

Hotline for Refugees and Migrants 2019 Annual Report

2019 marked a transitional period for asylum seekers in Israel. The past ten years were marked by a series of attacks on the asylum-seeking community consisting of mass detention, mass deportation attempts, and various forms of bureaucratic violence. These attacks wound to a close in March of this year, with the end of the attempted deportation of Congolese citizens. In the absence of a looming threat, and with the relative quiet that comes with over a year of being governed by a transitional government during the series of elections, we were able to focus solely on truly improving quality of life for asylum seekers in Israel. To do so, we worked to strengthen governmental systems to provide asylum seekers and migrants with the rights they are entitled to, ease barriers to dispersal throughout the country, and de-stigmatize asylum seekers in the eyes of the Israeli public.

Achievements in Numbers: 2019	
# of clients served	1,189 (1,132 refugees, 57 migrants)
# of detention visits	12 (6 to Saharonim, 6 to Givon)
# of individuals released from detention	5 (4 asylum seekers, 1 migrant)
# of legal interventions	50 (35 on behalf of asylum seekers, 9 on behalf of migrants, 6 on behalf of stateless individuals)
# of media items facilitated	102 (63 in Israeli media, 39 in international outlets)
# of asylum applications filled	71
# of clients accompanied to authorities	38
# of letters sent on behalf of clients	855
# of participants in educational tours and social events between asylum seekers and Israelis	1,850
# of women assisted	258
# of Freedom of Information requests submitted	13
# of research publications and submissions	6
# of advocacy meetings	44

English Media Sample 2019		
Times of Israel 26.05.2019	Estimated NIS 700 million missing in 'Deposit Law'	Link
Jerusalem Post 11.07.2019	African Migrants to Israel: Detain, deport, or ignore their existence?	Link
Times of Israel 11.07.2019	Asylum-seeker art at desert detention center is a surprising splash of color	Link
Jewish Telegraphic Agency 17.09.2019	Israel's crackdown on foreign workers is driving some families into hiding	Link
Jerusalem Post 11.12.2019	NGOs hold 'trial,' highlight violence against migrant women	Link

As we move into a new decade, it is our hope that, after two unsuccessful deportation attempts in the past two years as well as the closure of Holot Detention Center, the Israeli government will cease its attacks on the community and we will continue to make strides toward a more just migration policy and a more equal Israel for all.

1. Asylum Seekers and Refugees

Stopping Deportation to the Democratic Republic of Congo

In October 2018, with no prior notification, the Israeli government announced the end of group protection for citizens of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). This represented significant danger, as the DRC still suffers from widespread sexual violence, political suppression, and the Ebola virus. The Hotline immediately contacted the community and began providing critical individual support, media work, and governmental advocacy on behalf of this community. During this period we provided services to over half of the Congolese community in Israel, assisted the community to create their own leadership committee, and deeply strengthened our ties to the community. By the end of 2018, we had exhausted all options aside from litigation to stop this unjust deportation. On December 30, 2018, the Hotline and NGO partners filed a principle petition to the District Court, requesting to halt the plan to deport Congolese asylum seekers from Israel.

The Court issued a temporary interim injunction the next day, barring the State from carrying out deportations until further notice. On January 9, the judge issued a temporary injunction on the deportation, and on March 7, we received the happy news that **following our intervention, the government backed down from the deportation plan.** The court's decision further stated that any future reconsideration of the decision would require an updated evaluation of the conditions in the Congo conducted by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. This decision came as a great relief to the Congolese community in Israel, who will not have to disrupt the lives they have built here over the past decade or even more.

Promoting municipal inclusion of asylum seekers

As a part of our work advocating for dispersion and integration of asylum seekers outside of south Tel Aviv, we conducted 28 meetings with representatives from municipal governments, as well as the central government, throughout Israel. Throughout this process we partnered with many colleagues from fellow refugee rights nonprofits, particularly those located outside of Tel Aviv. In each meeting, we learned how different municipalities either were or were not responding to the needs of the refugee communities and discussed with them the important role that municipalities can play in dispersing the community as an alternative to Israel carrying out dangerous deportations. **This phase of the dispersion project was a major success, as it significantly contributed to capacity building** in terms of the extent to which various government offices are aware of the services they may provide to refugees, as well as refugees' unique needs. Additionally, we distributed over 200 copies of our [Guide for Integrating Asylum Seekers](#), published in December 2018, which now serves as a reference tool for many service providers throughout Israel.

