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# Feinstein International Center

Strengthening the humanity and dignity of people in crisis through knowledge and practice



## Refugee Livelihoods in Urban Areas: Identifying Program Opportunities

*Case study Israel*



**Tufts**  
UNIVERSITY

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The ideas, opinions, and comments below are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent or reflect those of BPRM or SIDA.

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*Despite a growing body of research about the livelihood problems of refugees in urban areas in countries of first asylum, there is little evidence about which humanitarian programs work, what livelihoods initiatives refugees undertake themselves, and where opportunities for programming interventions lie. This study addresses this knowledge gap by analyzing the urban livelihoods context for refugees and asylum seekers, and identifying programming opportunities and examples of promising program initiatives. The study's key objective is to find ways to strengthen existing livelihoods and generate new ideas from related fields of inquiry, such as low-income urban development and youth employment, that could be adapted for refugees in countries of first asylum.*

*We selected three case studies – Cairo, Tel Aviv and Quito, Ecuador – because they represent contrasting refugee policy contexts and livelihoods experience, and offer lessons for other host settings. Each case study begins with a review of existing livelihood programs in the country. This includes a mapping of commercial, humanitarian and governmental organizations that provide programming, advocacy or other resources that support the livelihoods of refugees, migrants and low-income citizens. We then interviewed asylum seekers and key informants to deepen our understanding of the livelihoods context in each country. Our main program recommendations, based on all three cases, can be found [fic.tufts.edu](http://fic.tufts.edu).*

# Executive Summary

This report is the result of field research in Tel Aviv from March to July 2012. Israel has been a destination country for African asylum seekers and migrants since 2006, and in 2012 there were about 60,000 Africans in the country. Most are Eritrean and Sudanese but there are small numbers from other countries. In 2012, policy changes in Israel along with shifts in other regional migration routes (such as through Libya) resulted in fewer entrants to Israel. For our case study we interviewed 63 African asylum seekers, and a range of key informants from aid agencies, the government and the private sector. The first section of this report describes the 2012 policy changes, then we outline the migration routes to Israel, livelihoods, and plans for the future as reported by our respondents.

## *Key Findings:*

(1) **Migration to Israel:** Most asylum seekers came through the Sinai via Sudan, using

smugglers. Over the past few years, an increasing number have fallen prey to traffickers, often involving kidnapping and torture. Testimonial evidence suggests that greater numbers of Eritreans are tortured and kidnapped in Sinai, and more extreme methods are used. Africans enter Israel by finding a way across the border fence, assisted by smugglers. Once past the fence and inside Israel, they are almost always stopped by the IDF and taken to Ketsiot prison where they are registered and held until released (this policy changed in mid-2012, as discussed below).

(2) **Documents:** There are very few asylum seekers in Israel who are unregistered or have expired documents. Partly this is because they are detained and registered by the IDF, but African migrants have little incentive to hide as documents are required to obtain nearly all jobs in the country.

- (3) **Assistance in Israel:** Asylum seekers have little opportunity to participate in poverty alleviation and other assistance programs for Israeli citizens, and pursuing a livelihood depends on the ability to obtain a job. Unlike in Cairo or Quito, there is a well-developed labor market in Israel with demand for labor and service jobs. There is relatively little formal aid for refugees, and most rely on their co-nationals and social networks for assistance. Those without such networks are in worse situations.
- (a) **Housing and rent:** Most new arrivals in Tel Aviv share flats with friends or relatives; if they do not know anyone they sleep outside in Levinsky Park. Over time, sharing rent continues to be housing strategy.
  - (b) **Health care:** Asylum seekers can access health insurance by paying a fixed fee at one of the hospitals, or through their employers. Those without insurance are treated at the (overburdened) clinic at Physicians for Human Rights in Jaffa.
  - (c) **Education:** Sudanese tend to be less educated than Eritreans. Very few asylum seekers have access to higher education in Israel.
  - (d) **Child care:** Childcare facilities are in poor condition, over crowded, expensive, and there are too few of them. Parents pay about \$150 per month per child. There is usually one adult for about 30 kids, no schedule, and not enough food provided. A few centers run by asylum seekers are more organized and clean but more expensive.
- (e) **Financial services:** In 2011 the Israeli Central Bank announced that banks should open accounts for asylum seekers regardless of documentation status. In order to open a bank account individuals need to show their visas, a housing contract and a check stub to prove they are working.
  - (f) **Legal services:** Organizations like Hotline for Migrant Workers and Kav la Oved provide representation for asylum seekers facing legal issues, including problems getting visas for their children, difficulties with employers, and health care issues.
- (4) **Livelihoods in Israel:** Most asylum seekers engage in the same kinds of livelihoods they did in their home countries – those with skills or with languages (English or Hebrew) are sometimes able to utilize them, but most find unskilled work in the service sector.
- (a) **Wage employment:** Most asylum seekers work in the service sector for restaurants, hotels, or coffee shops. Temporary work is paid in cash (average 22 Israeli shekels, or \$5.8 per hour), while permanent work is through a payroll (25-28 shekels, or \$6.75 per hour). However permanent work rarely includes pay-



stubs and health insurance. Many experience being underpaid or not paid at all, or injuries on the job.

(b) **Self-employment:** those wishing to pursue self-employment often struggle to understand government regulations and are vulnerable to taking on debt. The most common small businesses are internet cafés, restaurants, and small goods stores. Women start up daycare facilities or beauty/hair salons. Most businesses are located in the Neve Shaanan area of south Tel Aviv.

(5) **The future:** Most asylum seekers do not know their rights or whether they will be allowed to stay in Israel. They live with constant fear of being deported or not being able to earn enough to meet basic needs. Very few want to stay and find a way to live in Israel; most wasn't to go elsewhere – a few to return to their homelands and more to other countries. Some simply had no plans of any kind because they are demoralized and uncertain about their situation. It is very difficult to move to another country outside of Israel other than repatriating to one's own country. Until June 2012, Sudanese could leave Israel for South Sudan by registering for Ministry of Interior flights.

# The route to Israel

African migrants, many of whom would qualify as refugees if they underwent refugee status determination, travel from their home countries across the Egyptian Sinai to Israel in search of asylum and work. According to the government of Israel, the majority comes from Eritrea (56%) and Sudan (26%); other African countries represent about 18%<sup>[1]</sup>. These migrants travel to Israel for different reasons, including the push factors of political persecution and war, and pull factors of economic opportunity.

Most asylum seekers travel to Israel through Egypt.<sup>[2]</sup> Eritreans either cross to Port Sudan, and sail up the Red Sea, or they cross Sudan to the border with Egypt at Wadi Haifa, then travel up the Nile River to Aswan, and then either to Cairo or across the Sinai. Most pass through the city of Ismailiye and are then smuggled into Israel. Some (unknown) proportion of these migrants is held by traffickers usually in the north Sinai desert between Arish and Rafah. See the regional map with some common routes outlined, below.



**Map 1.** The Route to Israel (Source: nationsonline.org <http://www.nationsonline.org/oneworld/map/north-africa-map.htm>. Note: Route traced in red by the authors of this report).

[1] PIBA (Ministry of Interior): "Data of Foreigners in Israel" (in Hebrew); <http://www.piba.gov.il/PublicationAndTender/ForeignWorkersStat/Documents/mer2012.pdf>. p. 4, April 2012. PIBA tracks those who have entered Israel, and this number excludes those who have been deported or voluntarily repatriated. Amnesty International, in December 2011, estimated that between 45,000 and 54,000 African asylum seekers resided in Israel.

[2] Very small numbers of asylum seekers travel to Israel via the airport, entering legally with either tourist visas or work permits and then applying for asylum once in Israel.

In past years, many asylum seekers (mostly Sudanese) spent time in Egypt, either in Cairo, or in other towns. The route to Israel has changed recently, however, and today most report passing through Cairo for only a few days, en route from their home country or other regional cities and refugee camps.

Most Africans arrive illegally, smuggled across the Egyptian border. International and Israeli-based human rights organizations, UNHCR, and the media<sup>[3]</sup> have documented widespread torture by smugglers and traffickers by Bedouin gangs in Egypt's Sinai Peninsula<sup>[4]</sup>. According to Physicians for Human Rights-Israel, an estimated 20 to 30 percent of Africans arriving in Israel have been tortured<sup>[5]</sup>. Reports by HotLine for Migrant Workers and Physicians for Human Rights-Israel have documented abuses reported by Africans arriving in Israel since 2010. Hostages are repeatedly abused while traffickers call relatives in the diaspora (who listen to the cries for help) to demand ransom payments. Testimony indicates that Eritreans and Ethiopians experience the most severe abuse and pay the highest ransoms, which have now been documented reaching \$38,000 USD<sup>[6]</sup>. In addition, asylum

seekers risk being shot at the border fence by Egyptian soldiers.

