



HOTLINE FOR REFUGEES AND MIGRANTS 2021 REPORT

HRM IN NUMBERS

1994

TOTAL CLIENTS

1,132 clients via in-person or telephone reception, **862** via WhatsApp

79%

SUCCESS RATE

33% - request of client granted; 22% - asylum application filed and pending decision; 14% - the client was referred to another organization; 10% - counseling only.

268

WOMEN CLIENTS

24% of the applicants in HRM's reception and 51% of our legal clients were women.

112

ASYLUM SEEKERS PREPARED FOR ASYLUM INTERVIEWS

73 new asylum applications filed, **43** requests to re-open asylum applications filed

Hotline for Refugees and Migrants: 2021 Report

For over 20 years, the Hotline for Refugees and Migrants (HRM) has been fighting for and protecting the rights of refugees, migrant workers, and survivors of human trafficking in Israel.

In 2021, after over two years, several attempts, and a global pandemic, a governing coalition was finally formed. This relative political stability has created new opportunities for change, particularly regarding subjects that have been pushed aside due to Covid. Therefore, in 2021, we made progress and reached major breakthroughs in several important issues:

Protecting survivors of human trafficking

- Legal proceedings and advocacy work done by HRM have **led the government to publish detailed procedures setting the formal criteria for recognizing individuals as victims of human trafficking** and ensuring the protection of their privacy, safety and dignity throughout the process. **Since the publication of the draft procedure, 100% of the trafficking victims HRM has recognized were formally recognized!**

Granting protections to Ethiopians from the Tigray region

- Following the civil war that is ongoing in Ethiopia since November 2020, **HRM and fellow NGOs have convinced the Israeli government to grant protection from deportation to residents of the Tigray region in Ethiopia who reside in Israel, thus protecting them from being sent to an area the UN termed as "the worst humanitarian crisis in the world today".**

Rehabilitative services for Sinai torture survivors

- After years of advocacy by HRM and fellow NGOs, fighting for recognition for Sinai torture survivors, **in November 2021 the government approved the budget for its 2018 decision to provide certain rehabilitative services to survivors of the Sinai torture camps, thus correcting a decade-long injustice.** HRM and its partners will continue to fight so that the victims can access those services by the end of 2022.

Protecting Asylum Seekers Rights and Improving the Asylum System

Main 2021 achievements

- **Assisted 1,994 asylum seekers and migrants**
- **Helped asylum seekers fill 73 asylum requests**
- **Helped 47 asylum seekers re-open their asylum cases (most of them Ethiopians from the Tigray region)**
- **Prepared 112 asylum seekers for asylum interviews**
- **Obtained temporary protection from deportation to Ethiopians from the Tigray region (with partners)**
- **Led the government to press charges against a prison guard who assaulted an asylum seeker women**
- **Conducted a media and lobby workshop for 10 leaders of the asylum-seeking community**
- **Published a Passover Haggadah with refugee art which was sold in over 200 copies**

The Asylum Seekers Situation Today

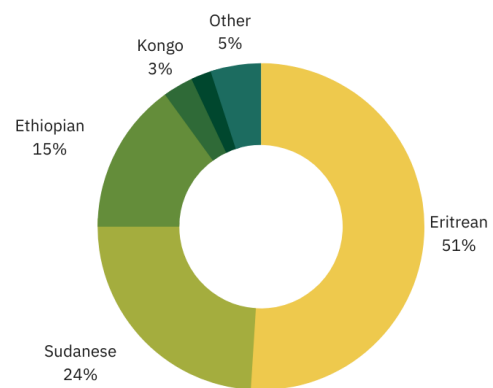
Despite our two decades-long fight, the legal and social environment for asylum seekers in Israel remains extremely challenging, given the deficiencies in the country's asylum system. Israel has not adopted any national refugee legislation; the recognition rate is well below 1%; and many asylum seekers have lost hope and seek for protection in other countries. The refugee community in Israel today is composed of less than 30,000 people, less than a half than their number in the early 2010s, but those who have stayed in Israel are in a greater need than ever for protection and stability.