Promoting connections between Israelis and asylum seekers

This year, the Hotline continued our project aiming to bring together Israelis and asylum seekers through social events, allowing the two communities to get to know one another on a human level. Throughout 2019, **we hosted 9 events with over 900 participants who came together to engage in art, sports, celebration, learning, and fun.** Below are a sample of some of our favorite events from the year.

"With the Wind in my Mind" refugee art exhibit

Between July 11-24, the Hotline hosted the first-ever art exhibit featuring photos of paintings on the walls of Holot Detention Center, by refugees who were detained there. From November 20-December 17, the exhibition traveled to Haifa where it was once again a success, bringing together Israelis and asylum seekers to hear from the artists and learn about asylum seekers' challenges in Israel. We plan to tour with the exhibit in 2020.



The Hotline's 20-year celebration

On July 8, the Hotline hosted our [20-year celebration](#) and fundraiser at the Tel Aviv Museum of Art. We were thrilled with the turnout of over 500 people, including many Israelis, refugees, and migrants alike. The evening featured performances by [Holot Theatre Group](#) and Assaf Amdursky, as well as speeches by former Vice-President of the Supreme Court of Israel and Mutasim Ali, our former client and the only Sudanese national to receive refugee status in Israel.

Run for refugee rights

Throughout 2019, the Hotline formed a running team consisting of Israelis and asylum seekers together, coached by Sudanese asylum seeker from Darfur Malik Yosef. In October, our team ran in two professional races: the Alley Race and Tel Aviv Night Run, on October 4 and 30, respectively. This initiative helped us raise nearly 100,000 Shekels and expand our network of supporters.

Combatting municipal racism in Petach Tikvah

Petach Tikvah, a city in Israel's periphery not far from Tel Aviv, has a history of electing mayors strongly opposed to the presence of the city's roughly 2,500 asylum seekers. In the beginning of the year, we had a success there when **the Supreme Court supported our appeal against the municipality's ability to shut off water and power from asylum seekers' apartments**. Then, Mayor Rami Greenberg made a public call for Israeli residents to report asylum seekers to the municipal government. We immediately condemned this racist act and began a media campaign to combat misinformation. The positive effects from our work continue to this day: in the end of December Mayor Greenberg was interviewed for a widely-read Israeli publication and asked about some of the issues that we raised in relation to this issue. This question served as confirmation that **our campaign against municipal racism brought the question of fairness to the forefront in Petach Tikvah and all Israeli municipalities**.

Fighting bureaucratic obstacles at Bnei Brak Mol Office

In the second half of 2019, we saw a sudden change at Bnei Brak Facility, one of only two locations where asylum seekers can renew their stay visas. To do so, asylum seekers are given appointments far ahead of time with no mechanism for rescheduling them for any reason. If they cannot make the appointment, they are forced to wait outside. This problem was compounded this year, when the Mol decided that only 30 asylum seekers a day can enter the facility not at their appointment time. Many of these individuals come from as far away as the Gaza border and are forced to wait for days. Furthermore, asylum seekers cannot access their bank accounts or work legally without visas, making the situation a threat to their livelihoods.

After several letters sent to the Mol did not yield results, on August 26 we filed a request to the Supreme Court to hold the State in contempt of its former judgment from 2017, where the State guaranteed proper conditions at Mol facilities. On October 28, we were disappointed to receive a Supreme Court decision that our contempt of court request was denied, thus forcing us to initiate a new legal proceeding. Therefore, on

November 25 our legal department sent an urgent letter to the Ministries of Interior and Justice about the situation. The letter requested that a mechanism be created to allow people to schedule a new appointment if they miss their original one, thus solving the problem.

Promoting rights on the ground: implementing Eritrean and Sudanese visa updates

In mid-2019 in the context of the ongoing Masgene case regarding Eritrean military deserters, the State promised that it would grant Eritrean asylum seekers visas valid for six months and remove the words "this is not a work visa." In another case in early 2019, the government announced that it would provide Sudanese from Darfur, the Nuba Mountains and the Blue Nile with a year-long visa and delete the wording "this is not a work visa." The announcement was part of a case that focused on the years-long delay in making decisions in the asylum requests of the people from those areas. These two announcements released asylum seekers from the burden of having to renew their visas every few months, but the State was reluctant to enact these changes on the ground, so we acted to ensure implementation.

In regards to Eritreans, we discovered that the clerks at Bnei Brak were unaware of the updates. Thus, we spoke with the heads of the Bnei Brak Mol office and even collected an affidavit from an asylum seeker who showed the clerks the commitment, but was still not provided with the proper visa. We gave the affidavit to our colleagues at the Tel Aviv University Refugee Rights Clinic leading the Masgene case and are working with together to have the State fulfill its promise. We were happy to have seen some Eritrean visas without the work prohibition, and will work to ensure that all Eritreans receive the proper visa.

