultural differences affect how Yotzim fit in socially at their workplaces. This challenge stems from their different backgrounds and life experiences and is compounded by their lack of familiarity with non-Haredi Israeli culture. To add to the difficulty, these employment challenges

are not contained within a vacuum. Yotzim look for work while coping with a myriad of other challenges related to their decision to leave Haredi life. In many cases, the transition is psychologically and emotionally demanding. Moreover, many Yotzim struggle financially and cannot afford to stop working or work fewer hours to invest in studies, which they need in order to obtain better-paying jobs.

**Because of these challenges, Yotzim tend to work in low-requirement jobs, do not plan their occupational choices in advance, move from job to job frequently, and find it difficult to settle on a career path.** While many assume that Yotzim should be able to enter the job market freely and fit in with ease, the challenges that emerge from this study indicate that this task is even more complex than it appears at first glance.

The second part of this study's findings concerns how Yotzim perceive their value as employees. An exploration of the balance of strengths and weaknesses Yotzim bring to the job market has shown that **Yotzim are aware of their weaknesses but are able to list many strengths when they see themselves through their employer's eyes.** The strengths Yotzim see in themselves relate to their path in life. They name traits such as courage, creativity, determination, motivation, resourcefulness, commitment, sharp learning skills, a strong drive to succeed, and the ability to swim against the current, understand complexity, ask questions and search for alternative meanings. Many Yotzim view themselves as free spirits and independent thinkers with a deeper outlook on life and a desire to do meaningful work. These traits may prove advantageous in many careers where creative thinking and daring actions—the catalysts for innovation—are valued.

Interestingly, Yotzim see an advantage in being highly sensitive to difference in others as a result of their past experiences as outliers in the Haredi community. Another advantage Yotzim report is their intimate familiarity with Haredi society. Their knowledge of Haredi life and culture means they are better able to interface with Haredi communities and individuals as colleagues, clients and suppliers.

**Most of the weaknesses reported by the Yotzim are professional (e.g. poor proficiency in English) or have to do with their experience in transitioning into Israel's non-Haredi communities. As this transition period is temporary, the weaknesses reported in connection with it are temporary as well. Conversely, the strengths reported by the Yotzim are personality traits or skills and abilities acquired or enhanced during the process of leaving Haredi life. These skills and traits are permanent. This distinction tilts in favor of defining Yotzim as a temporary diversity population—a status they, unlike most other diversity groups, can lose as they integrate into the job market.**

The third part of the findings is an overview of support and accommodations that could help Yotzim succeed in the job market, as reported by the Yotzim and guidance counsellors who participated in the study. This includes support from nonprofits and advocacy organizations as well as direct employers.