

2024 ANNUAL TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS (TIP) REPORT -

Input from ASSAF - Aid Organization for Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Israel
(hereinafter - ASSAF) covering January 1, 2023 to March 31, 2024

THE MAIN TARGET POPULATIONS AIDED BY ASSAF - GENERAL

African refugees and asylum seekers - According to the Population and Immigration Authority (PIA), as of September 30, 2023 there were 23,249 asylum seekers (referred to as "infiltrators" in Israeli law) in the State of Israel, including 17,511 Eritrean nationals and 3,248 Sudanese nationals, as well as other African nationals.¹ Both groups of asylum seekers - Eritrean and Sudanese - have been residing in Israel for 10 to 16 years under temporary group protection from deportation.²

Ukrainian refugees and asylum seekers - Since the outbreak of the war in Ukraine (February 24, 2022), approximately 45,000 Ukrainian nationals (who are not entitled to Israeli citizenship under the Law of Return) have arrived in Israel. Since then, most of them have left Israel, leaving an estimated total of about 14,000 Ukrainian nationals, mostly women and a few thousand children. In addition, about 15,000-20,000 Ukrainian nationals resided in Israel prior to the war as migrant workers, asylum seekers or undocumented migrants. Those who entered after February 24, 2022 received B2 (Tourist) visas. Those who entered before, did not receive new visas - either they remained with their existing visas or without visas. All are entitled to group protection from deportation to Ukraine. According to data from the Israel Population and Immigration Authority, nearly 4,000 Ukrainian citizens have left Israel since October 7, 2023.

For convenience's sake, the last chapter of the report will be dedicated to the information collected about Ukrainian refugees whereas the rest of the report will mostly refer to asylum seekers from Africa.

NOTABLE DEVELOPMENT REGARDING FIGHT IN TIP - GENERAL

On September 18, 2022 the government decided on a multi-year implementation plan of "The national plan to combat human trafficking for the years 2022 – 2026." The decision includes measures to improve the fight against trafficking and the recognition and protection mechanisms for trafficking survivors. One notable measure is the transfer of authority to recognize trafficking survivors from the police to the inter-ministerial coordinator for

¹ Population and Immigration Authority, [Foreigners in Israel - qtr. 3/2023](#) (October 2023) (Hebrew)

² It should be noted that while we use the term 'asylum seeker' in the report for convenience, the majority of asylum seekers from Sudan and Eritrea in Israel are refugees. First, the interpretation of the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees holds that a person becomes a refugee when she has to flee her country under circumstances that fall under the definitions of the convention. More so, while all asylum seekers from Eritrea Sudan are protected by non-refoulement, Israel has not recognized (almost) any of them as refugees due to bureaucratic and substantive barriers in the recognition system. In comparison to other western countries' refugee mechanisms, it is safe to say that the majority of asylum seekers from Sudan and Eritrea would have been recognized as refugees, had Israel completed the processing of their asylum applications.

combating trafficking in persons at the Ministry of Justice – MoJ (hereinafter - the MoJ's coordinator) who will act in consultation with an advisory committee that will be established and include representatives from the relevant government ministries, civil society organizations, as well as a representative who is herself a trafficking survivor. As per the decision, the MoJ's coordinator will have the authority to determine that there is prima facie evidence of the existence of human trafficking in a particular case and based on this determination - to approve rehabilitation services. According to the MoJ's 2022 annual report on combating trafficking in Israel, the transfer of the recognition authority from the police to MoJ's coordinator is officially subject to the publication of a procedure which will regulate the activities of the advisory committee. To the best of ASSAF's knowledge, the procedure has not yet been published but is due to be in the coming days (as of January 12, 2024).³

In spite of the fact that final authority of recognition has yet to be transferred to the MoJ's coordinator, the advisory committee has been convening all throughout the reporting period and discussed applications for recognition. An improvement has also been made in the immediate recognition procedure of TIP survivors arriving at Ben-Gurion airport and in the quick response mechanism to urgent cases in which the circumstances indicate prima facie evidence. In the latter cases, an urgent decision to protect the survivor is made by MoJ's coordinator in consultation with the head of the Human Trafficking Squad in the Israel Police, and is granted as a temporary relief until a final decision is made. The temporary recognition is given for the purpose of granting initial protective measures such as entry to shelter and receiving urgent medical treatment.