If they make the border fence crossing successfully they are stopped by the Israeli Defense Force (IDF) and taken to the prison at Ketsiot where they are registered. Border crossers have little incentive to hide on arrival in Israel, as they must be formally registered through the prison system in order to obtain documents, which are required for nearly all jobs in the country<sup>[7]</sup>. Border crossers receive immediate basic care such as food and water upon arrival after their grueling journey.

According to the Ministry of Interior's Population Immigration and Border Authority (PIBA) records, as of August 2012 some 59,858 Africans had entered the country. However, this number reflects arrivals only and does not take into account those who have departed Israel. In particular, the total over-represents the South Sudanese who have recently repatriated to their new state. Some Darfuris have also returned to Darfur via South Sudan<sup>[8]</sup>. The estimated figure of 33,5000 Eritreans is probably in the correct range since Eritreans do not have the option to return home; however, small numbers of Eritreans have left Israel via resettlement, family reunification or other forms of legal and illegal migration elsewhere. In recent months, the number of new arrivals to Israel has decreased significantly (see Figure 1). According to PIBA, the numbers

[3] Including the New York Times, Sinai Becomes Prison for African Migrants, October 31, 2012

[http://www.nytimes.com/2012/11/01/world/middleeast/01iht-m01-sinai-migrants.html?pagewanted=1&\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/11/01/world/middleeast/01iht-m01-sinai-migrants.html?pagewanted=1&_r=0); CNN, The Freedom Project

[4] See Human Rights Watch, Egypt: End Sinai Nightmare for Migrants, September 5, 2012 <http://www.hrw.org/news/2012/09/05/egypt-end-sinai-nightmare-migrants>.

[5] According to Shahar Shoham, Physicians for Human Rights-Israel, quoted in New York Times, October 31, 2012 [http://www.nytimes.com/2012/11/01/world/middleeast/01iht-m01-sinai-migrants.html?pagewanted=1&\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/11/01/world/middleeast/01iht-m01-sinai-migrants.html?pagewanted=1&_r=0)

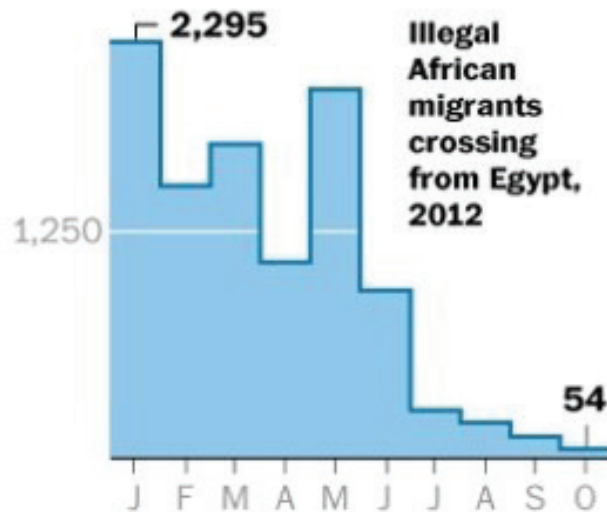
[6] For more information about this phenomenon, see Hotline for Migrant Workers [http://www.hotline.org.il/en\\_drupal/english/publications.htm](http://www.hotline.org.il/en_drupal/english/publications.htm) and Physicians for Human Rights-Israel <http://www.phr.org.il/default.asp?PageID=20> reports.

[7] This may be less true since June 2012 when the Israeli government began implementing the amendment to the anti-infiltration law (see below) and imprisoning newly arrived asylum seekers.

[8] Darfuris cannot return directly because Israel does not have diplomatic relations with Sudan.

## Migrant crossings thwarted

A new border fence, deportations, and military moves to block entry by migrants have sharply reduced the number of Africans illegally crossing into Israel in recent months.



Source: Source: Israeli Interior Ministry/  
Population, Immigration and Border Authority

The Washington Post

**Figure 1.** Asylum seeker entries in 2012 (Source: The Washington Post from PIBA data, November 2, 2012.)

have dropped from a peak of 2,295 entrants in January 2012 to just 54 in October 2012. It is likely that Israel's strengthened deterrence measures since May 2012 have worked, as well as a possible re-opening of the route through Libya to Europe (which had been rendered unusable by the Libyan-Italian agreement in 2009, and subsequent unrest in Libya), increased Egyptian military operations in Sinai, and IDF operations in Sinai. It is still too early to tell whether these trends will persist, or which factors have influenced most significantly the reduction in new entries to Israel.

# The legal and political context for refugees in Israel

Israel is a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol, but has yet to codify these treaties into domestic law. The Ministry of Interior took over refugee status determination from UNHCR in July 2009. Since then, UNHCR has not conducted interviews but is tasked with “ensur[ing] a fair and efficient asylum procedure in the country.” UNHCR sees its role as an advocacy body, working with the government to develop a favorable legislative and procedural framework<sup>[9]</sup>. UNHCR can make recommendations to the Ministry of Interior when it believes cases are wrongly decided, but to date fewer than 180 individuals have ever been granted formal refugee status.

The Israeli government claims that 99 percent of Africans in the country are economic migrants (referred to by the Israeli government as “infiltrators”) and not genuine refugees<sup>[10]</sup>. Refugee advocates suggest the government is able to claim this only because they do not hear most of their cases. In November 2010, Prime Minister Netanyahu explained his government’s distinc-

tion between refugees and economic migrants as follows:

*“We do not intend to arrest refugees from war. We allow them to enter and will continue to do so. But we must stop the mass entry of illegal infiltrators who are looking for work, due to the very harsh repercussions that this wave will have on the character and future of the State of Israel.”*<sup>[11]</sup>

Netanyahu warned that a “flood” of illegal migrants is “threatening the jobs of Israelis, and it is threatening the Jewish and democratic character of the state of Israel.”<sup>[12]</sup>

Since May 2012 there has been a dramatic increase in political and civil society awareness and action around the issue of asylum seekers in Israel. Incitements by Members of Knesset (Parliament)<sup>[13]</sup> and anti-migrant protests<sup>[14]</sup>

[9] UNHCR Israel Fact Sheet – June 2010. UNHCR also works to “secure access of refugees and asylum seekers to Government provided services,” and provides funds to organizations assisting refugees in Israel.

[10] The Jerusalem Post, Netanyahu: Flood of migrants must be stemmed. November 28, 2010 <http://www.jpost.com/NationalNews/Article.aspx?id=197099>; Haaretz, Eli Yishai: Infiltrators pose existential threat to Israel, November 22, 2010

[11] The Jerusalem Post, Refugees protest in TA: ‘We are not diseased.’ December 24, 2010 <http://www.jpost.com/NationalNews/Article.aspx?id=200873>.

[12] The Associated Press, Israel fears ‘flood’ of migrants threatens state. December 6, 2010.

[13] See Haaretz, Netanyahu condemns violence against African migrants, promises to solve problem. May 24, 2012 [http://www.haaretz.com/news/national/netanyahu-condemns-violence-against-african-migrants-promises-to-solve-problem-1.432482?utm\\_source=Mid-East+Refugee+Digest+5%2F24%2F2012&utm\\_campaign=MERD+special&utm\\_medium=email](http://www.haaretz.com/news/national/netanyahu-condemns-violence-against-african-migrants-promises-to-solve-problem-1.432482?utm_source=Mid-East+Refugee+Digest+5%2F24%2F2012&utm_campaign=MERD+special&utm_medium=email).

[14] See Haaretz, Hundreds demonstrate in south Tel Aviv against illegal migrants. May 23, 2012 <http://www.haaretz.com/news/>

have resulted in violent xenophobic attacks<sup>[15]</sup>, and strong anti-migrant protests have resulted in increased urgency for a political response.

## Policy changes in 2012: The deterrence strategy

In late 2010, Prime Minister Netanyahu described a three-pronged response to African ‘infiltration to Israel’: the government will impose heavy fines on employers, construct a fence at the border with Egypt, and build a 10,000-person detention center in the Negev. Since that time, the government has pursued these and added additional measures aimed at devising a comprehensive set of deterrence methods.<sup>[16]</sup>

We describe these measures in more detail since the policy context is relevant to the livelihoods and future plans of asylum seekers in Israel, and it has evolved rapidly throughout our period of research.

