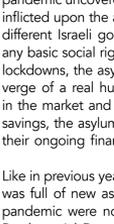


# ASSAF A Year in Between the Pandemic and the New Normal

ACTIVITY REPORT 2021

ארגון סיוע למפליטים (מנדטורי תחום ביטחון) א.ו.ח. א.א.ס.א.פ.  
Aid Organization for Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Israel



**From the Executive Director**

Dear friends, supporters and colleagues, I am proud to share with you this summary of ASSAF's main activities and accomplishments during the year 2021.

The ongoing pandemic played a major role in our lives throughout 2021. We started this year with a national lockdown and ended it with the Omicron variant outbreak – both events directly influencing the refugee community, our staff and volunteers at ASSAF. During these times of crisis, we kept searching for opportunities and ways to support the refugees and asylum seekers, protecting their well-being and fighting for their basic social rights. The pandemic uncovered once again the damages and the injustice inflicted upon the asylum seekers during these last 16 years by different Israeli governments. Deprived of any legal status or any basic social rights, and left unattended during the national lockdowns, the asylum seekers' situation only worsened to the verge of a real humanitarian crisis. Earning the lowest wages in the market and deprived of any institutionalized support or savings, the asylum seekers in Israel are still fighting to survive their ongoing financial distress.

Like in previous year, due to the ongoing pandemic crisis, 2021 was full of new asylum seeker beneficiaries, who prior to the pandemic were not in need of our assistance. This year, our Psychosocial Department kept providing assistance to asylum seekers from all over the country. The social, financial, and emotional assistance for individuals and families, particularly afflicted by the crisis, we also granted the community with individual therapy and assistance, created support groups, made information more accessible and helped promote and exercise basic social rights.

Furthermore, our Public Advocacy Department continued this year in promoting a change in the public sphere and advancing the rights of refugees and asylum seekers. Among other actions, we have published a special report named "Staring into the Abyss", which elaborated on the physical and mental impacts of the ongoing pandemic on the asylum seekers in Israel, and

which proposed a ten steps plan for preventing a similar crisis in the future. Since its first publication, in October 2021, the report plays an important role in all our advocacy efforts with local and central authorities, and it also gained great resonance through the media. Our organization also kept operating this year on the judicial level – for example, fighting alongside other organizations to abolish segregation policies in schools, and filing petitions against segregated municipalities, such as those in Petah-Tikva, Bnei-Brak and Tel-Aviv. We have issued many reports and position papers, met with different policy makers, made public announcements to the media, and participated in different parliamentary committees and boards.

Moving into the year 2022, we find ourselves greatly concerned with the worsening situation in the Ukraine and with the new developing refugee crisis. According to U.N. estimations, more than two million Ukrainian refugees have already fled to neighboring countries – most of whom are women and children.

Naturally, we cannot stay indifferent to the ongoing crisis. The new situation demands more knowledge and a constant adaptation to new ways of assisting and supporting those refugees arriving in Israel. We are also required to keep supporting those refugees who are already living in Israel among us, some of them for more than a decade, and who are still deprived of basic social and financial rights.

At the end of one year, rich with activities, and at the beginning of another, we here at ASSAF keep striving for the betterment and protection of the asylum seekers community in Israel. We demand of the Israeli government to create and consolidate a support network, which would allow this community to live in safety and with dignity in this country, and which would ensure an effective and fair consideration of their asylum applications.

**Tali Eherenthal, MSW**  
Executive Director of ASSAF  
March 2022

## ASSAF A Year in Between the Pandemic and the New Normal

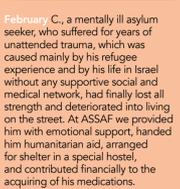
ACTIVITY REPORT 2021



**January** During the COVID crisis, our Youth Club's staff found creative ways to keep in touch with the youth, providing them a supportive educational framework. This framework included individual support, but also group activities: such as watching movies together via Zoom, participating in award-winning quizzes, playing entertaining games (such as "The Cash Cab"), and receiving a special "WOLF-like" delivery from the staff.