Despite the above-mentioned improvement, according to the MoJ's 2022 annual report, the number of trafficking survivors who received treatment and rehabilitation in shelters, in sheltered apartments (for survivors and their children) and in the day-rehabilitation center, decreased dramatically in 2022, at a rate of about 40% compared to the previous year.⁴ This may be related to the full capacity of the shelters and the fact that the only day center the State operates is located in Tel Aviv and is not accessible to trafficking survivors who do not live nearby.

For further details on the difficulties in Israel's recognition and protection mechanisms see below.

THE ONGOING EXPERIENCE OF ASSAF DURING THE REPORTING PERIOD HAS RAISED THE FOLLOWING KEY OBSERVATIONS:

- 1. The October 7 war in Israel put asylum seekers in immediate risk of a humanitarian crisis increasing the risk of exploitation, trafficking and survival prostitution** - The war that broke out in Israel on October 7, 2023 proved once again that in times of crisis and in the absence of a basic economic rights envelope, asylum seekers find themselves in a helpless situation, in an immediate humanitarian crisis,

³ The Coordination unit of the Fight against Trafficking of Human Beings at the MoJ, [Annual report for 2022](#) (Heb.)

⁴ See footnote 3 above.

and with an immediate increase in the risk of exploitation, trafficking and deterioration into survival prostitution.

The horrific crimes committed by Hamas on Saturday, October 7th, 2023, spared no one, and among the asylum-seeking communities there were also casualties. Most asylum seekers in Israel live in extremely poor conditions and do not have access to bomb shelters or to reinforced safety rooms ("Mamad"). Many point out that no shelters are available close enough to their places of residence so as to be relevant.

Furthermore, asylum seekers who lived in war zones had extremely limited options of evacuation. Those who were forced to leave their homes in the south did not receive any financial assistance, similar to the assistance that was (and still is) given to Israeli citizens in the same situation, and found themselves without work, without a roof over their heads and without any financial assistance from the State.

Not only in Israel's south, many asylum seekers have lost their jobs due to the immediate slowdown in the economy following the outbreak of the war. Since they are not eligible for Social Security allowances and benefits (including unemployment benefits and income support allowances), nor for State health insurance and most other social services, they do not have an institutional safety net to fall back on, and the communities' distress immediately increased. Since the outbreak of the war, ASSAF has increased humanitarian and psychosocial support and has witnessed a dramatic increase of 153% in the number of applicants to the organization (compared to the corresponding period of the previous year). There has also been a 70% increase in applications to ASSAF for aid from Ukrainian refugees. The main needs of the asylum seekers applying to ASSAF since the outbreak of the war are food aid, including baby formula and primary products, and financial aid due to the fear of eviction from home as a result of the inability to pay rent.

Saturday (October 7, 2023) was one of the most frightening and traumatic days in Israel's history. For asylum seekers, who survived wars, genocide, trafficking and brutal torture, the attack by Hamas meant reliving the trauma. Even in regular times asylum seekers in Israel have limited access to mental health services. As of October 7, that access has become even more restricted.

- 2. The government's actions to make basic structural changes in the existing constitutional structure of Israel's democracy pose an imminent threat to asylum seekers** - Since its inauguration, on December 29, 2022, Netanyahu's government has been working to make basic structural changes in the existing constitutional structure of the democratic nature of Israel. According to the coalition agreements and the statements of the ministers and members of the coalition parties in the media, some of the goals that the current government is pursuing are directly aimed at the refugee and asylum-seeking populations in Israel. The coalition agreements include three such goals, the main one being: the passage and implementation of the "Basic Law: Immigration". In the previous Knesset, such a proposal was already submitted (MK Rothman) and it included many offensive measures, including (1) unlimited denial of status in Israel for people who entered the country undocumented, including for protection and asylum; (2) the denial of the right

of an immigrant who was rejected (including refugees) to apply to Israeli courts; (3) the possibility of indefinite imprisonment for immigrants (including refugees); (4) the possibility of restrictions on movement; the possibility of occupational restrictions; and the possibility of holding immigrants' money (including refugees) "in trust" until they leave the country. The last items on the list above have already been partially rejected by the High Court, and clearly their inclusion in the proposed bill was intended to "override" the ruling of the Supreme Court.