The core of Israel’s deterrence strategy consists of building a secure fence along the border, building a detention center for infiltrators by expanding Saharonim prison, and enforcing employer fines.<sup>[17]</sup> In July 2010 a Government

Decision<sup>[18]</sup> ruled that it cannot fine employers without providing an alternative for meeting asylum seekers’ basic needs. Building a detention center would allow the government to enforce employer fines. The budgetary request for the fence and detention center totaled 630 million Israeli shekels (1.65 million USD). Of this, 280 million was for the completion of the fence, 250 million for the building of the detention center, and 100 million for the first year of operation.<sup>[19]</sup> The Ministry of Finance awaited funding approval until a new law allowing for the longer-term detention of asylum seekers was passed. Once the law was approved, the center was financed by cutting every government ministry’s budget by 2%.

In 2012, a 240 kilometer fence along the border of Egypt and Israel was under construction by the Ministry of Defense. According to the Prime Minister’s office, the entire border will be secured from Kerem Shalom to Taba<sup>[20]</sup>, including the encirclement of Eilat, with the exception of one mountainous area where migrants are not believed to cross. As portions of the fence are constructed, it is believed points of entry along the Sinai-Israel border have already shifted.<sup>[21]</sup>

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national/hundreds-demonstrate-in-south-tel-aviv-against-illegal-migrants-1.432228.

[15] See, “Cancer in our Body”, Hotline for Migrant Workers, June 2012 [http://www.hotline.org.il/english/pdf/IncitementReport\\_English.pdf](http://www.hotline.org.il/english/pdf/IncitementReport_English.pdf); Jerusalem Post, South Tel Aviv simmers as racial tensions linger. May 28, 2012 <http://www.jpost.com/NationalNews/Article.aspx?id=271625>; Haaretz, 4 injured in suspected arson attack on Jerusalem migrants, June 4, 2012 <http://www.haaretz.com/news/national/4-injured-in-suspected-arson-attack-on-jerusalem-migrants-1.434266#.T8xgkoUCxRY.facebook>

[16] Interview, Amnesty International, March 2012.

[17] Decision 2507

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[18] Decision 2104

[19] It is estimated that operations will cost another 50 million shekels per 1,000 detainees housed.

[20] “Stopping Illegal Infiltration into Israel, Proposal for Decision (unofficial translation). Accessed from <http://www.scribd.com/doc/76141903/Dec-2011-Israeli-Government-Decision-on-Infiltrators-Unofficial-English-Translation>

[21] Ynet news, Israel’s southern border fence progressing. May 19, 2012 <http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4231228,00.html>



From January 2011 to February 2012, the National Planning and Building Council (NPBC)'s sub-committee prepared plans for the detention center, which would be run by the Israeli Prison Service under the umbrella of the Ministry of Defense.<sup>[22]</sup> In March 2012, the Ministry of Interior gave final approval to the Ministry of Defense to move forward with building the center.

Currently, the Israeli government is in the process of building a detention center consisting of four facilities to hold migrants. The first is Ketsiot prison, traditionally used to hold Palestinian political prisoners, and now with 2,400 places allocated for migrants (a few hundred are currently occupied). The second is Saharonim detention facility, adjacent to Ketsiot in the same compound. This facility has already been expanded to 3,000 total places and it is about half full. A third detention facility is Sadot, with buildings for education, health, teaching, sport and cultural activities, and meetings.<sup>[23][24]</sup> This facility is currently under construction. Funding has been secured to build 3,000 places, plans are in place to reach 7,000. The fourth facility is Nahal Raviv, which is comprised of rows of tents surrounded by barbed wire. Between 1,000 and 2,000 places are currently available in this location, with none of them currently occupied.

[22] Amnesty International Israel Submission to Special Rapporteur, January 2012.

[23] Where meetings will be held between the residents of the facility and representatives of the Ministry of the Interior, international organizations, foreign embassy representatives, lawyers and other individuals.

[24] According to a January 2011 Parliamentary report: "The facility will not be built like a prison or detention centre but it will be surrounded by a fence." National Programme to Meet the Problem of Infiltrators and Asylum Seekers Entering Israel across the Egyptian Border, The Knesset Research and Information Center, January 2011. <http://www.knesset.gov.il/mmm/data/pdf/me02765.pdf>

The detention center was originally intended as a deterrence mechanism for newcomers rather than to hold individuals currently residing in Israel. As of June 3, 2012, the Israeli government began implementing the Anti-Infiltration Law (see below) and newcomers have not been released. On September 24, 2012, the Ministry of Interior enacted a new procedure whereby any "infiltrator" under suspicion of having committed a crime can be taken to prison under the Anti-Infiltration Law. Since the enactment of this protocol, tens of asylum seekers have been arrested, many held in the criminal prison system or in Saharonim facility.

### *Amendment to the 1954 Prevention of Infiltration Law*

The Israeli government's term 'infiltrators' is derived from the 1954 Prevention of Infiltration law, which was enacted to prevent the entry of Palestinian refugees and militants to Israeli territory. Until 2011, this law governed Israeli policy response to African asylum seekers, but most were released from detention in matter of days.<sup>[25]</sup> However, the 2012 Amendment (passed in January 2012) was targeted to address the issue of African migrants and gives the government legal authority to:

- Imprison migrants and asylum seekers crossing the border via Egypt for three or more years,
- Imprison those from 'hostile' or enemy

[25] Most asylum seekers were released quickly, apart from certain individuals, including those with contested nationalities. See: Hotline for Migrant Workers, January 2012, Unlawful Long-term Detention of Asylum Seekers and Migrants.

- countries, including Sudan, indefinitely<sup>[26]</sup>,
- Extend the period permitted before presenting migrants to a judge from 96 hours to 14 days, and
- Issue deportation orders based on a report written by military personnel who have no training in identifying refugees.<sup>[27]</sup>

The law contrasts with to Israel's obligations as a signatory to the 1951 Convention as well as international standards, which demand that state authorities demonstrate that immigration detention is "necessary and proportionate" and based on detailed individual assessments. It does not distinguish between refugees, illegal migrants and 'infiltrators' who enter Israel with intention to harm the country's security. Unaccompanied minors, those with humanitarian or health issues, or those who have stayed in detention for three or more years may be released. However, if the individual does not cooperate with authorities, if he is from an enemy or hostile country (where indefinite detention applies), or if he is an accompanied minor, these exceptions to detention do not apply. Beginning June 3, 2012, asylum seekers who crossed the Israel-Egypt border, including children and torture and rape survivors, have been detained under this law.

The amendment states clearly that its purpose is deterrence: "The expectation is that the detention period will stop the massive infiltration or at

[26] <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/MDE15/043/2011/en/cf5e3d1a-0f70-412c-91b7-989592e89ec8/mde150432011en.pdf> (December 23, 2011).; Amnesty International Israel Submission to Special Rapporteur, January 2012.

[27] [http://www.hotline.org.il/english/pdf/Hotline\\_072411\\_Anti\\_Infiltration\\_Eng.pdf](http://www.hotline.org.il/english/pdf/Hotline_072411_Anti_Infiltration_Eng.pdf)

least minimize it". The problem with the law is that it does not distinguish between terrorists, migrant workers, and asylum seekers.<sup>[28]</sup>

### *Additional legislation targeting asylum seekers*

A number of additional legislative amendments and regulations have been introduced in Israel, including:

- (1) Amendment criminalizing employment, providing shelter or renting accommodation and transporting asylum seekers
- (2) Amendment forbidding asylum seekers to send money abroad
- (3) Amendment imposing monthly deposits from salaries of 'Infiltrators'
- (4) Amendment that prevents migrants from appealing their deportation and expands authority of Immigration Authority over asylum seekers legally staying in Israel
- (5) New regulation would bar asylum seekers without passports from filing civil lawsuits in Israeli courts
- (6) Enforcement of 20% levies on employers of asylum seekers.

While not yet passed, these Amendments together with the deterrence policy indicate the shift in government policy towards a much more restrictive position on African migrants including asylum seekers.

[28] [http://www.hotline.org.il/english/pdf/Hotline\\_072411\\_Anti\\_Infiltration\\_Eng.pdf](http://www.hotline.org.il/english/pdf/Hotline_072411_Anti_Infiltration_Eng.pdf)



### *Ending of group protection, and deportations*

In December 2011, the Prime Minister's office announced that Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu will travel to African countries in 2012 to "formulate a plan" for deportation to third countries. Although these visits have not been publicized, there is some speculation about deals between Israel and third countries in Africa for payment.

In addition, the government has claimed it will use the UNHCR cessation clause to end group protection for particular groups. So far, individuals from Cote d'Ivoire have had their temporary

protection visas revoked (February 2012) and those from South Sudan (June 2012).

