

MID-YEAR REPORT

January-June 2022

20
22



HOTLINE FOR REFUGEES AND MIGRANTS

Mid-Year Report – January-June 2022

July 2022

Contents

Overview	2
Asylum Seekers' Situation in Israel Today	3
Removal of Group Protection From Citizens of the Congo in Israel	4
Ukrainian Refugees	5
Fighting for Eritrean Asylum Seekers	6
Putting an End to "Asylum Limbo" and Promoting Legal Status for Darfurians	7
Promoting the Rights of Asylum-Seeking Women	7
Erica's Story	8
Promoting the Rights of Children of Asylum Seekers	8
Lisa's Story	10
Promoting Asylum Seekers' Self-Representation	10
Protecting the Rights of Victims of Human Trafficking	11
Salach's Story	12
Protecting Rights in Immigration Detention	12
Vilma's Story	13
Organizational Development	13

Overview

THE FIRST HALF OF 2022 FORCED THE HOTLINE FOR REFUGEES AND MIGRANTS (HRM) TO RE-ADJUST TO UNEXPECTED EMERGENCIES, AS TIME AND TIME AGAIN REALITY HAS CHANGED.

In February, in light of the Ukraine crisis, we have fought to make Israel stand up to its moral and legal commitments towards those fleeing the horrors of the war, while simultaneously marking its ongoing mistreatment of the African refugees who have fled to Israel over a decade ago. Less than two months later, in April, we were faced with the announcement that Israel will remove its protection from the citizens of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), putting men, women, and children who were protected in Israel for over 20 years in risk of deportation. And lately, on June 30, we were confronted with yet another threat to the lives of refugees in Israel, as the Ministry of Interior published a new procedure, severely limiting the right to work of asylum seekers.

We have faced those recurring emergencies by relying on HRM's experience in promoting principle legal action and public advocacy, while at the same time individually assisting hundreds of asylum seekers and maintaining a close connection and partnership with the communities we serve.

11In light of the dissolution of the Knesset on June 20, it is hard to foresee what the future holds for the most vulnerable people in Israel. The last six months have sadly taught us that anti-refugee forces are still strong and determined in their quest to make the lives of refugees in Israel intolerable and renounce Israel's legal, moral, and historic commitments to refugees. We are determined to fight those forces and uphold Israel's commitments and protect those who need us the most.

ACHIEVEMENTS JANUARY-JUNE 2022

- ✓ Stop the deportation of asylum seekers from the Congo.
- ✓ Lead Israeli decision-makers to provide basic rights to those fleeing the war in Ukraine.
- ✓ Publish a report analyzing the main flaws in the way Israel reviews Eritrean asylum requests.
- ✓ Assist asylum seekers, and especially women, all over Israel.
- ✓ Initiate a Knesset hearing on status for children of asylum seekers.
- ✓ Produce an art exhibition for World Refugee Day and attract thousands of Israelis to visit it.
- ✓ Support refugee participation in the Knesset and the media.
- ✓ Achieve government-funded legal aid to victims of human trafficking.
- ✓ End the handcuffing of migrant women in detention.

HRM IN NUMBERS

IN ONLY 6 MONTHS WE...



REPRESENTED 1,170 CLIENTS

644 of them face-to-face.
526 via WhatsApp.

ASSISTED 114 CLIENTS TO BETTER PRESENT THEIR ASYLUM CLAIMS

Assisted 52 clients in applying for asylum.

Prepared 54 clients for asylum interviews.

Escorted 7 especially vulnerable clients to asylum interviews.

Assisted 8 clients in re-opening their closed asylum requests.



ASSISTED 30% WOMEN

Of the 644 face-to-face clients, 192 were women.



HELD 3 RECEPTION DAYS FOR WOMEN IN THE PERIPHERY

In Eilat we assisted 32 women in two reception hours.

In Haifa we assisted 40 women and identified 3 survivors of human trafficking.

ASSISTED 226 DARFURIS TO RECEIVE LEGAL STATUS

Following the 2021 Supreme Court ruling in the Tagal case.



INITIATED A TOTAL OF 32 LEGAL INTERVENTIONS

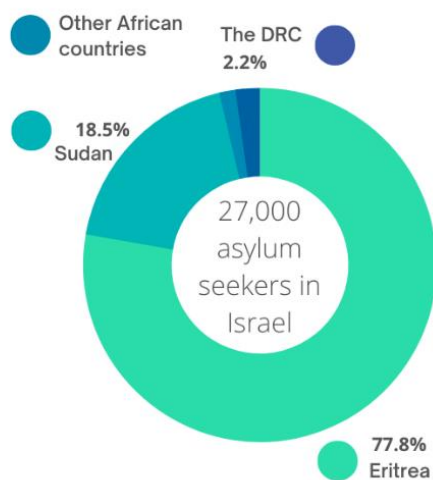
12 Individual cases.