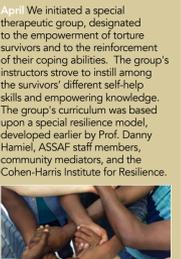
**January** On International Holocaust Remembrance Day we organized a special evening, in cooperation with the "Zikaron BaSaiam" organization, during which we have displayed varied perspectives of the refugee experience. Thus, one of our staff members talked about her grandmother's Holocaust story; another staff member, one of Eritrean origin, related to the crowd his refugee story, and another staff member, one who was born in Germany, told us about her childhood experiences in the years following the war.

**לעולם לא עוד?**  
מפגש על שואה ופליטים  
27.1 יום רביעי  
19:00 שעון ישראל 2021



**February C.**, a mentally ill asylum seeker, who suffered for years of unattended trauma, which was caused mainly by his refugee experience and by his life in Israel without any supportive social and medical network, had finally lost all strength and deteriorated into living on the street. At ASSAF we provided him with emotional support, handed him humanitarian aid, arranged for shelter in a special hostel, and contributed financially to the acquiring of his medications.

**February B.**, a single-mother of three, and herself a torture-survivor of the Sinai camps, has reached out to us for assistance, when she and one of her sons began suffering from medical complications, which required emergency care. We provided them with emotional support, arranged medical treatment for her and the child, assisted her with acquiring food and paying the rent, and worked to ensure that the family would receive further assistance from its municipal welfare bureau.



**March** We provided a specialized training session for 85 social workers throughout Israel stationed at various national Domestic Violence Prevention Centers. As part of the training, ASSAF staff members, along with an activist belonging to the asylum seekers community, presented to the social workers the community's special needs and the appropriate psychosocial treatment required – all this in order to make the centers more culturally sound and accessible for asylum seekers and refugees.

**March** In collaboration with other organizations, we wrote and published a special report, designated for the local authorities, and which specifies the preferred methods for treating the asylum seekers community. We are aware of the great influence that local authorities have on this community, and which therefore we aspire to compel them to create a municipal policy of inclusion, which would successfully integrate the community and its children among the other residents of the neighborhoods.

**מבקשי מקלט מלגות ביטחון**  
לרשויות המקומיות



**April** We put together a special group consisting mainly of asylum seekers and municipal social workers. The group was led by three students in the field of Social Work, who were specially trained at our organization. The group's members were appointed to deal with the issue of stress and anxiety among asylum seekers, while their main mission was to make all information on subject more accessible, and to try and abolish any taboo or prejudice existing among the community's members, concerning mental illnesses.

**April** We initiated a special therapeutic group, designated to the empowerment of torture survivors and to the reinforcement of their coping abilities. The group's instructors strove to instill among the survivors' different self-help skills and empowering knowledge. The group's curriculum was based upon a special resilience model, developed earlier by Prof. Danny Hamiel, ASSAF staff members, community mediators, and the Cohen-Harris Institute for Resilience.



**May** During the 2021 "Guardian of the Walls" conflict, our psychosocial team was active in instructing the community how to carry on in times of emergency. Our organization distributed food stamps to the more vulnerable members of the community, and provided them with emotional support and tools for dealing with anxiety and stress. It is important to note that for many of the members of the community the sounds of sirens and explosions triggered old traumas from their refugee experiences.

**May G.**, an elderly asylum seeker from Eritrea, reached out to us for assistance, after being injured in an accident in Israel, which prevented him from working again. Our organization provided him with emotional support, humanitarian help and a few solutions for the long term. We also applied, along with our partners at HIAS, a request to provide G. with a temporary resident status (Visa category A5). Following a long and complicated procedure – the request was finally approved.



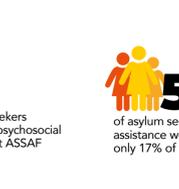
**June** During the first year of the COVID crisis, our organization operated on the front lines of the pandemic, assisting the asylum seekers community, and working to change the national policy concerning its members. Enhancing the staff's resilience, and trying to avoid emotional fatigue and secondary trauma, our organization took part in a special course, provided by "The Mindfulness Center", that was aimed at strengthening their ability in dealing with stress and crisis situations.