While the picture may seem grim, the last couple of years brought considerable progress in comparison to the pitfalls of anti-refugee policies we have witnessed throughout most of the 2010s - there are very few asylum seekers in detention today; there is no current plan for mass-deportation; the "Deposit Law"(which de facto confiscated a material portion of the salaries of those asylum seekers who managed to find gainful employment) was struck down by the Supreme Court in 2020; and close to 2,500 asylum seekers from Darfur, the Nuba Mountains and the Blue Nile are supposed to receive temporary status as a result of a Supreme Court decision from earlier this year. **These and other achievements show that while the road ahead is long and challenging, we should not give up and that we should continue to insist that Israel abides by the Refugee Convention and provides protection for those who fled for their lives.**

HRM works to assist refugees and asylum seekers and to push Israel to fulfill its international commitments by combining three modes of work - **individual legal and para-legal assistance** to refugees; **legal work focusing on principles that affect large numbers of refugees**; and **media and advocacy work** in order to change perceptions in the Israeli public and within decision makers regarding refugees and asylum seekers.

Individual Assistance:

In 2021, HRM represented 1,994 clients. The majority of our clients are Eritreans, Sudanese and Ethiopians. The data portrays a remarkable picture of success - we have managed to assist 79% of our clients (in 33% of cases, our requests were granted; in 22% we have helped clients file for asylum and are waiting for a decision; in 14% we have referred the clients to other NGOs or attorneys; and in 10% we have offered professional advice to our clients). In only 8% of our cases were we unable to assist our clients. (The other cases are those in which the case became superfluous or we have lost contact with the client or other circumstances).



HRM clients: breakdown by nationality

Legal Achievements:

HRM's legal department represents individuals in legal proceedings as well as promotes litigation on matters affecting groups of individuals. In 2021, we have initiated a total of **78** legal interventions. Of those, 51% were in individual cases (of which one fifth were detainees); and 49% were principle issues which effect the entire refugees and migrants population.

Providing protection to asylum seekers from the Tigray war zone in Ethiopia

HRM has been following closely the situation in the Tigray region in Ethiopia since November 2020. As a result of HRM's advocacy, together with HIAS and TAU Refugee Clinic, on November 2021 the Israeli government agreed to provide protection against deportation to residents of the Tigray region who reside in Israel. HRM has assisted over 80 residents of Tigray since.



Client case: Escalating violence in Tigray

Tsagai (pseudonym), is an Ethiopian citizen of Tigray origin. Tsagai was a political activist who tried to inspire change in his country. Because of his activities, he was interrogated and imprisoned. Due to his persecution by the authorities and the understanding that he could be imprisoned again because of his political opinions, he was forced to flee Ethiopia until the situation was safe for him to return. He arrived in Israel temporarily with a tourist visa, but due to fear for his life as the Ethiopian police searched for him and interrogated his family, he applied for political asylum in Israel. In the asylum interview, he said: "I believe in Ethiopia. But who will accept me and my family in our city? Amhara people expel Oromo, Oromo expels Tigray people. Where can we live if there is such discrimination?" Nevertheless, his asylum request was denied.

After the outbreak of the civil war in the Tigray province of Ethiopia in November 2020, Tsagai came to us unsettled, frightened and concerned for the lives of his family in Tigray. He asked us to help him open his asylum application for re-examination. Following our appeal to grant temporary protection against deportation to Ethiopia to people from the Tigray region, Tsagai has been granted a temporary permit and is now protected. [\[To learn more on Tsagai's story – click here\]](#).

Fighting for protecting asylum seekers from Eritrea

Since June 2019, The Immigration Authority has published 1,063 decisions in asylum requests of Eritreans, of them only 16 asylum seekers received refugee status (0.01%). **Dozens of those rejected have come to HRM, and we have reviewed in depth over 40 rejections, and currently represent in legal proceedings three Eritreans who were wrongly rejected.** The main legal question in those cases and others focuses on the interpretation of the Refugee Convention in regards to Eritreans, and specifically, does fear of retaliation due to desertion from the Eritrean army constitutes fear of political persecution according to the Convention. The cases are still ongoing, but the legal decisions reached in them will affect thousands of Eritreans with similar asylum claims.