3. Although the government has not (yet) succeeded in promoting the Basic Law: Immigration, it clarifies the current government's policy regarding refugees and asylum seekers, as is manifested in its following actions throughout the reporting period:

- a. Removal of the group protection from deportation of Ethiopian citizens, including from the Tigray region - On January 8, 2024, the Minister of the Interior decided to remove the group protection that was given to Ethiopian citizens, including Ethiopian citizens from the Tigray region. According to the Ministry of the Interior's (hereinafter: Mol) announcement, Ethiopian citizens have been given 30 days to leave Israel, after which the Population and Immigration Authority (PIBA) will begin enforcement actions to deport them. This move is another example of the consequences of the lack of a functioning asylum system in Israel: asylum seekers are forced to live for years under temporary protection from deportation with no chance of being recognized as refugees, and under the constant threat of a sudden removal of the protection without sufficient advance warning.
- b. The Mol regulation restricting employment of asylum seekers in the 17 main cities in which they live has not been annulled, although its implementation was postponed to June 30, 2024 - The regulation which was set by the former Minister of the Interior on June 30, 2022, was contested in court by NGOs, including ASSAF, and its implementation was delayed by the court until a hearing is held. On January 9, 2024 the Mol announced that in light of the ongoing war the implementation of the regulation will be postponed for 6 months, until June 30, 2024. If the new regulation comes into effect in July, it is expected to lead to further material deterioration of the basic living conditions of asylum seekers. The "strongest" of them, including the few who managed to reach more lucrative and stable jobs, will lose their livelihood and the most vulnerable, among them survivors of trafficking and torture, many of whom cannot work in the four types of physical work allowed by the regulation, will suffer not only from unemployment but also from an increased risk of abusive employment, exploitation, and risk of trafficking and resort to survival sex.
- c. A government decision to legislate regulations regarding an insurance arrangement for the provision of health services for all groups who are under protection from deportation is a step in the right direction, but has yet to be implemented and will not apply to those who entered Israel after January 7, 2024 - On December 31, 2023, following 2 petitions by NGOs - one regarding

denial of health and welfare services and allowances to African asylum seekers over 60, and the other regarding the discontinuation of health services to Ukrainian refugees and asylum seekers - the Government decided that the Ministry of Health (hereinafter: MoH) has until March 31, 2024, to enact regulations regarding an insurance arrangement for the provision of health services for all groups who are under protection from deportation (and arrived in Israel before January 7, 2024 Inclusive). If and when such regulations are enacted, they may greatly contribute to the well-being and health of asylum seekers, although this will depend on the scope of the health services that will be provided by the regulation, the amount of the monthly insurance premium payment, and the establishment of a system of discounts and exemptions from the payment of insurance premiums for the most vulnerable groups among asylum seekers, such as people with disabilities, TIP and torture survivors, single-parent women etc.

- d. Implementation of the limited mapping project regarding aid to torture survivors from the Sinai peninsula is still only partial - as mentioned in ASSAF's previous reports this project was initiated by the MoJ 6 years ago, in January 2018, but only at the beginning of 2022 were the budgets allocated to the MoH and to the Ministry of Welfare and Social Affairs (hereinafter: MoWSA) for providing limited rehabilitation services to 300 torture survivors in the most acute situation. A year and a half later, in May 2023, the MoH opened a clinic at Tel-Aviv's Ichilov Medical Center aimed at providing psychiatric services to recognized torture survivors ("Derech" clinic). Since then, ASSAF and partner organizations have been working vigorously to refer torture survivors to recognition by the MoJ and to treatment at the clinic, but after years without any governmental treatment and support, many torture survivors express despair of Israel and lack of trust in the clinic's ability to help them. Furthermore, the clinic is located in Tel-Aviv and is therefore less accessible to survivors who live in other cities. To the best of ASSAF's knowledge, in the six months of its activity, the clinic received a few dozen applicants.