The Ministry of Interior announced the end of the collective protection for South Sudanese to begin in April 2012. Following a temporary order handed down by the Jerusalem District Court, collective protection was extended until the court petition was resolved. In June 2012, the Court rejected the petition and the Ministry of Interior decision was upheld. Many South Sudanese were arrested and only released from prison on the condition that they signed that they would leave Israel. Throughout the summer of 2012, eight planes left Israel carrying South Sudanese. Tens of South Sudanese remain in



Owner and employee inside an asylum seeker-owned restaurant in Tel Aviv. Photo by: Clare Sikorska

the country, living under continual threat of deportation if caught by immigration authorities. Following this string of de facto deportations, interior Minister Eli Yishai announced that the 15,000 north Sudanese residing in Israel should leave Israel voluntarily before October 15 or would be imprisoned. Human rights groups challenged this decision in the Jerusalem district court. The State replied that this was in fact not a government decision but rather the actions of the Minister of Interior alone. The court case was subsequently retracted. The Minister of Interior is currently in negotiations with the Prime Minister's Office and other relevant bodies to come to a joint decision on the matter.

### *Return to hot returns – returning asylum seekers to Egypt at the border*

A policy known as “hot returns” – where Israeli soldiers return Africans to Egypt immediately on crossing the border – was in effect from 2007 until mid-2011. After significant efforts by rights groups, the Israeli government claimed to stop using this protocol since mid-2011. However, in August 2012, there have been renewed reports of this practice, based on affidavits provided by IDF soldiers serving on the border along with testimonies of some individuals who made it to Israel.<sup>[29]</sup> Some evidence points to IDF soldiers entering Egyptian territory, detaining migrants, and physically handing them to Egyptians. Ac-

cording to Human Rights Watch, Africans have been denied entry at the border at least seven times since June 2012 and in July, Israeli soldiers detained 40 Eritreans just inside the Israeli border and forcibly turned them over to the Egyptian army.<sup>[30]</sup> Recent media attention turned to the plight of 21 asylum seekers denied entry at the border fence where they waited between August 28 and September 5. In the end, two women and a teenage boy were allowed entry while the others were turned back to Egypt. This practice is illegal under international law (the 1951 Refugee Convention and customary international refugee law), which requires all countries to examine refugee claims before turning arriving refugees back to their home countries.

[29] Human Rights Watch, Israel: Asylum Seekers Blocked at Border, October 28, 2012 <http://www.hrw.org/news/2012/10/28/israel-asylum-seekers-blocked-border>; Jerusalem Post, IDF entering Egypt to stop entry of asylum seekers, August 11, 2012 <http://www.jpost.com/DiplomacyAndPolitics/Article.aspx?id=280828>.

[30] Human Rights Watch, Israel: Asylum Seekers Blocked at Border, October 28, 2012 <http://www.hrw.org/news/2012/10/28/israel-asylum-seekers-blocked-border>

# Tel Aviv case study

Our case study began with a review of existing livelihood programs in Israel. We mapped the commercial, humanitarian and governmental organizations that provide programming, advocacy or other resources that support the livelihoods of refugees, migrants and low-income citizens. To understand the institutional landscape of livelihoods in Tel Aviv, we conducted interviews with the following key informants in March and April 2012:

- managers and coordinators of organizations that serve refugees and asylum seekers,
- officials from the Tel Aviv municipality and business registry,
- business owners who are asylum seeker,
- private and commercial Israeli employers, and
- employment and housing agencies and other service agencies to which refugees and asylum seekers have access to in Tel Aviv.

Then, to understand more deeply the refugees livelihoods experience in Tel Aviv, we interviewed 63 asylum seekers between May and July 2012. Research assistants from the community conducted the interviews in Tigrinya (Eritreans), Arabic (Sudanese and South Sudanese), and French (other Francophone Africans). Interviews lasted one to three hours and were held in respondents' homes or in the offices of

the African Refugee Development Center (ARDC) in Tel Aviv. Research assistants took notes during the interviews, typed transcripts into Microsoft Word and then entered relevant data into a spreadsheet for analysis.

Respondents were selected using a snowball sampling method. Points of entry included friends, acquaintances, organizations, shop owners, group houses, shelters, and interception on the street. Our sample is not representative of the different asylum seeker nationalities in Israel, or of the overall asylum seeker population. While we do report some differences between groups, we see these as suggestive only. Our purpose was to build off the mapping exercise in Section 3 to gain an understanding of the livelihoods issues asylum seekers face in Israel from their perspectives.

## Livelihoods programs in Israel

There are many fewer NGOs and international aid agencies in Tel Aviv than in other developing country capitals including Cairo and Quito. Asylum seekers have limited opportunity to integrate into programs for Israeli citizens. Although many receive support from organizations, pursuing a livelihood in Israel largely depends on the ability to obtain a job. Unlike in Cairo or Quito, there is a well-developed labor market in Israel with demand for labor and service jobs as described in this report.

Most of the services available to refugees and asylum seekers are located in south Tel Aviv. A rough division of tasks by organization is outlined in Annex I. Different forms of support services including job placement, financial services, skills and education, childcare, health services, legal services, housing and relocation are available. The information obtained from the mapping was used to inform the interviews with asylum seekers, and to better understand the full livelihoods context in Israel.

## Demographics of our asylum seeker respondents

Of our 63 respondents, 29 (46%) were from Eritrea, and 26 (41%) were from Sudan<sup>[31]</sup>. Two each came from Democratic Republic of Congo, Ivory Coast, and Central African Republic. The remaining two were from Somalia and Niger. The following table shows the gender breakdown:

Table 1: Gender x Origin of asylum seeker respondents

Origin	Men	Women
Sudanese (26)	25	1
Eritreans (29)	19	10
Other African groups (8)	6	2
Total	50	13

[31] No respondents came from South Sudan. Throughout the research period there were rumors of deportation for this group and it was difficult for the research team to access this community.

Of the Eritreans, a quarter was from rural background and three quarters from urban areas. For the Sudanese, just over half (58%) came from rural background and 42% from urban areas. About half (54%) were aged between 14-24 when they left, and the other half were aged 25-60. When they left their country, most (41 or 64%) were single. 30% of both men and women were either married or engaged. Eleven of our respondents (16%) said they left children in their home countries.

## Migration to Israel

### *Sudanese migration*

Our Sudanese respondents left Sudan in two periods – a third (9) left between 2001 and 2004, and two thirds (17) left between 2007 and 2011. Those who came to Israel between 2001 and 2009 said they came due to the war or because they were facing persecution. Many did not leave Sudan with the intention of coming to Israel. All except one either planned to go to Egypt or just wanted to leave their country.

*...the war started taking place between the rebels and the Sudanese national forces. I felt unsafe in that place. I planned to run away but on my way the Sudanese forces arrested me and accused me to be a spy for the rebels, they took me to their base and tortured me to tell them what they want but I didn't know what to tell them.*

*Then one day while they were playing cards I escaped from that base to Khartoum.*

*From there I felt definitely unsafe and the idea came of leaving Sudan. (Sudanese man, arrived in Israel in 2003)*

*I left my country because my husband was working as a policeman and he got arrested because they accused him of working with the rebels. They hit him, broke his hand and his eye is not working anymore. (Sudanese woman, left Sudan in 2008).*

Those who arrived after 2010 were more likely to report migrating for economic reasons; they said they planned to come to Israel to seek a better life or to work and send money home:

*I left my country with an intention to come to Israel to work and go to school and continue my life, so I took the airplane from Khartoum to Cairo. (Sudanese man, arrived in Israel in 2011)*

Although they have been assisted by the Sudanese community in Tel Aviv, Sudanese who arrived in the past two years said they experienced exploitation by other Sudanese who have been in Israel since 2007. As one respondent reported, “old comers make business out of newcomers”.

### *Eritrean migration*

Eritreans started arriving to Israel mainly in 2009 and 2010. The younger arrivals (aged 16-20) mostly reported leaving Eritrea to avoid army recruitment. One young man reported, “my father served the army for 16 years and still he

is under the army”. Those who left when they were older than 21 mainly reported escaping the army. One who left at age 21 said, “I served the government for three years without salary. I am against the government because instead of building the nation they are building lots of prisons to detain the productive young people”.

Eritreans traveled through Egypt, Ethiopia, and Sudan before arriving in Israel. Half the Eritreans had spent around one year in Ethiopia before crossing to Egypt and then on to Israel. None were able to work in Ethiopia or Egypt, and one spent a month in an Ethiopian prison. Of those who traveled through Sudan, 17 out of the 29 Eritreans interviewees said they left their first destination (in Sudan) because life was too difficult there. Five left because they did not feel safe and one of them was kidnapped from Sudan by smugglers. The reasons for leaving given by our respondents are outlined in Table 2.