Client case: protecting Erica after being sexually assaulted by a prison guard

We supported Erica (pseudonym), an asylum seeker who was sexually assaulted by a prison guard while being held in Givon Prison. The complaint filed by Erica led to an investigation during which it was revealed that she was not the only victim of the prison guard's criminal actions. Yet despite this significant evidence, we were informed in May 2020 that the States Attorney's Office decided not to file an indictment. **We appealed the decision, and in June 2021, we were informed that our appeal had been accepted and the prison guard who sexually assaulted Erica was prosecuted!** [\[To learn more on Erica's story – click here\]](#)

Changing perceptions among Israelis:



Media and Lobby Training Workshop for asylum seeker activists

In 2021, HRM developed and conducted a four-meeting workshop for leaders of the asylum seeker community. The workshop took place during August through November 2021 and included meetings with journalists, former members of the Knesset and others. **Our workshop assisted the community leaders and future leaders to develop their media and lobby skills, so that they can better self-advocate and**

represent their community to the Israeli public and decision-makers. We received very positive feedback from the participants. Aranshi, one of the participants, told us that she was happy to participate in the workshop and that she feels that it will "lead her in the right direction". **Cody, another participant, told us that he felt he had been given tools and was re-motivated:** While he had previously been giving lectures on the subject, he stopped as he had seen no change, but now, thanks to our workshop, he regained hope that change is possible.

Passover Haggadah with refugee art

For Passover, we created a beautiful Haggadah which mixes artwork from African asylum seekers with messages about their communities, suggesting the similarities between current-day refugees and the Israelites' Exodus from Egypt. Over 200 Israelis have bought copies of the Haggadah.



Developing a guide for journalists

על מה אנחנו מדברים כשאנחנו מדברים על מבקשי מקלט?

מסמך זה נכתב עבור עיתונאים ואנשי
תקשורת המעוניינים להביא מידע מהימן
על סוגיית מבקשי המקלט בישראל

In collaboration with the Refugee Organizations Forum, we have created a guide for journalists about the legal and social status of asylum seekers in Israel - "What Do We Talk about When We Talk about Asylum Seekers". The aim of this guide is to ensure more accurate reporting and to combat stereotypes about asylum seekers that appear in the media. The guide was widely

distributed among relevant journalists in most media venues in Israel.

Fighting Trafficking in Persons (TIP) and Protecting Survivors

Main 2021 achievements

- Led the government to publish a first-of-its-kind procedure for formally recognizing TIP survivors
- All of the TIP survivors we represented this year were formally recognized!
- 7 survivors we identified were recognized as victims of human trafficking
- 5 lectures given on TIP identification to partner organizations, to over 100 participants
- Produced an art exhibition of portraits of victims of human trafficking, which attracted 500 visitors
- Published "20 years of fighting human trafficking" research report
- Granting temporary status to 27 Ethiopian trafficking victims who were kidnapped as teenagers
- Government budget approved for rehabilitative services for Sinai torture survivors (with partners)

New Procedure Upholding the Privacy and Dignity of Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Victims

Last year, we have raised the issue of the way in which interviews of trafficking survivors were held: victims were taken to the police station; were harshly interrogated, as if they were criminals; and were left horrified and hurt after the interview. **Following HRM's advocacy and media on the topic, we are happy to say that the situation has completely changed in 2021!** We have escorted 7 victims to recognition interviews this year, and in all of them the picture was utterly different: the interviews were held in our offices or in another familiar environment, with the clients accompanied by our staff (and in especially vulnerable cases, by their therapist or social worker); the police officer conducting the interview came with no police uniform; and the interviews were attentive and protective as much

as possible. These protective measures were also codified in a new recognition procedure, published on October 2021 by the police, as a result of an 2020 HRM Supreme Court case.

All of our clients this year were formally recognized as TIP survivors, a status which entitles them to rehabilitative housing, a one-year work visa, and psychological as well as physical healthcare. Of the seven survivors, three women (an Eritrean and two Ethiopians) had been held in slavery-like conditions in Israel by their husbands and were referred to us by social workers at "No 2 Violence" NGOs' shelters; two women (Ethiopians) had been held in slavery-like conditions by their employers in Jordan and the Palestinian Authority, and fled to Israel; and the last two were Sinai torture camps survivors, a man and a woman.

100 %

recognized as victims of TIP

HRM identified and referred to the Police unit **seven survivors** of human trafficking. All of them were formally recognized as victims of human trafficking and received the designated rehabilitative services they are entitled to.

