

CORONAVIRUS CRISIS

Snapshot: Asylum seekers and stateless people in Israel

2.4.2020*

The challenge: The population of asylum seekers in Israel numbers approximately 31,000 men and women, particularly vulnerable due to absent basic safety nets such as state health insurance and eligibility for benefits such as unemployment or income support. Moreover, as many members of the community were employed in restaurants and hotels, the unemployment rates are extremely high, and the majority of the members of the community have lost their jobs. Therefore, there is already an acute humanitarian crisis which we expect will increase as the emergency situation continues. See an article on social television (Hebrew).

In addition, there are other vulnerable populations who lack legal status in Israel (e.g. Palestinians working in Israel, migrant workers etc), who are susceptible to similar difficulties.



Snapshot: Needs and Responses | Round Table Subcommittee



➤ **Distribution of food and basic products** – currently attempts are targeting responses for approximately 2,000 families who are in acute crisis. The expectation is that this number will increase. Currently explored is the possibility of utilizing the school nourishment system as a means of distribution for food to the families.



➤ **Severance and unemployment** – 10,000-20,000 men and women, approximately 70% are currently unemployed and numbers are expected to rise. As of May 1st, 2017, every employer of an asylum seeker has to deduct 20% of their monthly wages and deposit it in a designated fund, which cannot be used until asylum seeker leaves the country. As a partial immediate response, it is proposed to release the deposit funds for the benefit of the unemployed. There is a pending government emergency bill addressing the possibility of releasing some of these amounts. The bill does not address people who do not have any or enough funds in their deposit (relevant for approximately 15-30% of the workers who were laid off). In addition, exploring the possibility of alternative employment in essential jobs such as agriculture, building, food chains, cleaning and nursing.



➤ **Fear of eviction from housing** due to inability to pay rent. There is an Initiative for municipal actions and state reductions of taxes.



➤ **Children at risk** – Childcare has been a problem even before the current crisis. To address this the government started to establish frameworks for toddlers to assist in creating an alternative to unregulated frameworks that posed immediate danger to children. *Currently, all such frameworks are closed*, thus for parents who work, there is still the risk of children being sent out of the house for arrangements that endanger the children, or are at risk at home. Once parents start to resume work, there is a real fear that this will become an acute humanitarian crisis for these infants where parents will be pressed for cash and seek any possible solution.

* This brief offers the latest picture as evidenced by the information available to us. The briefing will be updated from time to time. Interested knowledgeable and interested parties are invited to contact us with updates.



- Currently **trafficked women and women involved in prostitution** are a particularly vulnerable group. Even if government deposit funds are released they will not be eligible and in addition, some are being forced to work even now. There is a fear of expanding prostitution if that is the only option available for income. There is police supervision closing down more “formal” prostitution centers, but it is not sufficient for activities that take place at home or on street corners.



- **People with disabilities** – It was suggested to explore service provision through the Ministry of Welfare.

- **Homelessness** –

- **For asylum seekers** – when quarantine is required, the Ministry of Health is providing solutions. But the shelters who homeless people who are not sick are overpopulated and there are homeless people who cannot find a proper shelter at this time.



- **Palestinians construction and agriculture workers** – requiring quarantine are handled through the Home Front Command. Contingent complaints that should be referred to the Commissioner for Foreign Workers’ Rights in the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs. Organizations are recommended to hold negotiations with employers. Many Palestinians are forced to choose between leaving their families for the entire duration of the crisis, or losing their jobs without any form of compensation.



- **Nursing Staff** – In individual cases that require quarantine or dismissal from work, the Employee Rights Commissioner at the Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare is to be contacted.



- **Reliance on public transportation** – as of now, there is no response.

Additional actions and needs in the field **

Status Matters

- Achieved: Operations for release from administrative detention – to reduce the risk of contracting a virus while in prisons.
- In process Operations for release from administrative detention – to reduce the risk of contracting a virus while in prisons.
- Call for the release of the funds deposited in accordance with the Deposit Law (20% which is deposited separately and will be delivered and paid to the asylum seekers upon leaving the country). This matter is being reviewed by the government and a bill on the matter is being promoted.

Health Matters

- Running a volunteer clinic for those lacking status in Israel or health insurance coverage and caring for at-risk patients: There are existing clinics who have received additional funding per their requests through state funds.
- Strengthening new service of medical advice through VC App on phones.
- Arranging test complexes and quarantine facilities for those in need: the Ministry of Health has issued directives ordering that test and hospitalization and any treatment also for other background disease associated with the Corona virus must be equally provided to all, regardless of status, lack of insurance or ability to cover payment.
- Examination of insurance rights and ensuring continuity of insurance for the disadvantaged who lost or may lose private health insurance in the absence of work and livelihood.
- Translating Ministry of Health guidelines into foreign languages and distribution of information in real time: in progress with the assistance of interpreters from NGO's cooperating with MOH.



Financing for medical equipment and medicines; financing for maintaining insurance coverage; Funding transportation for at-risk patients in need of hospital treatment, webcam funding for remote treatment.

** Courtesy of The Hotline: Center for Refugees and Migrants, ASSAF, Elifelet, Kav LaOved, MeSila, Doctors for Human Rights, The Negev Refugee Center, Kuchineta, Gan Levinsky Library

Other Welfare and Employment Issues

- The continuity and additional supplies of food baskets, vouchers for food and basic need products.
- Coping with growing violence against women and children.
- Digital tutorials and individual psychosocial support through phone hotlines.
- Individual para-legal assistance and counselling. A minimum of 1,000 inquiries are expected in the foreseeable time.
- For Children Kids and Youth – Support for study, arts and crafts kits, workbooks, storytelling and other enrichment activities on the social networks and a zoom platform. Currently there is no proper infrastructure for online learning.
- Assistance to the unemployed in finding work and alternative means of income according to essential needs in agriculture, food chains and cleaning. This is done in coordination with the government.
- Rent assistance and tenant protection information.
- Examining needs and assistance to asylum seekers in the geographical periphery – both in the Negev, the outskirts of Gush Dan, and the North. food supply, medicines and medical equipment, protective equipment (masks, etc.), online sessions, online learning and leisure activities, emotional support.



Additional funding for food, drugs and medical insurance and general assistance.

Philanthropic Response

- The New Israel Fund has approved a \$ 30,000 emergency grant.
- JDC Israel, the Arison Foundation, the Schusterman Foundation, the Van Leer Foundation, Bader Philanthropies and the Mubadarat Foundation are interested and involved. An immediate response was made, to support the community, with allocation of an emergency grant of \$200,000. The foundations are looking to provide a strategic response for the medium and long terms.