### *Paying for the journey*

Most Sudanese said they paid for their journey with their own funds. Eritreans were more likely to fund their trip with the help of family and friends (both from Eritrea and abroad). Almost half of all our respondents (29) said they used their own funds. Another nine said a relative in Israel helped, five mentioned their parents, and 19 said a relative or friend in the diaspora helped. Many were helped by more than one individual. The sources of support for the journey are outlined in Table 3.



Table 2: Reasons for leaving country of origin

Reason for leaving	War/Persecution	To find work	Family reunion	Looking for a better life
Sudanese	58%(15)	23%(6)	4%(1)	15%(4)
Eritreans	80%(23)	10%(3)	7%(2)	3%(1)
Others	63%(5)	25%(2)	12%(1)	

Table 3: Sources of support

Who helped them pay	Other nationalities	Eritreans	Sudanese
No one	4	5	20
Family/friends at home	2	9	5
Family/friends in Israel	0	8	0
Family/friends diaspora	1	8	1
Total	7	30	26

## Cost of journey

Bedouin smuggling groups are known to collect money to lead asylum seekers through the Sinai desert. This aspect of the journey is extremely dangerous for those who get caught up with abusive smugglers, some collecting ransom payments in amounts much higher than originally agreed upon. The reported cost of the journey ranged from \$400 to \$35,000 as shown below:

### Sudanese

77% do not know

33% \$400-\$3,500 USD

### Eritreans

52% \$800-\$2400 USD

36% \$2,500-\$3,400 USD

12% \$3,750-\$35,000 USD

Eritreans pay significantly more than the Sudanese for the journey. Testimonies by migrants in Israel indicate that greater numbers of Eritreans (and to some extent Ethiopians) are tortured and kidnapped, and more extreme methods are used, compared to the Sudanese, despite their using the same smuggling groups. One explanation is that smugglers take advantage of Eritreans' close community ties, knowing they will pool significant amounts of money to release a captive relative. Others speculate that smugglers know that Eritreans have relatives in the di-

aspora in the West (Europe, America, and Israel) who have access to larger sums and international currencies. Another explanation could be that Sudanese can offer assistance to the Bedouin smugglers because of their common language and religion.

One 21-year old Eritrean who had been held for ransom in Sinai for five months recounted his experience with traffickers:

*They told us to pay 25,000 USD. When we said we don't have they beat us with iron and a big plastic stick in all body parts.*

*From day to day they continued the extreme cruelty. They hanged us upside down, put electric and hot iron on our body. While everybody screamed they called our parents to make them send money very fast. In this way we stayed for 5 months eating only bread and very little salty water. 16 people from our group paid 25000usd and were taken ... to Israel...My parents couldn't pay because they do not have anything.*

*My mom was crying when she heard our screams and pain on telephone. When our neighbors saw her crying they called their relatives abroad. In this way many people knew about me. People from my village living in Israel and Europe collected 25,000 USD to pay for me. After this [the traffickers] sold us to other people who also sold us {for 10,000 USD). Here five people die after they finished paying. I and two others paid a total 35,000 USD. Then at night one*

*of the smugglers brought us to the border. We made it through the fence to Israel very easily.*

### *The route to Tel Aviv*

More than half our respondents (33) passed through Cairo, either as their first city after leaving their homeland – as did almost all the Sudanese respondents (25) – or the second city, as did 6 (3 Eritreans). 18 Eritreans passed through Kassala. Only one came directly to Tel Aviv by plane.

More than half (36) said they stayed less than two months in the first place, most (20) staying only a few days. Another 11 respondents said they stayed in the first place more than two months but less than a year, and 14 said they stayed one to four years.

All Sudanese interviewees – except for one who passed through Libya (see below) – went to Cairo first, half staying only for a few days. Of the 11 who lived there for at least 10 months, 10 said they decided to leave as they didn't have rights and they got tired of waiting for a response from UNHCR. Until about 2009, many Sudanese living in Cairo traced their decision to leave to an Egyptian police crackdown on refugee protestors that took place at Moustafa Mahmoud Park in December 2005<sup>[32]</sup>. As one respondent

[32] In late 2005, a sit-in by Sudanese asylum seekers and refugees in Mustafa Mahmoud park near the UNHCR offices in Cairo culminated in tragedy. Between September and December, up to 2,500 Sudanese protested UNHCR's suspension of refugee status determination procedures and conditions in Cairo. Negotiations between the refugees and UNHCR failed to end the protest, and on December 30, Egyptian security personnel entered the park and forcibly removed the refugees, in the process killing

described his experience following the Moustafa Mahmoud incident,

*...later I wasn't feeling safe, I could be arrested and will be forced to return to Sudan where my life will be in a real danger. I saw the example with many of my friends who had been forced to return, so to avoid that, I decided to run away from Egypt and there were no any available place than Israel. So I came here [to Israel].*

### The route via Libya

Four respondents came via Libya where they had worked for several years. All of them said they had left their home countries to find work in Libya and had left Libya because they heard economic prospects were better in Israel.

Two of these respondents were Ivorians who originally fled the war in their country. One had left Cote d'Ivoire in 2001 during the war, worked in Mali for two years, and then had crossed Algeria to Libya for work where he had stayed for three years. In 2009, he heard the situation in Israel was better and had come via Egypt to Is-

rael to find work. The other Ivorian's journey was similar except he had left Cote d'Ivoire in 2005 and had gone directly to Libya for two years, then come to Israel in 2007.

One Sudanese was from West Darfur (El Ge-neina) and had left in 2009 to go to Libya, and then come to Israel in 2010. One from Niger had left in 2008 to find work in Libya, and then had come to Israel in 2011.

## Livelihoods in Israel

### Documents

Very few asylum seekers in Israel are unregistered or have expired documents. Most are taken by the IDF for registration immediately upon crossing the border. Sudanese and Eritrean asylum seekers all receive a 2A5 visa, and most report knowing this upon arrival so they present themselves to authorities in the rare case that they are not caught at the border. The following types of visas have been given by authorities during different periods:

**A5:** Recognized refugee visa. To date, Israel has recognized fewer than 200 official refugees. Those in possession of the 2A5 visa have the same rights as citizens except for the path to citizenship. In 2007, the Minister of Interior Affairs granted A5 visas to several hundred Darfurian refugees, Eight (12%) of our respondents had A5 visas, of whom 7 were South Sudanese.

**B1:** Work visa. Until 2008, a total of nearly 1,000 Eritrean refugees were granted B1 work

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27, at least half of whom were children and women. Later a 14 year old boy died in hospital and one man committed suicide in detention. Most cardholding refugees and asylum seekers were released within a few days, but more than six hundred remained in detention for weeks until their status was clarified between UNHCR and the government of Egypt. The Mustafa Mahmoud events elicited criticism locally and abroad, strained relations between UNHCR and the government, and exacerbated an atmosphere of distrust between UNHCR and Sudanese refugees and asylum seekers. This summary is taken from a detailed report, "A Tragedy of Failures and False Expectations. Report on the Events Surrounding the Three month Sit-in and Forced Removal of Sudanese Refugees in Cairo, September–December 2005." The American University in Cairo, Forced Migration and Refugee Studies Program. June 2006. [http://www.aucegypt.edu/gapp/cmrs/reports/documents/report\\_edited\\_v.pdf](http://www.aucegypt.edu/gapp/cmrs/reports/documents/report_edited_v.pdf)



permits,<sup>[33]</sup> although these visas are no longer issued. Employers accept a B1 visa for work without problems. According to some entrepreneurs, they also offer more protection against having businesses closed by the municipality. Five of our respondents had B1 visas, of whom four were Eritrean.

**2A5:** Temporary protection or ‘conditional release’ visa must be renewed every one to three months, and are the most commonly held visa. Three quarters of our respondents had one. Asylum seekers from Eritrea and Sudan (not including South Sudan) are automatically granted a 2A5 visa without a review of their asylum claim. The 2A5 is officially a deportation order; the “condition” of release is that the holder must cooperate should the government enforce the deportation. This visa does not provide any rights to social benefits or to work, yet at this time most asylum seekers can use the document to obtain jobs. In recent months, community activists report the 2A5 document has changed frequently without explanation. For example, the label of ‘visa’ was changed to ‘temporary license’, and the colors are sometimes changed without notice, creating confusion. Some asylum seekers report being turned away by an employer who was unsure about a changed version of the document.

Most employers, particularly those who hire just a few individuals, do not understand the difference between asylum seekers who have permission to work and those who do not. If the

government decided to fine employers for hiring those without work permits, smaller companies would suffer less than larger hotel chains, since asylum seekers often make up a large part of larger companies’ workforce. The latter have been known to fire all migrant workers every time the government makes a threat about enforcing employer fines.