Training NGOs and front-line organizations to identify and recognize TIP survivors

Due to the positive changes in the TIP recognition landscape, HRM started educating NGOs and organizations which deal with vulnerable populations on how to assist their clients who are victims of human trafficking. **In 2021 we conducted four training sessions for six organizations.** We hope that by spreading the word and making sure as many front-liners as possible know how to identify and assist TIP survivors, more survivors will be able to receive the help and rehabilitation they need.

Rehabilitative services to Sinai torture survivors

In 2021 there were more than 3,000 asylum seekers in Israel who had fallen victim to the horrors of the torture camps that operated in Sinai in the early 2010s. For years HRM and its partners, Physicians for Human Rights and ASSAF - Aid Organization for Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Israel, have been advocating and fighting for rehabilitative services to Sinai torture survivors. In 2021 we have finally seen the first step to implementing those services! **In November, the government approved the budget for its 2018 decision to provide certain rehabilitative services to survivors of the Sinai torture camps, thus correcting a decade-long injustice.** HRM and its partners will of course continue to fight until these services are available to all who needs them.

Fighting for survivors of human trafficking who were kidnapped as teenagers

In 2010, a group of 27 teenage girls from Ethiopia was kidnapped and taken to Sudan and then onto the Sinai Peninsula before entering Israel in 2012. Throughout the entire journey, the girls were violently tortured and were thus recognized as victims of human trafficking after they entered Israel. Today, ten years later, the women still cannot return to Ethiopia due to the discrimination they will suffer there as victims of rape, and due to the devastating effect it will have on their rehabilitation. Since 2019, we are representing these women to acquire permanent status in Israel. **In January 2021, we achieved**

temporary status for them, and filed an appeal for them to receive permanent status as we had requested. A hearing was scheduled for December 2021, but prior to the hearing the Ministry of the Interior requested to re-consider its position and make a new decision in their case.



Desta Getana Tsegai next to her portrait



Naama Sabato (in the middle) with part of the women she painted

In order to increase public awareness for their case, on the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women that took place on November 25th, HRM organized an **art exhibition which presented portraits of these women**. The artist, Naama Sabato, accompanied these women in 2018 as a social worker in Mesila. She painted a series of portraits of the women, with the participation and involvement of the women themselves. Over 500 people came to visit the exhibition, which was displayed between November 25-29 in the Fine 3 art gallery in Tel Aviv.

Publishing of "20 Years of Fighting Human Trafficking" Research Report

In 2022 the government will begin implementing its 2019 National Plan for Fighting Human Trafficking, after for the first time in a decade, in 2021 Israel dropped to the second tier of countries fighting trafficking, according to the US state department TIP report. In order to influence the government's priorities in implementing the plan, we published a comprehensive research report analyzing HRM's 20 years' experience in promoting the fight against human trafficking among migrants. The



Report describes the major trends and conclusions of our last twenty years of activity. For example, the report criticizes the fact that while Israel's policies to fight human trafficking have come close to eradicating trafficking in women from the former Soviet Union for the sex industry, the state has not yet adopted policies that properly address the trafficking offenses committed against migrant

workers or that present a solution to new trade patterns that have developed in the last decade. The report received significant media attention.

Knesset hearings on Fighting Human Trafficking

In 2021, we participated in six Knesset hearings in total, two of them focused on human trafficking. In December the head of HRM's legal department Adv. Inbar Barel participated in the Knesset's Women Committee and raised the issue of the status of the 27 Ethiopian TIP victims as well as problems regarding the lack of protection given by the inter-ministerial humanitarian committee to other victims.



Adv. Inbar Barel, Head of HRM's legal team, in the Knesset hearing

Protecting the Rights of Refugees and Migrants in Detention

Main 2021 achievements

- **Leading the Detention Tribunal to start a program to educate adjudicators about detainees with mental disabilities**
- **Leading the Knesset Committee on Migrant Workers to conduct two visits to immigration detention facilities**
- **Publishing the yearly detention monitoring report**

As the only NGO with access to immigration detention facilities, HRM continued its work during 2021 to reduce the scope of long-term immigration detention in Israel and to improve detention conditions for migrants and asylum seekers. In the last couple of years, and more so since the beginning of the pandemic, the number of detainees in immigration detention has been constantly dropping. Nevertheless, we continue to closely monitor the situation and the decisions of the Detention Review Tribunal, to make sure no detainee is forgotten in prison.

