The academic, business and social sectors joining forces will increase Israel’s strength

By JEHUDA HADDAD

The recently published OECD report sets out to Israeli decision makers a series of decisions they would have to make to put Israel on an equal footing with other developed countries around the world. Israel’s basic economy data are good, but unless Israel makes a series of significant decisions about employment and reassignment, it may face an economic crisis, or perhaps even worse, a social crisis, resulting from education and employment gaps.

The report indicates that vocational education, training programs and the integration of Arabs and ultra-Orthodox Jews into the workforce are prerequisites for the continuing growth and prosperity of the Israeli economy.

In 2010, the Higher Education Council formed a multi-year plan designed to expand the accessibility of higher education to minorities and to ultra-Orthodox Jews. About 15 programs and frameworks adapted to the special needs of the ultra-Orthodox have been started over the years. The government has also invested in the Arab population by establishing preparatory courses designed to assist with integration into higher education, by granting scholarships, etc. Nevertheless, the progress appears to be relatively slow and requires the recruitment of resources and forces from other sectors as well.

‘THE COUNTRY needs to promote a national plan for their continuing training and accompaniment, so that they can apply for higher paying jobs,’ the author writes. (Reuters)

Furthermore, according to the organization’s data, the percentage of poor workers in Israel is about 14%. The programs offered today to promote the integration of these populations into higher education, but it seems that their integration into the labor market has not yet raised them above the poverty line, because they are still engaged in low-paying jobs that keep them “poor.”

Hence, in addition to having more academic institutions open vocational tracks for the ultra-Orthodox population and promote preparatory and basic courses, in order to allow the integration of these populations the country needs to promote a national plan for their continuing training and accompaniment, so that they can apply for higher-paying jobs.

In parallel to the academic track and the training courses, it seems that the country, together with the academic institutions and the business and social sectors, should mobilize and lead the next step of integrating these populations and construct a national plan not just to advance their professional training, but also to promote society’s ability to receive them into workplaces, accept them socially and get to know them a little better. The social gaps are still very large, and in order to overcome them, the Arab and ultra-Orthodox populations, as well as the traditional and secular populations, need to learn more about one another.

Higher education and training are the thresholds for entering the labor market and for gaining occupational mobility, and they also contribute to social cohesion. The business sector, too, recognizes the huge potential of these populations; therefore we must step out of the “box” of the academic and business worlds, and give the national plan a social touch that would be expressed by school curricula which would facilitate the integration of all populations into the work cycle and increase Israel’s national strength.

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