### *Housing and rent*

New arrivals in Tel Aviv either spend a few nights (sometimes months) staying with friends, or if they do not know anyone they sleep outside in Levinsky Park. Women with children or without a partner can stay at the African Refugee Development Center women’s shelter. An organization called B’nei Darfur, founded by asylum seekers from Darfur, runs a men’s shelter during the winter. Once asylum seekers find work, they rent a room, usually with friends, obtained through word of mouth or through one of the 25 or so housing agencies in south Tel Aviv. However, housing agencies charge a month’s rent for finding an apartment and charge a premium on the rent, making their services prohibitively expensive.

Most interviewees (67%) shared their flats with friends or relatives. Out of these, half share their flat with between three and six non-relatives. Seven lived at their workplace, three lived alone and seven lived with their immediate family (spouse and children). Three lived in Levinsky Park or on the street.

[33] See Yacobi, *Irregular Migration to Israel: The Sociopolitical Perspective*, CARIM Analytic and Synthetic notes 2008/63, 5.

The monthly rent paid for their flats ranged between 1500-7000 shekels, with about half paying between 2500 -3000. The rent our individual respondents paid ranged from 400-7000, with 73% paying 1000 shekels or less.

Our interviewees complained that the owners of the apartments ask for more money to renew the contract:

*We found a big place with two bedrooms and living room. Four people live here, two in each room. We pay 3000 shekels plus electricity and water. We divide all the money equally. After we stayed six months the landlord asked for an additional 600 shekels a month. We had no choice so we agreed, because we would pay more to an agency if we try to find another place.*

## Health care

Asylum seekers can access health insurance by paying a fixed fee at one of the hospitals, or, for those with a stable job, through their employers. Those without insurance can be treated at the clinic at Physicians for Human Rights in Jaffa (near south Tel Aviv).

There is currently no victim identification procedure in place for those who have experienced torture, rape, gunshots and other abuses in the Sinai during the journey. Those who face serious health issues as a result of the journey are in particular need of urgent medical care and often cannot access basic services. Physicians for Human Rights-Israel regularly sees Sinai

victims, but the clinic is overloaded with cases. There is also a significant need for psychosocial services, particularly those who have undergone extreme hardship during the journey. The African Refugee Development Center offers a small support group for women but the community need is much greater.

Less than half (25) of our respondents had health insurance, and those without it have problems. One Sudanese described the difficulty in accessing care from the few humanitarian agencies that provide it:

*No one in my family has health insurance. If someone gets sick we go to the central bus station to a humanitarian hospital, but it is just like a lottery over there. Sometimes even if you're dying they won't receive you. If you're lucky they receive you, it depends. It's really bad for us.*

In case of a serious emergency, hospitals in Israel will treat patients free of charge. However, a problem with this system is that "if you have been in the hospital and could not pay, you don't go back because you know you owe money".

Without insurance, women giving birth pay NIS 4,000 (\$1,000 USD) per day at the hospital. The baby does not receive a birth certificate until the fee is paid. One woman said the hospital had threatened to keep her baby until she paid for the delivery, despite their not having enough to cover the fees:

*When I delivered my recent baby in a hospital, because I didn't have money to pay they refused to give me my newborn. They asked me to pay 4000 shekels but I didn't have it. After a fight for four days finally they gave me him but without a birth certificate; until now I have him for eight months without any paper.*

Newborns and children receive free checkups and vaccines at “Tipat halav” (Health Ministry, Tel-Aviv Municipality).

### *Education and skills*

For most asylum seekers, learning new skills or receiving education is very important. Of our interviewees, Sudanese were less educated than Eritreans. Of the Eritreans, 17% had some college, compared with 7% of Sudanese. And 15% of Sudanese had no school, compared with only 3% of Eritreans. Many say that while they do not see a future in Israel, education will enable them to progress in their lives. However, few options exist. Courses in Hebrew and English are offered and there are a few informal computer courses run by an organization called the Community Education Center, and another run by a refugee from Darfur, which costs \$40 for ten sessions and anyone may participate.

During 2011 the Ministry of Foreign Affairs ran a driving course for asylum seekers from South Sudan who had volunteered to go back home through an organization called Operation Blessing. This closed after the deportation of South Sudanese.

Very few asylum seekers have access to higher education in Israel. In order to qualify, they must undergo a matriculation exam, submit letters of recommendation, and sometimes complete a psychometric/SAT for undergraduate education. Additional exams are required for graduate school. For those who fulfill these requirements, the main constraint is financial, as pay tuition runs between \$4,000 and \$10,000 (depending on the university). Institutions including IDC, Tel Aviv University and Bar-Ilan have provided two or three scholarships to outstanding asylum seeker students. Table 4 lists the organizations where asylum seekers can obtain education in Tel Aviv.

### *Childcare*

Most childcare facilities are in very poor condition. Parents pay about \$150 per month per child. There is usually one adult for about 30 kids, no schedule, and not enough food provided. A few centers run by asylum seekers are more organized and clean but more expensive, about \$200 a month. For example, a Congolese woman started a daycare center that has one adult per 10 children, a schedule with activities (such as English and Hebrew classes, painting, and dancing) and three nutritious meals. UNI-TAF runs several daycare centers, hiring women from the community to run them.

Children above age six can attend public school in Tel Aviv, although asylum seeker children are not always permitted in other municipalities. Israeli schools such as Bialik are known for the high concentration of foreign worker and asylum seekers' children.

Table 4: Organizations where asylum seekers can obtain education in Tel Aviv

Organization	Education offered	Cost
1. CEC – Community Education Center	With Microfy: Business skills  With Apple Tree: Computer skills Photography Theater	Fee: NIS 150 (\$40), computer classes NIS 200 (\$53)
2. ARDC – African Refugee Development Center	Hebrew lessons  English lessons (basic and advanced)	Fee: NIS 150 (\$40)
3. Universities (TAU, IDC, Ben Gurion, Bar Ilan, Academic Collego of Tel Aviv Yafo, Michlala le Minhal and others)	Higher education: About 13 asylum seekers and refugees are currently studying at universities in Israel	Fee: Between NIS 12,000 and NIS 37,500 (\$3,200- \$10,000) per year.
Informal courses offered by asylum seekers	Ismael: Computer course  Fathum: Painting course Bonfils: Music (guitar, drums, organ classes) Organization B'nei Darfur: English and Hebrew classes	Fee: \$13-\$26 per hour class, or NIS 150 (\$40) for a course
4. Online courses	Wall Street: English and Hebrew courses	Fee: NIS 200-1,000 (\$53-\$268)

### *Financial services*

Asylum seekers did not have access to formal financial services until 2011, when the Israeli Central Bank announced that banks should open accounts for asylum seekers regardless of documentation status. In order to open a bank account individuals need to show their visas (even if only a temporary 2A5 permit), housing contract and a check to prove they are working. They can open a checking or savings account

with a deposit of NIS 500 – 2000 (\$125-\$500). However, in practice most banks make it difficult for asylum seekers to open bank accounts. The Postal Bank, run by the government, will not open accounts for them, but does provide debit cards that asylum seekers can buy and refill. These cards are useful for online purchases such as Skype minutes to talk to people abroad. For business owners, this service allows them to pay bills.

Asylum seekers needing a loan often approach friends or family. When opening a new business, it is common to ask many different contacts to contribute to setup costs and the borrower usually repays the money once the business is up and running (see 'Capital for starting a business' below).

### *Legal Services*

Asylum seekers crossing the border from Egypt are picked up by the army and sent to the prison at Ketsiot. Those who can prove they are Sudanese or Eritrean have until now been released from prison after one to six months<sup>[34]</sup> (these constitute about 80 percent of cases). Those with disputed nationalities or who are not considered to be true asylum seekers by the Israeli government often stay in prison for one year or more. No legal representation is provided for these individuals by the government, and many must secure large loans from family or friends to pay for legal representation services. An organization called Anu Plitim provides representation for the most difficult cases, and has obtained release for most of those it has represented. Following release, they must then defend against deportation.

Organizations like Hotline for Migrant Workers and Kav la Oved provide representation for asylum seekers facing legal issues during their residence in Israel, including problems getting visas

[34] Since the amended Anti-Infiltration bill passed in January 2012 and implementation has begun, even new arrivals from Sudan and Eritrea can be held for longer periods (up to three years) in prison. It remains to be seen how this law will be implemented for these groups.

for their children, difficulties with employers, and issues arising in the health care system.

### *Onward migration and resettlement*

It is very difficult to move to another country outside of Israel other than repatriating to one's own country. Until June 2012, Sudanese could leave Israel for South Sudan by registering for Ministry of Interior flights.

A family reunification program exists for people desiring to resettle to the US, although the process can take up to seven years and very few asylum seekers are successful moving on through this route. Canada accepts seven refugees every year.