As to the provision of rehabilitation services by the MoWSA (for which about 2 million NIS were allocated to the ministry), as of January 18, 2024 the provision of such services has not yet materialized.

- e. Implementation of a program for aid to statusless individuals (including asylum seekers) engaged in survival sex has yet to be implemented, leaving asylum seekers without any governmental rehabilitation services - as mentioned in ASSAF's previous report, on December 14, 2021, more than 2 years ago, the MoJ announced that the inter-ministerial team on the issue of prostitution allocated a specific budget to provide services to statusless women engaged in survival sex (including women asylum seekers) in answer to an observed increase in their numbers. Following this, a tender was published for the provision of rehabilitation services for statusless women in prostitution, but no service provider submitted a bid. As of January 18, 2024 the program has not yet materialized.

It is worth noting that in times of economic crisis, such as the one that followed the Covid lockdowns or the one that began following the outbreak of the October War, ASSAF's team notices an increase in the number of asylum-seeker women turning to the organization's aid, whom the team suspects are involved in survival prostitution.

It is also important to emphasize that there is great difficulty in collecting reliable data on the phenomenon and in fully mapping it due to the exclusion of the population from governmental services, as well as due to the accompanying stigmas. Some of the women find it difficult to share their plight as those engaged in survival prostitution even with the social worker who cares for them. There are four main characteristics of the ways in which women asylum seekers engage in survival prostitution (especially in regard to Eritrean asylum seekers):

- i. "Prostitution for housing": in recent years, and especially following the Covid crisis, we have seen an increase in the number of vulnerable women, especially single-parent women, who, in order to survive, are forced to find a place to live in a shared apartment with several male partners in exchange for sexual services and household chores (cooking, cleaning, laundry, etc.). Other single women are forced to provide sexual services to the landlord as a substitute for rent they cannot pay.
- ii. Prostitution within the "hamaras": the "hamaras" are pubs that serve as a meeting place, principally for Eritrean, Sudanese and Ethiopian men. Most of the women employed there as hostesses and waitresses are refugees from Eritrea. Many of them are single parents. Some of them provide prostitution services to men who are referred to them by the "hamara" manager in discreet apartments nearby, in hotels or in their homes. All the women working in the "hamaras" suffer from stigma among the community.
- iii. Prostitution from the residential apartment: We know of women who work in prostitution from their homes, many times, in order to avoid the stigma associated with prostitution in "hamaras" and other public places.
- iv. Prostitution in discreet apartments controlled by Israeli pimps: We know of a small number of asylum-seeker women from Africa who engage in prostitution in this way. It can be assumed that Ukrainian citizens who have been trafficked, held in slavery conditions or who engage in survival prostitution in Israel also fall into this category.

DIFFICULTIES IN ACCESS OF TORTURE SURVIVORS TO TIP'S IDENTIFICATION AND RECOGNITION PROCESS -

The burden of identifying potential victims of trafficking among asylum seekers still falls mainly on NGOs, although, today, referrals for recognition are not limited to NGOs and can be initiated by any authority or organization which aids potential TIP survivors.

NGOs are often forced to take on the government's work, including research, collecting documents from various government agencies, and collecting testimonies from eye-witnesses in order to prepare the cases for submission. Obtaining the necessary documentation (medical records, detention protocols etc.) takes long periods of time. Survivors often need to be interviewed more than once in order to clarify inaccuracies in dates or gaps in memory, as such inaccuracies and gaps can be grounds for rejection. Unfortunately, many survivors often do not remember exact details and dates due to untreated post-trauma and the lengthy time period that has passed since they were trafficked.

In addition, many times ASSAF's team reluctantly decides not to submit victims for recognition as the authorities do not always consider the interviews made by NGOs and their psychological assessments as sufficient proof.

The authorities' unreasonable expectation that survivors have a flawless memory of the dates and details, despite the lengthy periods that have passed since they were held in the Sinai Peninsula, is another significant reason for failed applications. NGOs estimate that only 10% of the Sinai torture survivors have been recognized as TIP survivors.