**July** During the summer, our Youth Club operated the annual Summer Camp, which is unanimously dubbed the highlight of the year by the Club's participants! The COVID crisis gravely affected asylum seekers youth, worsening their feelings of uncertainty, distress and loneliness – and that is why it was so important, this year in particular, for the Summer Camp to take place. During this time, the youth enjoyed special activities, such as sailing in kayaks, enjoying a visit to an entertainment park, going to the museum, the cinema and many more activities.



**August** Alongside many of our partners – and with the help of hundreds of parents, community members and Israelis alike – ASSAF petitioned the Israeli court to abolish segregation policies, which were carried out in the educational system of Tel Aviv. ASSAF also demanded from municipal authorities to integrate asylum seekers' children in educational institutions, where other Israeli children learn.

**September** For the first time in Israel – a Peer Rehabilitation course launched in ASSAF, in cooperation with the organization "Yozaia Derech Halev". Intended to help asylum seekers, survivors of torture, human trafficking and trauma. During the course, asylum seekers who have undergone their own rehabilitation journey were trained to become emotional supporters of their community, guided how to try and abolish stigmas concerning mental illnesses and mental recovery.



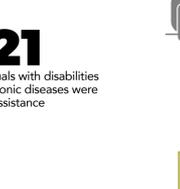
**October** ASSAF published a special report named "Staring into the Abyss", which described Israel's first year of the COVID crisis from the perspective of the asylum seekers community. As an advocacy and policy change tool, the report elaborated on the financial, physical and mental health impacts of the ongoing pandemic, and proposed essential steps required to alleviate the community's harsh situation.

**October** Our lobbyist, representing the "Asylum Seekers Organizations Forum", participated in different parliamentary committees and boards. The Constitution, Law and Justice Committee, for example, dealt with the law intended to reduce the use of cash money – a law which creates further complications for disadvantaged communities. Our disadvantaged committee the members of the committee the grave implications of the law on the asylum seekers community, who are deprived of access to any adequate banking services.



**November** For the first time at ASSAF, we launch a unique open-door group for art therapy. This safe space is designed to provide the asylum seekers, who are suffering from various mental health challenges, the means to express themselves through art and creative group work. The space is operated by an art therapist and serves as an island of peace and solace for the participants.

**November** With the collaboration of Physicians for Human Rights in Israel, we successfully opened a therapy group for asylum seekers women, who were suffering from psychosomatic pains, due to their traumatic refugee experiences. It was quite evident, that as the meetings progressed, the symptoms suffered by the women waned and decreased. The group was also an affective source for mutual female empowerment, bonding, and support.



**December** We launched a new program called "Come As You Are" – designed for female teenagers from the community, who gathered for an evening at the youth club. The program was created out of a special need to assist these young girls, and to create for them a separated space for girls, where they could engage in a safe, honest and empowering discourse, while providing them with a non-formal support network. All the contents in the program are passed through open discussions and are led by professional psycho-educational guidance.

**December** We launched a new therapeutic support program for elderly men. In the Eritrean culture, men who are over fifty are considered as elderly, and are usually treated with respect and admiration. Unfortunately, here in Israel these men suffer from loneliness and exclusion. The aim of this group was to create a support network between its members, to reduce their loneliness and to provide them with tools for coping with their daily reality, and with the traumas of their past.



**2021 in Numbers:**

**2,278** asylum seekers received psychosocial support at ASSAF

**54%** of asylum seekers who reached out for our assistance were women (while they constitute only 17% of all the asylum seekers population)