## Employment

In their home countries, our interviewees' livelihoods included selling and trade, teachers, tailors, construction, carpentry, business, tractor driver, hairdresser, mechanic. Other skills included cooking, photography, and computer science. Both men and women had been in the government and many Eritreans had spent time in the army.

### *Wage employment*

Most asylum seekers in Israel find wage work rather than self-employment. Of our respondents, 14 mentioned some form of *chic chac* (temporary work) (22%), and 22 said they worked cleaning in private homes, Yeshivas, restaurants or hotels, as shown in Table 5.

Table 5: Occupation by visa type

Occupation	Number	Type of Visa
No work	14 (22%)	B1 Visa (2), conditional release (12)
Cleaning (house, restaurant, hotel, yeshiva, street, hospital)	22 (35%)	A5 (5), B1 (3), conditional release (14)
Chic chac or construction	14 (22%)	conditional release (14)
Business owner	5 (8%)	A5 (1), B1 (1), conditional release (3)
Other (shop, textiles, catering, photography, construction, factory, old people care)	9 (14%)	A5 (2), conditional release (7)

Although employment is more available and better paid in Israel compared to their home countries, a fairly large number of our respondents, 14 (22%), said they had no work.

New arrivals in Tel Aviv often find “chik chak”, or casual labor jobs. Commonly, new arrivals (and some longer stayers) wait each morning at Levinsky Park or the corner of Kibutz Galuyot Avenue. Respondents reported that on an average day some 200 men wait from about 5am-10am for the chance of being picked up for a day of work with a construction company, renovation project, street cleaning, or catering event. When cars stop, individuals run at them, knowing it is the only way to be selected amongst many job seekers. Selections are usually made arbitrarily although those in good physical condition or with language skills are preferred.

Most asylum seekers in Israel work in the service sector for restaurants, hotels, or coffee

shops. They are hired for cleaning, washing dishes, making up hotel rooms, construction, moving, or special events. Those with English or Hebrew skills manage to secure higher-paid positions as chefs, waiters, and receptionists. While men are nearly always hired for manual labor, both men and women accept cleaning jobs. Some women work at home-based daycares for children from their community, either run by an asylum seeker or by UNITAF, an NGO started and run by Mesila, part of the Tel Aviv municipality. Daycare salaries are generally lower and paid in cash (NIS 22, or \$5.8 per hour).

### Pay and insurance

Temporary work is typically low-paid and in cash (usually around 22 Israeli shekels, or \$5.8 per hour), while permanent work is usually paid higher (25-28 shekels, or \$6 -6.75 per hour) and through a payroll. Permanent work rarely includes paystubs and health insurance. The

average amount of time worked was six days a week, 10 hours a day. For those working occasional jobs, it “depends on your luck”, with some reporting having not been paid for work done.

54 out of the 63 interviewees said they had not learned any new skills in Israel. Others reported having learned makeup skills, video editing, Hebrew, English, construction, and painting.

Many experienced difficulties while working, including:

- No overtime payment, no pay for rest (discounted per day for lunch) or holidays
- Being fired without notice or payment
- Being paid fewer hours than worked (and no complaint mechanism)
- Receiving difficult manual work disproportionately, very tiring
- Workplace injuries that led to being fired. Our participants view was it is better not to say anything if problems arise at work.

### Job placement

Large companies such as hotel chains usually find workers through manpower agencies, although many Israeli job placement agencies are not willing to provide their services to asylum seekers who do not hold work permits. There are about 20 job placement agencies in south Tel Aviv. At the popular ones, such as at the Central Bus Station, job applicants can wait for many hours and are not always seen by a staff member. In the past, Assaf opened a Gmail account where people could send job opportuni-

ties and asylum seekers could apply. This email is not currently active, since the initiator was an asylum seeker from South Sudan who was running it on a volunteer basis and now runs his own agency independently.

Small and medium enterprises find most of their workers through word of mouth, often as recommendations from previous workers or workers in similar businesses. Of our 35 respondents that had a permanent job (excluding chic chic and business owners), 21 said they found work through a friend. Nine said they found work through a manpower agency, one found through a relative and one (holding an A5 visa) found work through the Ministry of Interior.

### Self-employment

Self-employed asylum seekers have more control over their lives and jobs, but also struggle to understand and meet government regulations and are vulnerable to taking on significant debt. The most common businesses are internet cafés, restaurants, bars, coffee shops, and small goods stores selling groceries or clothes. Women tend to start up daycare facilities or beauty/hair salons. Most of these businesses are located in the Neve Shaanan area of south Tel Aviv.

### Capital for starting a business

Since 2008, hundreds of asylum seekers have opened successful small businesses using capital from different sources. Some use funds they had upon arrival (through a previous job/business or family support), or from savings



from jobs as cleaners or other low-wage work in Israel. It is common to ask for loans from their community to start a small business (usually between NIS 5,000 and 10,000, or \$1,300-2,600). There is also a small microfinance organization, Microfy, which targets the African migrant/refugee population (See Annex II). Microfy has provided loans totaling \$15,000 over the past four years.

To start a business, asylum seekers either buy an existing business from another asylum seeker or look for a new location through housing agencies. For example, a restaurant can cost between NIS 40,000 and 100,000 (\$10,000 to \$30,000 USD) depending on the location, popularity, and furniture included. An internet café costs between NIS 10,000 and 30,000 (\$2,500 to \$7,500 USD).

### Legal regulations

One problem for business owners is that permission from the municipality is required to operate restaurants, bars, and childcare facilities. The 2A5 'conditional release' visa, which most asylum seekers hold, does not allow them to run businesses, and they risk forced closure if the municipality learns about them. Those with work permits (A5 or B1) can register their business, but they struggle with the costs of implementation requirements imposed by the municipality such as repairing bathrooms, adding security cameras and fire extinguishers, and hiding cables. Lawyers' fees required to work out legal and administrative obstacles often exceed NIS 100,000, or \$26,000.

All businesses in Israel are required to pay taxes, but non-citizens, even those with work permits, are not allowed to register at the tax registry. A small percentage of asylum seekers' businesses are registered through partnership or agreement with an Israeli citizen. Most refugee businesses employ at least one fellow asylum seeker, who is usually a friend, acquaintance, or direct relative.

### Assistance from organizations

Only 16 out of the 63 interviewees (25%) said they had received any help from organizations. However, it is important to note that our community research assistants thought that assistance from organizations was underreported by our informants. Independent volunteers, both Israelis and from the asylum seeker communities, also support asylum seekers and connect them with existing services.

Most said they received help from family, friends, or others in their communities. Those who have resided in Israel for longer help newcomers secure food, clothing, and housing. Often new arrivals live with those who are already established for several months. This is true when individuals become unemployed as well. Those who are better connected can help others find jobs, although this is becoming increasingly difficult.

## The future

When asked about the types of services they would use if offered, 14 (22%) of respondents said they did not know what they wanted or did not want anything in Israel. One said he wanted help returning to Eritrea. 15 (24%) said they



would like to be relocated to another country where they could have a normal life, or obtain documents that would allow them to live a normal life in Israel. 8 (13%) said they want to be able to work or have a permanent job. 7 (11%) would like to have their own business or expand their current one. 25 (40%) would like to study some profession (18) or a language (7)

*What we are seeking since we left Sudan is to find a safer place for us and good education for our children and that is what we are looking for here too.*

In general, the greatest difficulty for asylum seekers in Israel is to have a stable life, because they do not know what their rights are

and whether they will be allowed to stay in the country. They live with constant fear of being deported or not being able to earn enough to meet basic needs. As one respondent described:

*My dream is to find a stable life and be able to learn. But I don't want that to happen in Israel because I am already here for five years but I still don't know nothing about how to live or integrate in the community of Israel. I still don't know about under what condition I live in here - am I a refugee, citizen, or what? I have no idea so it's very difficult.*

When asked about their future plans, only two said they wanted to stay and find a way to live



Exterior of a shop established by an asylum seeker in the Neve Shaanan neighborhood of Tel Aviv. The shop sells a combination local goods and those imported from the owner's region of origin including spices, traditional clothing, and DVDs. Photo by: Clare Sikorska

in Israel; everyone else wanted to return to their homelands (29%) or go elsewhere (49%), or simply had no plans of any kind (13%). Eritreans were much more likely to say they planned to return to Eritrea – sometimes to fight for a change in government. Ten Eritreans said they wanted to return, compared to only three Sudanese.

Some wanted to be educated and learn new skills: “I would like to learn computer science and English”, “to learn architecture”, “study international politics”, “to learn English and mathematics. I choose English and math because I think then I could be able to live without difficulty anywhere in the world, I don’t know how but I feel that”, and “to study business management”.