Therefore, the government's overly strict evidentiary standard for granting official victim status and the length of the recognition process currently deter submission of almost all cases of trafficking among Eritrean and Sudanese torture survivors for fear that the application process would re-traumatize them without resulting in recognition.⁵

It should be noted that although only prima facie evidence of trafficking is required as a precondition for providing protection and rehabilitation services, the criteria for deciding the existence of prima facie evidence have, to the best of our knowledge, not yet been fully clarified, which increases the risk of inconsistency of decisions.

LACK OF GENUINE REDRESS AND SERVICES FOR RECOGNIZED SURVIVORS -

Survivors of TIP, who have been recognized as such by Israel, are entitled to one year of rehabilitative services including shelter, healthcare and a B1 work visa. On March 30, 2023, MoWSA published a tender regarding the operation of shelters for survivors of trafficking. The terms of the tender worsened the existing situation for recognized trafficking survivors, by shortening the length of stay in the shelter to six months without providing complementary rehabilitation services in the community for the entire year of rehabilitation. In response to an NGOs urgent referral to MoWSA regarding the terms of the tender (April 27, 2023), MoWSA replied (May 16, 2023) that the government adopted a new model for the treatment and protection of survivors of trafficking. The model stipulates that after an initial reception and diagnosis period in the shelter, during which intervention will also be made in times of crisis, a rehabilitation plan will be built in the community and the survivors will continue to receive the services from the community. In accordance, in the new tender, an initial six

⁵ 2023 Trafficking in Persons Report, State Department,
<https://www.state.gov/reports/2023-trafficking-in-persons-report/israel/>

month time period of diagnosis and evaluation in the shelter was determined, after which the TIP survivors will leave the shelter and will continue to receive the therapeutic treatment they need within the framework of the rehabilitation day-center which is operating in Tel-Aviv (The Mesila day-center for TIP survivors). MoWSA's reply added that the tender makes it possible to extend the duration of the stay in the shelter by another six months. The Ministry's reply emphasized that this does not harm or shorten the year of rehabilitation to which the survivors are entitled. Moreover, as per the reply, the services provided to them in the community will be significantly expanded in terms of manpower, the set of services, and the scope of activity, including medical/psychiatric services, procuring rights, family intervention, rehabilitation, and occupational guidance and community social activity in order to respond to all trafficking survivors - those who have left the shelter, as well as those who would prefer not to enter the shelter in the first place.

However, to the best of ASSAF's knowledge, as of January 18, 2024, the services at the rehabilitation day-center in Tel-Aviv have not yet been expanded as described in MoWSA's reply.

Therefore, many TIP survivors who are asylum seekers are not receiving appropriate rehabilitation services for three main reasons: either because they have been living in Israel for many years prior to their recognition and are reluctant or unable to leave their families behind and enter a shelter; because they live far from Tel Aviv and cannot access the day-center; or because the services that are currently provided at the day-center do not meet their needs.

For these reasons, in practice, many TIP survivors, particularly those who live far from Tel Aviv, get little or no services as a result of their recognition, even during the first year of rehabilitation. As mentioned above, the health insurance scheme for "foreigners under protection from deportation" has not yet materialized and even if it does - it is unknown what the monthly payments will be and whether the most vulnerable asylum seekers, including TIP and torture survivors, will be able to pay the monthly payments and benefit from said scheme.

It should be noted that while survivors of TIP who are not asylum seekers have the option to return to their home countries after the year of rehabilitation, survivors who are asylum seekers and who are under Israel's non-deportation policy remain in Israel and lose their B1 work visa and access to rehabilitative care. Those who do not live in the center of Israel find it hard to get services from the Day Center that caters for TIP survivors after their year of rehabilitation. Many suffer deterioration of their condition as a result.

