

MEMMO

August 12, 2016

Israel Celebrates International Youth Day

On August 12, Israel joins the world in celebrating International Youth Day. A leader in the region in ensuring legal protections for its children, Israel provides vast educational, cultural, and social opportunities enabling young people to thrive.

Protecting the Future

- Since its founding, Israel has put in place protections to ensure that its youth grow up in an environment conducive to success. Israeli youth have extraordinary access to education: the Compulsory Education Law provides free education from preschool through 12th grade, and requires at least ten years of schooling. Nearly 100 percent of 3-4 year-old children in Israel are enrolled in school. By comparison, the OECD average attendance for 3-4 year-olds is 81 percent, while the U.S. enrollment rate is 54 percent.
- For more than sixty years the Youth Labor Law has effectively prevented child labor in Israel by barring children under the age of 15 from working, and setting stringent terms for youth employment.
- In 1991, Israel became one of the first countries to ratify the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). It is strictly enforced and has been cited numerous times in Israeli Supreme Court and lower court rulings.
- Israeli civil society continues to strengthen the safeguards that defend Israel's youth. One such group, ELEM (Youth in Distress), is dedicated to treating and reforming the lives of troubled teens by creating learning opportunities for those unable to excel in the traditional classroom structure. One of its programs, "From Protection to Independence," serves 200 16-24 year olds annually—Jews and Arabs—who are living in Youth Protection Authority institutions, and helps them transition to independent living.



Israeli children joined U.S. President Barack Obama and former Israeli President Shimon Peres during his March 2013 visit to Israel. (Sebastian Scheiner/AP Images).

Educating the Future

- Israel's public education system is crucial for fostering cross-cultural communication and coexistence among the diverse Israeli population. While students have had the option to study Arabic in school for decades, this past year the Knesset (parliament) passed legislation requiring that both Arabic and Hebrew be taught to all students.

- Since 2001, Israel's Children's Museum has focused on providing unique educational experiences for children. Located in Holon, the museum features exhibits led by blind and deaf guides that allow children to experience what life is like without certain senses. Experiences like these are designed to promote tolerance and help teach empathy and understanding.
- Israeli high school students are given the option of either academic or vocational programs. In academic schools, students take general education courses at the start and specialize during their final two years. In vocational schools, students study technical or agricultural disciplines. These diverse programs allow Israel's youth to reach their maximum potential no matter their interest.
- Israeli high school retention rates are among the highest in the world cutting across socioeconomic and ethnic backgrounds. Ninety-two percent of Israeli students graduate high school, compared to the 84 percent Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) average.

Youth Movements

- Youth movements play a central role in Israeli life. Funded in part by the Ministry of Education, these organizations encourage tolerance, develop leadership, and foster responsibility and social involvement. In 2015, there were 13 active youth movements, encompassing and integrating Israelis from all walks of life, including secular, religious, Arab, Druze, Bedouin and new immigrants.
- Youth movements play an important role in empowering children from minority backgrounds and new immigrants. These organizations reach out to those communities and teach language, culture, values and coexistence. They also provide an outlet for children of new immigrants to absorb the culture and aid in their integration.
- With 71,500 active members, Tzofim ("scouts") is Israel's largest national youth movement. Established in 1919, Tzofim was the first egalitarian scouting movement in the world. Tzofim is also known for reaching out to youth with physical and developmental disabilities and youth at risk.
- Israeli youth are among the country's most engaged champions of peace. Organizations like Kids4Peace, Seeds of Peace, Yala Young Leaders, HeartBeat, Hand in Hand—and dozens more—mobilize thousands of young Israelis in advancing coexistence between Israelis and Palestinians. They educate youth to advocate for a peace, and a safe and secure future for Israelis and Palestinians.