Some wanted to start or expand their own business or organization: “to create an NGO to protect the orphans and victims of rape”, “to go back to Sudan and open my own garage”, “open a barber shop”, “to be able to live normally and to work in my profession as a computer scientist”, “to make money and return home to create my own company”, and “to expand my project of kindergarten and to go back to school to finish my studies”.

Several felt they had too little control over their lives to plan. When asked about their future plans, some said: “I can’t plan because my life is not under my control”, “I can’t start thinking about that now because I’m living in horrible situations”, “we don’t have any plans for the future we are living randomly”, “with the current situations I don’t have any vision for the future so I will keep working and will see what is going to

be”, and “I don’t have any future. I am praying to God to take my life”.

Not being able to return home and not being able to live stably in Israel presents a significant problem for most of our respondents: “I can’t plan to return to Sudan as long as the Regime is the same, and this country [Israel] also I can’t live here for long, because someone cannot even find a work in his profession.”

# Conclusion

The 58,000 African asylum seekers currently in the country find ways to support themselves, despite an increasingly difficult host environment. Xenophobic elements in Israel are increasing and 'infiltrators' is now a significant part of the political discourse. The refugee and border control policy of the current government is evolving in an increasingly restrictive direction, and asylum seekers face significant obstacles both in gaining refugee status and in finding work. Services supporting asylum seekers are ad hoc and under-resourced. Many organizations rely on a few paid staff members and volunteers, many of whom remain only for short periods.

The political climate makes it difficult to know how to advocate for refugees, or which kinds of livelihoods programs would be most effective (assuming there were resources). Improved access to information on how to access to basic services, open bank accounts, navigate busi-

ness regulations, and obtain health insurance, in addition to a basic introduction to the law and culture of Israel, would be helpful. Language and skill-building courses would improve asylum seekers' employability, or their ability to start their own small businesses. The latter would certainly benefit from more microfinance, such as that provided by Microfy. Formal training and education for asylum seekers in the current social and political environment might be politically sensitive, but skill-building courses that build human capital do not necessarily imply a long-term stay in Israel, and could be shown to increase the ability of refugees to repatriate.

# Annexes

## Annex 1: Overview of key organizations serving asylum seekers

Organization	Type	Services provided	Funding source
African Refugee Development Center (ARDC)	NGO founded by refugees and Israeli citizens to assist and empower refugees and asylum seekers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Assistance to apply for refugee status</li> <li>-Language training</li> <li>-Access to higher education</li> <li>-Women's shelter</li> <li>-Women empowerment project</li> <li>-Relocation Assistance</li> <li>-Children's summer activities</li> <li>-Advocacy</li> </ul>	UNHCR; Sigrid Rausing Trust; European Union; Royal Netherlands Embassy; New Israel Fund; The Good People Fund and private individuals
Assaf	Aid organization for refugees and asylum seekers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Youth Club</li> <li>-Advocacy</li> <li>-Psychological assistance</li> </ul>	UNHCR; The Samuel Sebba Charitable Trust - UK; The Dutch Jewish Humanitarian Fund; The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee; War Child Holland; The New Israel Fund; The Jerusalem Cornerstone Foundation; Mazon; Latet; Peat Shulhan; Shatil
Hotline for Migrant Workers	Promotes the rights of undocumented migrant workers and refugees and works to eliminate trafficking in persons in Israel	-Migrant workers from every nationality and legal status can call or schedule an appointment to get support and legal advice regarding problems they encounter with their employers	MoriahFund; UNHCR; Sabaa-Foundation; Sigrid Rausing Foundation; US State Department; others.
Kav la oved	Committed to protecting the rights of disadvantaged workers in Israel and the Occupied Territories, including Palestinians, migrant workers, subcontracted workers.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Worker's rights</li> <li>-Legal advocacy</li> <li>-International cooperation</li> <li>-Events and conferences</li> </ul>	Ford Foundation; New Israel Fund; the European Union; and NDC Foundation

Mesila	Founded by Tel Aviv Municipality to serve the needs of foreign workers, asylum seekers and refugees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Social welfare services</li> <li>-School registration information</li> <li>-UNITAF: 3 daycare centers for refugee and foreign workers' children</li> <li>-CEC: Community Education Center. Provides computer, theater, photography, Hebrew, and business classes</li> </ul>	Tel Aviv taxpayers
Hagar & Miriam (Brit Olam)	Supports pregnant asylum seeking women and women after birth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Escort young women to their pre-natal care, deliveries, post-partum care and abortions</li> <li>- Consult on family planning issues and contraception.</li> </ul>	Private donors
HIAS Israel	Assists Israel in establishing a permanent set of guidelines that will apply to those seeking asylum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Training of municipality workers on visa renewal processes</li> <li>-Training of lawyers who represent asylum claims</li> <li>-Consultations on relocation (resettlement, family reunion)</li> </ul>	HIAS headquarters in New York. UNHCR funds some of HIAS' work in other countries.
Legal Clinic at Tel Aviv University	Provides legal assistance to disadvantaged groups in Israel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Provides free legal assistance to asylum seekers</li> <li>- Promotes legislative and policy changes</li> <li>- Research and publication of reports and position papers on the asylum system in Israel</li> </ul>	Elga Cegla Center for Interdisciplinary Research; Israel; Euro-Mediterranean Foundation of Support to Human Rights Defenders (EMHRF); Denmark; European Union; Donation in the name of Eli Horowitz; Philip King Trust, UK; Netzach Israel Fund; Oram – Organization for Refuge, Asylum and Migration, US; Peres Center for Peace;

<p>Physicians for Human Rights - PHR</p>	<p>Medical care and other services that are prerequisites to health</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Medical Assistance: Provides medical diagnoses and treatment at PHR-Israel's clinics</li> <li>-Individual Assistance: Represents individual applicants vis-à-vis state authorities, with the objective of protecting their right to health and other human rights.</li> <li>-Advocacy for health and human rights of marginalized populations</li> </ul>	<p>EED Germany; EPER-HEKS Rich Foundation; European commission; DIAKONIA; Royal Embassy of the Netherlands; The Ford Foundation; Christian Aid; CheckPoint Software Technologies Ltd.; UNHCR</p>
<p>Microfy (see Annex II)</p>	<p>Provides refugees and asylum seekers the tools to sustain themselves and become economically independent</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Business training in partnership with CEC &amp; Mesila</li> <li>-Professional one-on-one business consultancy for business owners and new ventures</li> <li>-Small loans to start or develop small businesses</li> </ul>	<p>Hillel IDC; CitiBank; US State Department; private donors</p>

## Annex 2: Microfy

Microfy was established in 2010 in response to the influx of thousands of asylum seekers crossing from Sinai. Microfy is the only organization in Israel providing refugees and asylum seekers with finance-related tools to create independent sources of income.

**Business Courses:** Microfy formed a partnership with the Community Education Centre and Mesi-la to offer a business course specially designed for refugees. Faculty from Tel Aviv University worked with Microfy staff to develop a 10 week program that covers economics, marketing, finance, budgeting and legal issues. Weekly two hour sessions are held for up to 20 students and are open to anyone wanting to learn, no matter what their previous business knowledge/experience, country of origin, visa status or current situation in Israel. Staffed totally by volunteers, the course is repeated 3 times a year and has equipped many refugees with invaluable business skills and knowledge, both now and for the futures. The business courses help identify candidates for one-on-one consultancy and loans by enabling Microfy staff to gauge levels of commitment, performance and reliability before deciding who would be good candidates.

**Business Consulting:** Microfy has partnered with TASC consultancy, whose staff volunteer to offer professional advice and share their experience with refugee business owners. Not understanding issues such as tax and legal requirements often leads to the failure of small businesses. TASC consultants assist clients in devising busi-

ness plans, or with ideas to improve and expand their current businesses.

**Loans & mentoring:** Clients who demonstrate competency are invited to apply for a loan of up to NIS 5,000 (\$1,700). Together with the consultants, the clients fill out a loan application form that includes much of the information covered in the consultancy sessions. The loan repayment plan is devised and explained to ensure full client understanding and to prevent possible failure. Clients make 6 monthly payments, covering the principal and 10% annual interest. Once the loan is disbursed, Microfy assigns the client a mentor who meets with him/her regularly to monitor the business and loan utilization. If a client feels he/sh cannot repay the loan in 6 months, Microfy works with them to reorganize the repayments.

### Achievements

- 150 refugees & asylum seekers directly benefit from Microfy's projects
- 100% return on the loans
- PlaNet Finance International Microfinance Award, Paris 2010 - This is the first and only award granted to an Israeli micro finance organization.



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