In regards to people from Darfur and the other relevant regions of Sudan, many individuals from these areas were never formally recognized as such. Therefore, following the announcement regarding visas for individuals from these regions, we asked the Population Authority (PIBA) to make decisions regarding their identities. PIBA replied that it would recognize these people in their asylum interviews, only to later announce that due to the unrest in Sudan, it would not conduct any asylum interviews with Sudanese. These combined announcements left many Darfuris without the rights they were entitled to, so in September we filed a petition to the District Court to force the State to properly identify Sudanese. The hearing in this case is set for February 3, 2020. Furthermore, while the petition is pending, PIBA published an updated policy, according to which all Sudanese citizens will receive a year-long visa, but only those from Darfur will have the wording "this is not a work visa" removed.

While there is still a long way to go, these **two major achievements in the length of visas (six months for Eritreans and one year for Sudanese)** are a significant move forward in creating a legal environment that supports asylum seekers' dispersion in Israel. Without the need to renew their visas every few months, and with the deletion of the "this is not a work visa" wording, asylum seekers can more easily build a life anywhere in Israel, thus creating an environment for long-term inclusion within Israeli society.

Publication of Deposit Law report

In May we published our report about money going missing under the Deposit Law, the law under which 20% of asylum seekers' salaries are withheld each month, entitled [In Broad Daylight: The Deposit Law, Implementation and Impact](#). The report was published together with our partners at Kav LaOved, and exposed how the Deposit Law pushed asylum seekers into poverty: at least 50% of asylum seekers who work full time earn less than minimum wage and many have moved into the informal labor market despite the risks. **Our report also exposed the law's widespread misuse by business owners: many workers' salaries are docked, but the money is never deposited into their fund.** These findings drew further investigation from the economic newspaper Calcalist, who concluded that the sum of funds missing as a result of this law amounts to 700 million shekels. The [Calcalist article](#) was published prior to the next hearing on our case against the Deposit Law being led by Kav LaOved, which took place in the High Court on May 8. In this hearing, the court asked the State to provide more information about several matters relating

to asylum seekers in Israel. The State provided this information on June 27, after which we submitted a reply. The case is now pending a decision.

Improving asylum: publishing Country of Origin Information and translation in asylum interviews

In early 2019, **we filed a Freedom of Information appeal demanding publication of the Country of Origin Information (COI) reports that the Refugee Status Determination (RSD) unit uses to assess asylum claims.** Due to our arguments, on July 22 the State declared that it was looking into which of the materials could be published. On that ground, on July 31 the District Court formally dismissed our appeal but ruled that 6,000 NIS in expenses would be paid to our fellow petitioner and us. On October 31 the State published COI information for several countries, not including Eritrea or Sudan, arguing that COI information for other countries or public dissemination of the COI information would harm national security or foreign relations. On December 2, we submitted a request to the Mol for specific explanations about the argued harm. We requested a full list of countries on which Israel keeps COI, and justifications why certain documents cannot be sent, even if Israel has them. Obtaining updated COI information for as many countries as possible, particularly Eritrea and Sudan, will drastically increase transparency in the realm of RSD and allow better protection of asylum seekers' rights.

Another major problem we have confronted in Israel's flawed asylum system is that cases could be closed if an asylum seeker who does not speak English or Hebrew failed to bring their own translator to their RSD interview. In 2018, we submitted a petition on this subject, and on March 5, 2019 the District Court in Lod heard final arguments. **The case concluded on a highly positive note, with the Mol committing to provide interpreters in asylum procedures,** not to close any more asylum cases on these grounds, and to re-open cases that were closed on these grounds. This represents a significant improvement in the functioning of the asylum system, and in asylum seekers' ability to advocate for themselves and their asylum claims.

Providing assistance in the periphery

With the Hotline's ongoing focus on dispersion of the asylum seeker community outside Israel's central region and on broadening our services, **our Crisis Intervention Center (CIC) staff has begun providing service outside Tel Aviv by conducting short trips to the periphery** to provide assistance to asylum seekers living there. Approximately half of the asylum-seeking population lives in Tel Aviv, which is where the majority of services are provided, so traveling to the periphery provides an opportunity for the community living there to receive assistance and for us to meet new members of the asylum-seeking population. In the first half of the year, we began this new initiative with a trip to Eilat from June 17-18. During this trip, our staff assisted 11 individuals to fill out RSD (meaning of RSD) forms and assisted 44 asylum seekers with questions related to their asylum applications. On July 26, our CIC travelled to Be'er Sheva to see clients in the periphery. In one day there, we assisted nine asylum seekers in filling out RSD forms, seven of whom were women—a significantly higher proportion of women than we receive in our office in Tel Aviv. We also assisted several men in checking the status of their asylum applications, and updated everyone we assisted on the status of the pending court cases regarding Darfuri and Eritrean asylum seekers. These successful trips accentuated the need for services in the periphery. We already have multiple periphery trips planned for early 2020.

