

Breathless - Situation Report on Social Services for Vulnerable Asylum Seekers in Israel

Directors' abstract
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In the new report [Breathless - situation report on social services for vulnerable asylum seekers in Israel](#) ASSAF - Aid Organization for Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Israel presents the current policy regarding social welfare services for vulnerable asylum seekers residing in Israel. The report examines the gaps between the existing policy and the actual needs of vulnerable asylum seekers, and the inhibitions preventing full implementation of the above policy. The report also presents recommendations for amendments. This report is based on data collected during the daily psychosocial accompaniment provided by ASSAF for vulnerable asylum seekers and the constant policy advocacy work that the organization performs.

Approximately 30,000 adult asylum seekers are living in Israel at the moment. The majority of them come from Sudan or Eritrea. They live in Israel under temporary group protection, but the state is holding off thousands of pending asylum applications and the asylum seekers live in great uncertainty concerning their future. Asylum seekers in Israel have no formal status, and no social or medical safety net. Some groups are more vulnerable than others, in need of aid and support to survive: single mothers; women victims of domestic violence; families at risk; torture and human trafficking survivors; persons in prostitution and persons who are physically disabled and chronically or mentally ill. These groups need social welfare services to provide for themselves and put a roof over their heads. However, they receive no proper care to allow them to live a dignified, protected life. The Coronavirus crisis hit the most vulnerable asylum seekers the hardest, and their condition, grave as it was before, is now rapidly deteriorating.

After years of constant public activity performed by ASSAF and associate organizations, the Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs and Social Services has formulated a policy to assist only three groups of vulnerable asylum seekers: women victims of domestic violence, persons with disability and homeless persons. According to the ministry's policy, these groups will only be catered to by emergency out-of-home placements (shelters for women victims of violence and institutions for persons with disabilities and homeless persons), instead of community based solutions that could prevent escalation and allow these vulnerable people to maintain their home and community lives (for example, through domestic violence prevention centers and occupational rehabilitation programs).

Professionals, including those at the Ministry of Social Services, disagree with the existing policy, recommending that community based services must be accessible to vulnerable asylum seekers. Community based institutions can reduce the need for emergency solutions and lower state expenses, but most importantly, they are necessary to allow vulnerable asylum seekers to lead the most independent lives possible.

Moreover, even the social welfare services that must be provided for the above three groups according to the ministry's policy are only partially provided. Field work performed by ASSAF shows that there are major gaps between the policy presented by the Ministry of Social Services and its actual implementation: some of the members of above stated groups receive no placement in institutions; there are many cases when the suggested institution is not adequate to fill the specific needs of the person requiring aid; the allocated budget was only partially used and is now decreasing further; and the applications for placements are processed slowly, over the course of months, sometimes arriving at a dead end when institutions refuse to admit disabled or homeless asylum seekers as they have no health insurance.

Therefore, the aid currently provided for vulnerable asylum seekers by the state is not at all sufficient and is only granted in extreme cases, and not even in all of those. It only includes out-of-home placement solutions while asylum seekers need community based aid, which will be more effective and cost less. Most importantly, it is the help that most vulnerable asylum seekers really need. The majority of vulnerable asylum seekers remain helpless and their distress is not eased. They are denied the most basic right to dignity and are left to poverty, instability and anxiety with no basic livelihood security.

These are the recommendations made by ASSAF to change the situation:

1. The state must open the doors to social welfare services at local authorities and allow all vulnerable asylum seekers to apply for aid in the community.
2. At the very least, the state must ensure that all social services departments are available for the three groups of vulnerable asylum seekers that are already included in the Ministry of Social Services' policy - women victims of violence, homeless and disabled persons, and that the services available to them will include aid and support in the community, most importantly:
 - Occupational rehabilitation and day centers
 - Designated shelter for homeless asylum seekers
 - Centers for prevention of domestic violence
3. The state must arrange subsidized health insurance plans for adult asylum seekers, thus allowing them to receive the social welfare services that they are in need of, and first of all - the pending out-of-home placements.