Azev (alias) is a 33-year-old asylum seeker from Eritrea. While she was with a one-year-old baby, her husband was imprisoned. About two years after his incarceration, rumors came about his escape from prison, Azev tried to locate him and left her daughter, who was 3 years old at the time, with her family. She was initially captured by the Eritrean police near the border with Sudan and was imprisoned for about two months until her family paid for her release on bail. A few months after her release, understanding she isn't safe, Azev crossed

the border into Sudan with the help of a smuggler who brought her to a refugee camp. After a stay of about a month in the same camp, she and two other women who went out for a walk in the area were abducted by traffickers. The kidnappers took them to an intermediate station in Sudan, where they stayed for several weeks, at which time they were loaded onto vehicles and driven to Sinai. In Sinai, Azev was separated from her friends, whom she never saw again, and was imprisoned in solitary confinement for about three months. During this period, groups of three to four men visited her every night, abused her and raped her in a systematic and continuous manner, including forcing her to cook for them afterwards. After those three months, Azev's family raised part of the money for her release, at which time she was transferred to a building along with the other captives and the systematic rape stopped, but she still suffered violence such as electric shocks and beatings with a hose on her feet.

Finally, after paying an additional sum, she was released with another prisoner, who died on the journey to Israel. Upon entering Israel, she was imprisoned in the "Saharonim" facility and did not say anything about what she went through for fear that her name would be tarnished in public. Her difficult situation led her to seek assistance from her flatmates, with one of whom she developed a relationship, started a family, and had children together.

The group rape, the continuous abuse, and the traumatic experiences that Azev experienced on her way to Israel have had severe mental and physical consequences on her life to this day, including nightmares and many medical problems from which she still suffers, some of which have necessitated her evacuation to the hospital.

Azev's partner had difficulty dealing with her trauma and the relationship became emotionally violent. Finally, Azev broke up with him, but due to her vulnerability, she is forced to rely on him financially and with regards to looking after the children while she is undergoing medical procedures. In many cases, Azev ends up having sex with him against her will out of a sense of obligation and dependence on his assistance. Furthermore, due to her vulnerable condition, Azev finds it difficult to hold on to a job. When her medical condition worsens, she loses her job and with it, the little medical coverage she has, and she accumulates many debts, which adds to her dependence on her ex-partner and prevents her from cutting him out of her life.

If Azev had access to public health services, social security allowances and benefits, and welfare services she would have a real opportunity for rehabilitation - medically, emotionally and financially. Without these necessary support systems, she finds herself engaged in survival sex with her abuser and with little possibility of rehabilitation.

Tirhas (alias), is a 41 years old asylum seeker from Eritrea. Fearing imprisonment in Eritrea, Tirhas and her friend paid smugglers to help them cross from Eritrea to Sudan. The smugglers imprisoned them for 4 days during which Tirhas and her friend were repeatedly sexually abused, raped, and sodomized. After 4 days they were released and found their way to a UN camp and from there to a refugee camp in Sudan where they stayed for about

two months. During their stay at the refugee camp Tirhas suffered severe pain due to the abuse that was inflicted upon her, but did not receive medical treatment. Finally, Tirhas left the refugee camp and tried again to continue her flight journey with the aid of another smuggler. However, this smuggler drugged and raped her and then sold her to traffickers who imprisoned her for two weeks of sexual abuse and daily rape until her release in the Sinai desert without food or water.

When Tirhas arrived in Israel, her medical condition deteriorated, she fell ill with malaria, underwent gallbladder surgery (cholecystectomy) and to this day suffers from severe mental and physical trauma, anxiety, and depression and has great difficulty maintaining social relationships or trusting people.

In her first years in Israel, Tirhas tried to earn a living by cleaning and preparing food, but deteriorated into survival prostitution as she was unable to hold on to a job due to her difficult condition. At that time, she met an Eritrean asylum seeker who became her partner and had two children with him, but once he learned about her history, he broke up with her, turned to alcohol and slandered her among the community, which increased her isolation and had a devastating effect on her ability to make a living by selling food.

The time she was engaged in survival prostitution and then the disgraceful treatment from the father of her children led to re-traumatization, which added to Tirhas' difficulties which now also include extreme concentration difficulties and memory problems, so that she is in need of a holistic rehabilitation program that she does not receive in Israel. Due to her fear, she hid her past for many years, and it is now very difficult to obtain supporting evidence linking her present state to her past, except for her very clear PTSD condition, so she also has great difficulties getting the services that she needs.