Assisting in writing asylum requests and pre-asylum interview preparation

In October 2017 the Hotline opened our RSD clinic. Applications can only be submitted in Hebrew or English, and therefore many people need assistance. Since starting the RSD clinic **our staff and volunteers have helped a total of 375 individuals write their asylum applications, of which 71 were completed in 2019.** Over half of the Eritreans and Sudanese in Israel have now submitted an RSD applications. Others are

apprehensive as they fear that a rejected claim will make them even more vulnerable. However we continue to encourage people to submit, as it is important to refuting the claim that they are not asylum seekers.

In addition to assisting in filing the requests, we also provided pre-asylum interview preparation to those who have been called for an interview. During the beginning of the year, we provided pre-asylum interview preparation for a number of Darfuris and Congolese. This followed the Congolese deportation scare and the RSD unit's commitment from late 2018 to conduct interviews with Darfuris. More recently, PIBA once again halted Sudanese asylum interviews due to the changing situation in Sudan, and began interviewing small numbers of Eritreans—who we have also been preparing. In addition, we prepared brochures in French, Arabic, English, Hebrew, and Tigrinya about what to expect in RSD interviews and what rights individuals have during RSD interviews. This is an important resource for the entire community.

Right to family unity

For a long time, we have been working on the issue of the right for families to remain together regardless of the status of their asylum requests. In cases where a couple met and live together in Israel, the State claims that they have no responsibility to allow the couple to stay together even if the couple has children in Israel. In 2018, we began litigating a case on behalf of an Eritrean-Ethiopian couple who began their relationship and were married in Israel. In February 2019, after filing a request for the court to reconsider its previous stance, we received a disappointing decision upholding the court's previous decision that if the family wanted to stay together, they could go to a 'third country', which we know to be an unsafe option. The case is now pending in the Appeals Tribunal and has received a temporary injunction, meaning that the wife is safe from deportation until a final verdict is reached.

On May 30 our Legal Department submitted a principle petition to the District Court in Jerusalem, requesting that the court order PIBA to change Section 12c in the Procedure for Handling Political Asylum Seekers in Israel. **The change we are requesting would allow partners of asylum seekers to submit a request to fall under the same legal status as their partner**, regardless of whether the relationship began in Israel or elsewhere. This would finally be a solution for situations like our case above.

High-profile Iranian asylum case

In 2019, we took on the case of an Iranian asylum seeker who fled Iran for Turkey, where she lived in safety for a few years before her status was revoked, at which point Israel's Minister of Interior invited her to apply for asylum in Israel. She did so, but has not received an answer to her asylum application in many months, which is the matter in which we are representing her. On September 8 we sent a letter to the Minister of Interior, and on November 5 we filed an appeal to the Jerusalem Appeals Tribunal asking the MoI to respond to her asylum request. We are now waiting for the MoI's response. **This case is significant because it is a high profile example of the failings in Israel's RSD system:** our client is Iranian, and the Minister of Interior personally invited our client to apply for refugee status in Israel in a public manner with significant media attention years ago, yet still her application was neglected.

Saving asylum seekers from deportation

Since 2011, we have been representing two clients who come from an African country with a brutal ongoing civil war. Our clients have reason to believe that, if they are ever deported back to their country of origin, they will face violence for having resided in Israel, which is why we do not publicize the name of this country. When they entered Israel in 2009, Israel did not have its own asylum system, so it was up to the UNHCR to decide which asylum seekers deserved refugee status. Despite the UNHCR's confirmation that they deserved refugee status, Israel did not grant it. After spending over a year in Saharonim Prison, their

asylum requests were rejected in 2011. We took the case to court and eventually reached a compromise with the State, ensuring that our clients would not be deported and would continue to receive visas. Two years ago, however, without warning, PIBA decided to withdraw our agreement, gave one of the clients a new deportation order, and denied his visa. We returned to court, and on April 29 of this year, **our appeal ended successfully: the Appeals Tribunal ordered Mol to return our client's visa, not to deport either client, and to reconsider their asylum requests.** After this successful final verdict, on May 26 we submitted two reconsideration requests to the RSD unit. These two clients were relieved to hear that they are safe from deportation in the time being and hopeful that, after ten years in Israel, their asylum requests might finally be evaluated in earnest.