**192** survivors of torture in the Sinai

**248** individuals with medical needs were given assistance

**221** individuals with disabilities and chronic diseases were given assistance

**29** homeless individuals and people without a permanent housing

**41** survivors of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), who were offended in Israel

**7** facilitated therapeutic support groups for **666** individuals

**165** open-reception hours for the community were held

**255** humanitarian aid packages for newborns

**109,408** LS worth of dry food

**327,572** ILS worth of direct financial assistance

**38,400** ILS worth of supermarket food vouchers

**436,981** ILS worth of humanitarian aid

**775** advocacy activities aimed at favorable policy change

**779** letters and petitions for the advancement of the community's cause

**2,280** individual meetings with members of the community

**2,537** phone calls with members of the community

**78** youths attended the Youth Club

**473** people took part in lectures designed to raise awareness for our cause

**90** volunteers devoted **7,341** hours to helping asylum seekers

**5** legal petition

**24** media publications

**17** position papers and reports

**60** meetings and activities with different policymakers

**17,591** people engaged with our website (in English and Hebrew)

**17,591** people engaged with our website (in English and Hebrew)

**15,487** people follow us on Facebook (in Hebrew)

**8** videos with information for the refugee

**53,300** minutes of our videos were viewed through **50,800** unique views



### Meet the Team

- Tali Eherenthal**, MSW, Executive Director of ASSAF
- Adi Drori-Avraham**, Head of Public Advocacy
- Miriam Meyer, MSW/ Sari Urim**, MSW, Psychosocial Department Director
- Emma Eytan**, Resource Development Director
- Daniela Fields**, Volunteer Manager
- Orly Levinson-Sela**, Lawyer, Public Advocacy Director
- Dror Sadot/ Dr. Shani Bar-Tuvia**, Lobbyist
- Inbal Ben-Yehuda/ Tomer Shore**, New-Media Coordinator
- Tali Almi/ Tali Harari**, Community Engagement and Resource Development Manager
- Michal Shechter**, Social Worker, Coordinator of Support Program for Torture Survivors
- Avigail Pinto**, Social Worker, Coordinator of Support Program for Vulnerable Refugees
- Marina Shaarbani**, Psychologist, Coordinator of Support Project for People with Disabilities
- Adi Shitrit/ Nitsan Feldstein**, Social worker, Youth Manager
- Eli Amon**, Youth Club Coordinator and Office Maintenance
- Yael Federman**, Co-director of Advocacy and Support Center – Follow Up
- Solomon Gebreyohanes**, Co-director of Advocacy and Support Center, Translator and Community Mediator

- Eden Tesfamariam**, Translator and Community Mediator
- Aster Hulemariam**, Translator and Community Mediator
- Hailu Hailemariam**, Translator and Community Mediator
- Hewan Sium**, Translator and Community Mediator
- Madhawi Pecki Usman**, Translator and Community Mediator
- Harawa Zarah/ Hila Douvdevani**, Office Manager
- Yael Keren**, Finance Manager
- Hila Greengras/ Nur Shdzick**, National Civil Service

**SERVICE VOLUNTEER**  
90 Volunteers

**BOARD MEMBERS**  
MSW Lea Miller, Chairman  
Adv. Lea Metzer-Forshtat  
Jordan Rosenberg  
Tali Kaminer  
Prof. Jerome Bourdon  
Adv. Orit Ronen  
Adv. Osnat Cohen Lipshitz  
Dr. Shani Bar-Tuvia (Until 13.7.2021)

**ASSAF wishes to express its appreciation to all its partners – organizations, foundations, and different private donors – for all their endeavors and support.**

The Blue Thread	Belsize Square Synagogue	Barnabas Fund	Arkin Family Foundation	Anat Harlap
New Israel Fund (NIF)	International Rehabilitation Council for Torture Victims	Forfeiture Fund, Israel Ministry of Justice	Dutch Jewish Humanitarian Fund (JHF)	Ildo Kook, In Memory Of Daphna Loz, Z"l
Schusterman Foundation Israel (SFI)	Sarn & Bella Seibba Charitable Trust	Rayne Foundation	Protestantse Kerk	Porticus-Stiftung Auxilium
United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in Israel (UNHCR)	The Canadian Embassy	Tel Aviv-Jaffa Municipality		

Signing Anew

And additional private and corporate donors

### Donate:

ASSAF is a nonprofit organization, supported by generous donations from other organizations, foundations, and private donors. We invite you to take part in our effort, donate ASSAF and support the refugees and asylum seekers community in Israel.

**Donate**

**Volunteer**

**Our Website**



ASSAF holds a "Midot" Seal of Effectiveness



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