Client case: Stopping a Deportation of a Mentally Disabled Detainee to Sudan

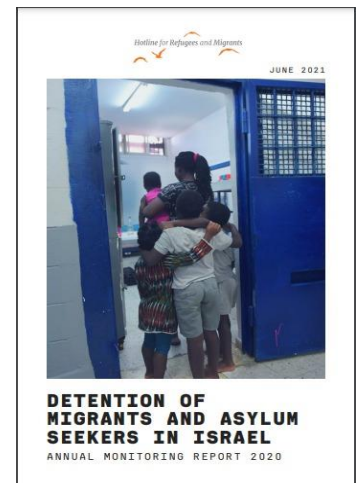
In April 2021, during our regular review of the Detention Tribunal's transcripts, we noticed a case of a Sudanese asylum seeker who had agreed to be deported to Sudan, but his testimony at the tribunal suggested some significant concerns about his mental health and capacity to advocate for himself. The MoI immediately arranged a flight for him to Sudan, despite his unsettling statements during the hearing. **We rushed to visit him in detention, but the meeting has only confirmed our suspicions. Therefore, we demanded that the government not deport him before receiving a psychiatric opinion that confirms that he is able to make an informed decision as to his return to Sudan.** The Commission for Equal Rights of Persons with Disabilities at the Ministry of Justice supported our request, and he was sent to undergo a psychiatric assessment, which revealed he was unable to make that judgement call. **Subsequently, following the psychiatric opinion, the person was released from detention.**

Protecting Immigration Detainees with Mental Disabilities.

Following a few cases that we identified of detainees who had mental disabilities but were not recognized as such by the authorities, in April 2021 we sent a letter to the head of the Detention Tribunal, calling the tribunal to take responsibility for identifying detainees who may be mentally disabled and to appoint state-funded attorneys to represent their cases. **The head of the Detention Tribunal accepted our request, and agreed to implement formal training sessions for all adjudicators with the Prison Service's head psychiatrist, and has thanked us for bringing the topic to her attention.**

Publishing our yearly Detention Monitoring Report

Since 2015, HRM has published a yearly monitoring report, which details the main information and testimonies regarding holding of migrants in detention in Israel. In July 2021, we published our yearly detention monitoring report for the year 2020. In the report, we noted that while in 2020 the number of immigration detainees had dropped, the problem of long-term detainees remained salient, with over 20 detainees held in detention for over a year. Other topics we covered in the report include the violation of rights of the detainees due to the Corona epidemic; lack of recognition and treatment for victims of trafficking and detainees with mental illness and issues relating to the detention of women and families with children.



Knesset Committee visits to Immigration Detention Facilities

Following HRM's advocacy, the Migrant Workers Parliamentary Committee made two visits to immigration detention facilities this year - in October to the Yahalom detention facility at the Ben Gurion Airport; and in December to the Givon detention facility in Ramla. In both visits, HRM staff educated the members of Knesset about the issues, as well as asked difficult questions of the representatives of PIBA who were present, and HRM's reports served as the main source for information and data. In the Yahalom visit, the new general manager of the Population and Immigration Authority, Tomer Moskovitch, praised the HRM yearly monitoring reports and said that he encourages civil society criticism and that he is sure that



MK Ibtisam Mara'ane in the Givon visit, accompanied by Adv. Inbar Barel and Sigal Rozen from HRM

these reports contributed to the fact that every year the detainees in the facility are detained for shorter period before their deportation.

Organizational Updates and Staff Well-Being

In September 2021, HRM has vacated its old offices, and moved to Beit Hakehilot (The Communities House), alongside with Elifelet, ARDC, PICATI and Mesila. The new shared offices hold the potential for increased cooperation with our colleagues and with the communities we serve.

Staff Wellbeing: HRM is committed to protecting the wellbeing of its staff and clients. HRM staff participates regularly in group sessions with a psychologist, in order to allow both emotional support to the staff members as well as reduce compassion fatigue and other forms of burnout to improve our services to the communities we serve. HRM has a detailed Code of Ethics and Anti Sexual Harassment policy and receives regular trainings in order to ensure a safe environment for staff and clients alike.



Maysoon, Kibrum, Asmait, Sigal and Alexandra saying goodbye to HRM's old offices