Litigation on behalf of LGBT Nigerian asylum seeker

In February, we began representing a Nigerian asylum seeker who had been held in Yahalom Airport Detention Center without being allowed to submit an asylum request—a flagrant violation of the law. We assisted with his asylum application, which was rejected, and filed an appeal to prevent his immediate deportation. We learned that he was fleeing persecution in Nigeria on the basis of sexual orientation, and managed to forbid his deportation, although he was forced to remain in detention in Givon Prison. The reason **the State rejected his asylum application** was not on the basis that being gay in Nigeria does not warrant refugee status, but **because it said that his claim of being gay was not credible.** The State's disbelief of his sexual orientation is based on two main issues: stereotyping and cultural misunderstandings. **The Hotline filed an appeal against the Mol's decision to dismiss his asylum claim on grounds that he was not credible,** which became the beginning of a long legal battle regarding his asylum case, potential deportation, and continued detention. Sadly, on January 19 the District Court rejected our appeal.

In another aspect of this case, we received a harsh decision saying that because we represent him pro bono, we and all the other legal NGOs representing vulnerable clients ought to be able to pay all his legal fees "so the burden doesn't fall on the State." This decision was alarming to us and to our peers in the nonprofit sector in Israel, as it would make legal work on behalf of vulnerable clients more expensive and less sustainable. We quickly submitted an internal appeal regarding this decision and were pleased that the District Court accepted all of our arguments, saying that even when someone is represented pro bono by an NGO, the NGO is not liable for any of the relevant fees.

2. Protection of Migrants' Rights

Construction workers in conditions of forced labor

One of our long-term cases is on behalf of employees of Yilmazlar, a Turkish construction company with operations in Israel. Yilmazlar has a unique visa arrangement where they are able to hire 1,200 workers in Turkey to come to Israel to work only for foreign construction companies. While on paper this arrangement does not constitute binding an employee to their employer, in reality the only other foreign construction companies operating in Israel are Chinese, and Turkish speakers would not be able to work there. For years, we have heard stories of slavery-like work conditions at Yilmazlar. Because they have no realistic ability to work for any other company nor access to Israeli authorities, however, they are vulnerable to exploitation.

Our current case is on behalf of five former employees of Yimazlar who left the company due to those rights violations. We aim to provide them with work visas that will allow them to work in other Israeli construction companies. After several legal hearings throughout 2019, the cases traveled throughout the various levels of the court including the Supreme Court, and have now returned to the Appeals Tribunal in Jerusalem and we are waiting for hearings in February prior to a final decision. Today four of our five clients are eligible for interim visas that allow them to work for other Israeli construction companies.

Supporting Filipina mothers in their fight against deportation of Israeli-born children

Over the past several months, the [United Children of Israel](#) (UCI) has been leading a campaign against the deportation of migrant workers and their school-age Israeli-born children from Israel. The UCI was founded by a group of Filipina migrant workers and mothers of Israeli-born children in the summer of 2017, and has been more active than ever in light of summer 2019's drastic increase in the number of schoolchildren issued deportation orders. The Hotline led the public campaign against child deportation from 2003 to 2006, when a one-time decision was reached granting status to nearly a thousand migrant children. In 2009, the Immigration Authority again threatened to deport children, and the Hotline supported the organization "Israeli Children" that operated at that time. In 2010, the government made another one-time decision to grant status and prevent deportation.



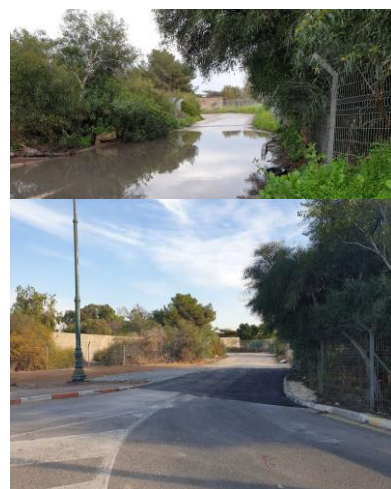
Today, **the Hotline is proud to support the mothers' struggle against deportation of Israeli-born children.** We help the campaign by providing advice and facilitating media attention, drawing on our experiences from 2003-2006 and 2009-2010 to advise and assist.