UKRAINIAN REFUGEES IN ISRAEL

Almost two years after the outbreak of the war in Ukraine, refugees from Ukraine in Israel find themselves, once again, at war. After fleeing war in their homeland, they now face another war in their place of refuge. Their already vulnerable situation has intensified and is only getting worse. Since October 7, their appeals to ASSAF for humanitarian aid have increased by about 70%. It should be remembered that most Ukrainian refugees who arrived in Israel since February 24, 2022, are women and their children.

1. Tourist visas: Ukrainian refugees have not received a "special visa" or "special status". They can only stay in Israel with short-term tourist visas, which are renewed periodically. On January 11, 2024, the Minister of the Interior announced that Ukrainians' tourist visas would be renewed until the end of the year, December 31, 2024. However, renewals of the visas are conducted only through a notice published on PIBA's website and Ukrainian refugees do not possess a valid physical document attesting to the legality of their stay. Over time, life as a "tourist" without a physical stay visa has become unbearably difficult. Without a proper visa, Ukrainian refugees have difficulty finding work and housing, their

access to banking services is limited, as is their access to public services. This adds to the already-heavy burden of trying to conduct their daily business and increases their risk of abusive employment and exploitation.

2. Employment: Instead of granting work permits to Ukrainian refugees so they can find legal employment, the government has announced a policy of “non-enforcement”. This means that the refugees have not been given work permits since arriving in Israel, but if they do work, no legal actions are being enforced against them or their employers. This is the same as the supposedly “temporary” policy enacted regarding the refugees from Africa, which was instated in January 2011, and is still in effect today. This ambiguous policy of non-enforcement increases the difficulty in finding a job and the risk of harmful employment and exploitation. **According to data collected by ASSAF, 39% of the Ukrainian refugees who have contacted the organization are unemployed, and 26.2% are working “illegally”.**

It should be noted that the Mol's regulation, mentioned above, restricting employment of asylum seekers in 17 main cities also applies to Ukrainian refugees, and although it is currently on hold - if it comes into effect in July 2024 it will further limit the employment options of the refugees and increase their exposure to abusive and exploitative employment.

3. Health: At the beginning of August 2023, the arrangement for providing healthcare services for Ukrainian refugees was unexpectedly terminated. This caused a sudden cessation of medical treatments, risking patients' lives. After a public struggle, pressure from civil society organizations and the Embassy of Ukraine, and the filing of a legal petition, the arrangement was extended until the end of 2023 and it was prolonged for another 3 months, until March 31, 2024, only after a second petition was filed, on December 31, 2023. It should be noted that the health services in question are provided only for people over the age of 60. Other Ukrainian refugees only have access to healthcare services at the Terem clinics, which provide basic emergency services, not complete and ongoing healthcare. In addition, Ukrainian citizens who entered Israel before February 24, 2022, and those who will enter after January 7, 2024, are not entitled to any medical services at all.
4. Housing shortage: When war broke out in the Ukraine, the refugees who came to Israel had to stay with Israeli residents. The state provided housing solutions only in extreme cases. Over time, many hosts could no longer offer the refugees a place to live, and the State stopped offering housing solutions, even in extreme cases. Many refugees had to look for places to rent. But rent in Israel is extremely high, and not all refugees can afford this economic burden. Many families of Ukraine refugees must pool their small incomes to rent apartments together and live in severely crowded conditions with their children.
5. Human trafficking and survival prostitution: At the end of 2022, The Tel Aviv Center for Ukrainian Refugees documented about 850 women who were engaged in survival prostitution. Not a single one of them agreed to enter the Center's program for protecting and rehabilitating survivors of human trafficking. The lack of valid physical work visas and

the reduced government assistance increase Ukrainian refugees' risk of exploitation, abusive employment, trafficking, and need to engage in survival prostitution.

6. Deterioration of mental health: For many refugees, who experienced and fled a war in their homeland, the attack by Hamas caused them to relive their traumas. With no access to mental health services, they are not receiving the mental health support they need in these difficult days.