

Food insecurity among refugees and asylum seekers

Position paper

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"The communities of the asylum seekers and statusless persons suffer from a lack of solutions and rights, and most of their members live in poverty; and due to the Corona epidemic, most of the households in this population are left without income and most of them live in moderate or severe food insecurity." (From a Brookdale Institute report, March 2022)

"Since the outbreak of the war, there has been an increase of more than 150% in the number of people applying to the organization for humanitarian aid - basic food, baby food and primary products. The longer the crisis lasts, the greater will be the deterioration of their economic situation. The food insecurity, which is already high among these communities, will increase even more, and so will the shortage of primary products, including diapers and baby formulas. More and more people will be under the threat of being evicted from their homes due to the inability to pay rent." (Tali Ehrenthal, CEO ASSAF-Aid Organization for Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Israel, January 2024)

Approximately 25,000 asylum seekers from Africa live in Israel, the vast majority from Eritrea and Sudan. The asylum seekers from Eritrea and Sudan have been living in Israel legally for about 15 years under a government policy of group protection against deportation to their countries of origin. However, they live in Israel without a regulated status and without a health and social safety net, including health insurance, social security benefits and most welfare services. Many years of living without an envelope of socioeconomic rights have led to the deterioration of the economic and health conditions of many of the asylum seekers, and to increased vulnerability of many of them to poverty, food insecurity, exploitation and trafficking.

Because the asylum seekers are not entitled to social security benefits (aside from a few exceptions concerning their rights as workers), there is also no government mapping of the level of poverty and food insecurity among this population, and the information regarding those issues is based mainly on the accumulated experience of the civil society organizations that assist them.¹ It should be noted that because of the rental practices used among apartment owners who rent to the community, many of the asylum seekers are not

¹ Brookdale Institute (Sharvit, Brendel), "Food insecurity in Israel - characteristics, solutions and challenges : (2022) "The conventional surveys for measuring food security (Israeli National Insurance Institute surveys, Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics and "Latat" NGO) do not deal with rates of food insecurity among this group in the population (18) [Hebrew]

registered with the local authority as "tenants" of the apartment they rent, and therefore are not "recognized" at all for the purpose of receiving property tax discounts based on income.

According to a survey conducted by the Nutrition Division of the Ministry of Health in collaboration with two Tel-Aviv municipality programs ("Aid for asylum seekers and work immigrants" and "Beteiavon [Bon ap-pé-tit]") between May and December 2020 in the community statusless persons in the city, **85% of them suffered from food insecurity during this period of the Corona crisis** - 32% from moderate food insecurity and about 54% from severe food insecurity (according to Ministry of Health criteria). **The war that broke out on October 7 brought further deterioration of their economic situation - asylum seekers who are residents of conflict-area settlements did not receive any financial assistance, including even those of them who live in Sderot and who evacuated under government order. Moreover, many of the asylum seekers lost their jobs, either because the employer closed the business because of the war or because they were put on sick leave or fired as a result of the situation. For many of them, their salaries for the months of October, November and December were either not paid at all or were greatly reduced, and in the absence of entitlement to social and health services and benefits, first and foremost, the State Social Security, State Health Insurance and most welfare services, the immediate meaning of the war for many of them was a "free fall" into severe food insecurity.**

The children of asylum seekers from Africa number approximately 8,200, most of whom were born in Israel. The children grow up on the margins of Israeli society: in a hostile and racist environment, in poverty, food insecurity and exclusion. **Questionnaires distributed among parents of asylum seekers indicate that about 40 - 50% of the children do not receive a meal at school or kindergarten. Even though it is not a representative sample, the figure raises serious concern. Bearing in mind that the country does not have data on the rate of food insecurity among the asylum seeker population, and bearing in mind that the hard data from the survey was collected during the Corona period, there is a serious concern that thousands of children experience food insecurity and are not provided with solutions by way of the educational system.**²

In the last two years, another group of refugees arrived in Israel - those who fled the bloody war in Ukraine. Those who arrived in Israel since February 24, 2022 and are not entitled to apply for Israeli citizenship - a group consisting mostly of women and approximately 3,000 children - receive visas that are short-lived, some of them do not receive any opportunity to

² ASSAF - Aid Organization for Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Israel, ["Closing a Door on You" – Situation report regarding the children of refugees and asylum seekers in Israel \(10/2023\) \[Heb\]](#)

work, and the health services they receive include access to primary health services only within the framework of "Terem" clinics (except for those aged 60 and over). As a result of the passage of time, dwindling savings, limited aid, and severe limitations on their employment options, the situation of the citizens of Ukraine who fled the war is deteriorating, and we are receiving reports of increasing economic distress, food insecurity and the lack of ability to finance private health insurance.

The State of Israel must act immediately:

- **To locate and register all statusless foreigners in Israel, including asylum seekers and their children, who suffer from food insecurity.**
- **To include all those who are experiencing food insecurity among this population in every project and program aimed at ensuring the nutrition of adults, babies, children, teenagers, and pregnant women.**

Hunger does not distinguish between people according to their type of visa, nationality, religion, or origin. A hungry person is a hungry person.

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