Granting status to a Filipino family

Some of our oldest clients are a Filipino family we have been representing for ten years in three different court procedures arguing that they should have gotten status as they fall under the 2010 decision granting residency in Israel for children who fulfill certain conditions and their parents. On September 2 we received a decision from the Appeals Tribunal finally saying that the family will receive status in Israel! The children will receive permanent residency and the parents will receive temporary residency. **After ten years of work, we were thrilled to be able to finally tell our clients that they would be able to have a stable life in Israel.**

Improving access to Beit Dagan Mol Facility

On March 3, **we filed a complaint to the Mol regarding the lack of accessibility to Beit Dagan, a Mol facility where hundreds of migrants are required to report monthly and sometimes weekly** to renew their stay visas, undergo hearings, and more. In our letter of complaint, supported by photos taken around the facility, we argued the facility is essentially hidden and lacks proper signage. To reach the facility, people are required to walk alongside a highway, thus endangering their lives. There are no safe pedestrian roads leading to the office, only a dirt road which floods quickly in the event of rain. Along with the Mol, we sent the letter to the Commissioner for the Equality of People with Disabilities in the Ministry of Justice, urging



them to intervene in the matter. By December, the road in front of Beit Dagan had been repaired, there was increased signage, and a new bus station right in front of the facility.

3. Supporting Survivors of Human Trafficking

Survivors of human trafficking

Under Israel's framework, certain individuals may be formally recognized as survivors of human trafficking. This status entitles them to rehabilitative housing, a one-year work visa, and psychological as well as physical healthcare. These services are vitally important for many survivors of human trafficking, whose physical and psychological states are often so poor that they are unable to provide for themselves or maintain stable housing. To attain this status, however, requires significant work on the part of the Hotline. To "prove" human trafficking requires a high threshold of evidentiary support, for which the Hotline speaks with external psychologists, collects countless documents from various government agencies, interviews survivors, attains medical records, and more. Even after a long period of research, the Police Task Force on Human Trafficking, the only body with the authority to grant this status, recognizes very few individuals.

Throughout 2019, **the Hotline has interviewed 37 individuals who we considered advocating for to receive recognized status. Of those, we submitted ten, and four were recognized.** Of these four, two women were survivors of human trafficking and torture in the Sinai Peninsula, one man was a Serbian construction worker subject to conditions of slavery, and one additional woman was a sex trafficking victim from Turkey.

Challenging the evidentiary threshold for recognizing Sinai torture victims as victims of trafficking

In 2019, we have been representing a survivor of the Sinai torture camps who was rejected as a survivor of human trafficking because we utilized the Istanbul Protocol, a procedure designed for victims of torture, to examine his case and provide supporting evidence. While this procedure typically applies to victims of torture, not human trafficking, there is significant overlap between those two definitions, making the findings of the procedure highly relevant for his case. Originally, we appealed to the Ministry of Justice, who rejected our appeal on the grounds that they were not the right venue to take up the appeal. **Our next step will be to submit a petition to the High Court. This case has the potential to set a significant precedent regarding recognition of trafficking victims** and become an important part of the case law on this issue.

Protecting the future of 44 Ethiopian women who fell victim to trafficking in persons

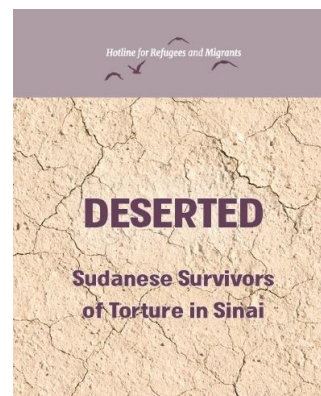
In 2010, a group of 44 teenage girls from Ethiopia was kidnapped from their homes. After being kidnapped, the girls were taken to Sudan and then onto the Sinai Peninsula before eventually entering Israel. Throughout the entire journey before they reached Israel, the girls were violently tortured. When the group finally entered Israel in 2012, all of the girls were sent to Saharonim Prison. This was a major violation of governmental policy, as most of the girls were minors. Furthermore, as the group had been formally recognized as victims of human trafficking, they were supposed to be placed in residential rehabilitation shelters. However the State failed to follow proper procedure, and instead kept them in detention for over a year.

Today, the women cannot return to Ethiopia due to the discrimination they will suffer there as victims of rape, but their circumstances do not fall under the criteria listed in the Refugee Convention. Due to the extreme humanitarian situation, **the Hotline will initiate a non-conventional request for the Ministry of Interior to provide special humanitarian status for this group of young women.** This is not an official procedure, however the case warrants special consideration. The combination of the State's malpractice

and the group's severe humanitarian needs merit this unique solution.

Publication of report on Darfuri victims of torture in Sinai

In August 2018, the Hotline identified a group of Sudanese asylum seekers who had been tortured in Sinai. This group caused a paradigm shift, as between 2010, when the Hotline first discovered the phenomenon of torture for ransom in Sinai, and 2018, when these Darfuri victims were discovered, we had only come in contact with Eritrean victims, and we (along with the relevant authorities) thought that only Eritreans were tortured in Sinai. Since entering Israel, these men have met with Israeli government officials in the Border Authority, Population and Immigration Authority, Detention Review Tribunal, Israeli Prison Service, hospitals, and other venues. Despite the myriad opportunities, however, the government never recognized any member of this group a trafficking victim. It is the stated role of the government, including the Israeli Police Taskforce on Human Trafficking, and the Ministry of Justice, to identify victims of trafficking. By demonstrating this failure to identify a particularly vulnerable population over seven years of their being in the country, **our report highlights the flaws in Israel's TIP recognition system.** It will prove valuable in future lobbying for reform.

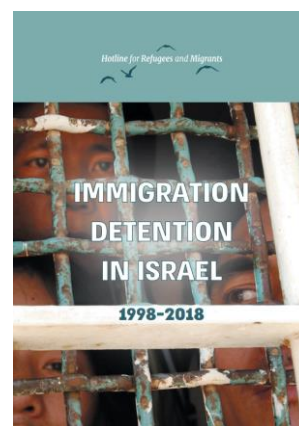


TIP signs identification video

In December, we premiered a new video in Hebrew, English, Arabic, and Russian detailing telltale signs of human trafficking. Our goal is to disseminate this video throughout the Israeli public in the hopes that it may help previously unidentified trafficking victims. The video was created in collaboration with students and professors from the Bezelel Academy of Art and Design.

4. Protecting Rights in Immigration Detention

20 years of detention trends report



We used the celebration of our 20-year anniversary to publish a one-of-a-kind report which traces the macro trends in Israeli immigration detention.

The report includes a description of the history of the immigration detention facilities, as well as of creating the legal institutions now in place for monitoring and protecting the rights of immigration detainees.

The report also gives special attention to the protection given to asylum seekers and refugees, as well as vulnerable groups of detainees: victims of sex trafficking, minors, women, and families. The report also includes an analysis and historic description of the ongoing monitoring an abbreviated list of the main legal cases from the last 20 years which affected and shaped modern immigration detention in Israel. This overarching account allows us to make diagnostic judgments about the most necessary changes to the immigration detention system, as well as educated predictions about the future of the system. It is also a unique source of knowledge for other organizations, researchers, and policymakers in the field of migration.

Releases from detention

Since the cancellation of the mass deportation plan in 2018, there are fewer asylum seekers in detention than in any other time in the last decade. Today those who remain are the most vulnerable individuals with the most complex cases. Releasing these individuals from prison is complex and often requires months of work, multiple hearings at the Detention Review Tribunal, and legal appeals. This is the reason for the decline in our release numbers in comparison to previous years.

We released five people from detention in 2019. The first man released was a Sinai torture survivor with a contested nationality; he says he is Eritrean but the authorities believe he is Ethiopian. He has been held in detention on-and-off for over seven years during which time he made multiple suicide attempts. We managed to get him released again on the basis that the State is unable to deport him, and that his mental state in detention is very poor. The second man we released from detention was a Darfuri who was detained under the Criminal Procedure after committing a petty crime and held in immigration detention for seven months. The Criminal Procedure allows asylum seekers convicted of criminal charges to be held indefinitely in immigration detention even after the conclusion of their criminal sentence. We worked on his case for months and attended multiple hearings before achieving a release decision. The third detention release was a mentally ill woman for whom we managed to attain State-funded legal representation.

The fourth was a stateless Guinean client who was released from prison after many years when we found a guardian who was willing to watch over him. The fifth was an Eritrean man held under the Criminal Procedure. We argued that our client, a homeless person fighting addiction, committed the relevant offences to finance his own consumption of drugs, and that his addiction stems from his past as survivor of torture in the Sinai camps and his total lack of social support in Israel. The judge asked us to find a custody alternative that includes some form of rehabilitation, and he was released from detention on December 9.

Breaking the vicious cycle of stateless detainees

For years, the Hotline has been working to assist de facto stateless individuals in and outside of detention. While some of our many legal cases remain pending in the courts, as of now no legal solution has been achieved, thus leading us to search for new avenues—namely lobbying and advocacy—through which to assist this vulnerable group. Just as our search began, we were approached by a veteran of Israel's Foreign Service who served as Ambassador to multiple African countries and is eager to further our shared goals. He volunteered to join us in collaboratively writing and publicly co-authoring a research report on the issue of de facto statelessness in Israel; his unique perspective as a former high-level government employee provides

otherwise unattainable insight into the options available to end the vicious cycle of detention, release, arrest, and detention. **The report will serve as an important tool for a broader advocacy initiative aiming to engage in dialogue with the State and reform policy affecting stateless individuals in Israel, to the benefit of all parties.**

Publication of the annual detention monitoring report

In early April the Hotline published our [2018 annual detention monitoring report](#). Our annual monitoring reports are a central tool in holding the Immigration Authority and Prison Services accountable and in our ongoing work to improve conditions in the immigration detention facilities. **The major issues covered in this year's report included detention of children, access to the Yahalom Airport Detention Center, and violence by immigration officials.** The report was widely publicized, leading to a public debate regarding the use of violence against refugees and migrants. We are in the midst of an ongoing effort to create a body to investigate violence by immigration officers, which was strengthened by the increased public awareness of this issue brought on by the media attention surrounding our 2018 detention monitoring report.

Ensuring proper procedure in the Detention Review Tribunal

In June, **we sent a complaint letter to Michal Tzuk Shafir, head of the Entry to Israel Law Review Tribunals, regarding the terseness of and lack of uniformity in the transcripts of the Detention Review Tribunal**, the body that decides on immigration detainees' continued detention or release. On August 27, we received a reply from Tzuk Shafir's deputy in which he stated that, in accordance with the judicial independence principle, it is appropriate to intervene in the manner in which the adjudicators conduct their hearings. We found the reply unsatisfactory and on August 28 sent a letter to the Ministry of Justice's Legal Advisor, who supervises the Detention Review Tribunals. In the letter, we stated that the recommendations in our letter only concerned the procedural aspect of the tribunals' hearings and could not possibly be considered a violation of the judicial independence principle. We therefore requested her intervention in the matter.

Letter to Minister of Justice regarding representation of long-term detainees

On July 10, we wrote a letter to the Minister of Justice on the matter of representation of prolonged detention of asylum seekers, migrants, and de facto stateless people. **We asked the Minister to promote legislation ensuring State-funded representation of such detainees.** In the letter we noted that in recent years there are significantly fewer detainees, thus the cost would be negligible, and that this approach would be consistent with the State's actions legal actions to protect other fundamental rights.

Improving conditions in Yahalom Airport Detention Center

In the end of 2018, we represented 12 Sri Lankan asylum seekers who had been held in Yahalom Airport Detention Center, and not allowed to apply for asylum. Ultimately the political situation in Sri Lanka changed, allowing our clients to return home safely, but this case led to a principle petition and a complex legal battle on the conditions in and oversight of Yahalom. This case ended on December 31 2019, when the Supreme Court ruled against us, saying that administrative oversight regarding detention in Yahalom—as opposed to mandatory oversight by the court—was sufficient in safeguarding detainees' rights.

Although this was a disappointing decision, **we have seen improvements in regards to conditions in Yahalom since our case began.** Multiple clients of ours were allowed to file asylum claims from Yahalom this year, which used to be impossible. Furthermore, an earlier judgement sharply criticized the conditions there. This criticism resulted in a significant improvement: the MoI will have to re-examine the justification for individuals' detention in Yahalom every 14 days, rather than every 30 days.

Organizational Development

New Executive Director and Director of International Relations and Development

We welcomed our new Executive Director, Dr. Ayelet Oz, on January 1 2019. Dr. Oz comes to us from the Public Defender's Office in the Ministry of Justice where she served as the Director of the Administrative Law Division from 2016-2018. She holds a Bachelors' Degrees from Tel Aviv University and a Doctorate of Juridical Science from Harvard University.

On August 1 2019 we said goodbye to Tamara Newman, who served as our Director of International Relations and Development for the past five years. We look forward to seeing all she accomplishes in her future endeavors. She was replaced by Emily Zoffer, who worked together with Tamara as the Hotline's Development Officer for ten months. Emily holds a Bachelor's Degree from Harvard University and a Master's Degree in Nonprofit Management & Leadership from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

20 Years of Human Rights Achievements

In November, we published a [book celebrating the Hotline's 20th anniversary](#) in English and Hebrew. The book contains a series of short essays containing reflections on the Hotline's achievements written in a personal narrative style by those staff, volunteers, clients, and supporters who experienced them firsthand.