20 Principal issues which affect the entire refugee and migrant population.



Asylum Seekers' Situation in Israel Today

AS OF JUNE 2022, THE LEGAL AND SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT FOR ASYLUM SEEKERS IN ISRAEL STILL FALLS SHORT OF ESTABLISHING AN INTERNATIONALLY ACCEPTABLE ASYLUM SYSTEM. ISRAEL HAS NOT ADOPTED ANY NATIONAL REFUGEE LEGISLATION; THE RECOGNITION RATE IS WELL BELOW 1%; THERE IS NO TIME LIMIT FOR DECIDING ASYLUM REQUESTS; NO COHERENT GROUP PROTECTION POLICY; AND IN LATE JUNE 2022, THE ASYLUM SEEKERS' RIGHT TO WORK IN ISRAEL WAS SEVERELY LIMITED. NOT SURPRISINGLY, MANY ASYLUM SEEKERS HAVE LOST HOPE AND SEEK PROTECTION IN OTHER WESTERN COUNTRIES.



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 principle issues that affect large numbers of refugees; and media and advocacy work to change the Israeli public’s and decision-makers’ perceptions regarding refugees and asylum seekers.**

Removal of Group Protection From Citizens of the Congo in Israel

ON APRIL 5, 2022, INTERIOR MINISTER AYELET SHAKED ANNOUNCED THE REMOVAL OF GROUP PROTECTION FOR CITIZENS OF THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO (DRC) WHICH THEY HAVE HELD SINCE 2003 (IN 2018 THEN-INTERIOR MINISTER ARYEH DERI ATTEMPTED TO REMOVE THE PROTECTION, BUT WAS BLOCKED FROM DOING SO FOLLOWING A COURT PETITION FILED BY HRM).

Immediately after the [announcement](#), we reached out to the Congolese community in Israel (numbering about 400 people, including 130 women and 50 children), explaining the Minister's message. On April 12, we held an open meeting at a community church, attended by several dozen people, in which we explained the legal significance of the announcement and our plans for a public and legal battle. In addition, we



Community meeting with Congolese community members and HRM staff

created a WhatsApp group so that we may update community members on an ongoing basis about any changes in the situation.

We have also initiated a discussion in the Knesset's Interior Committee, in which two Congolese asylum seekers, [Tonton Amisi Kalupa](#) and [Patrick Kapuya Tshiuma](#) called the Knesset to oppose the decision. At the end of the hearing, **the Interior Committee called on the Interior Minister to reverse her decision.**



From left to right: Shani Bar Tuvia of the Refugee Forum, Ayelet Oz, Tonton Amisi Kalupa, and Patrick Kapuya Tshiuma at the Knesset Hearing

On May 3rd, [we filed a petition](#), together with HIAS Israel and in the name of other NGOs, to the Jerusalem District Court. **That same day the court granted a temporary injunction preventing the removal of the group protection until the case is decided, "to prevent substantial and irreversible damage."** The petition is scheduled for hearing on September 8, 2022.

Ukrainian Refugees

ON FEBRUARY 24, RUSSIA INVADED UKRAINE, CAUSING THE BIGGEST REFUGEE CRISIS IN EUROPE SINCE WWII, WITH OVER 6 MILLION REFUGEES. OVER 26,000 NON-JEWISH UKRAINIAN REFUGEES ENTERED ISRAEL SINCE THE BEGINNING OF THE WAR, AND CURRENTLY RESIDING IN ISRAEL ARE ROUGHLY 14,000 NON-JEWISH UKRAINIANS WHO HAVE ENTERED SINCE THE WAR BEGAN AND 15,000 UKRAINIANS WHO WERE IN ISRAEL PRIOR THE INVASION AND ARE CURRENTLY RESIDING IN ISRAEL UNDER A GROUP PROTECTION POLICY.

Since the beginning of the war, HRM and fellow NGOs have promoted advocacy, lobby, and media work to make sure Israel provides protection and basic rights to those fleeing the war in Ukraine, under a clear group protection policy (read [Dr. Ayelet Oz's op-ed on the matter](#)). We have managed to push [Israel to set a non-exclusion policy for Ukrainians](#) and release all Ukrainians held in detention; to provide basic rights to those fleeing the war; and [to allow all Ukrainians to work legally](#). **Within the first month of the war, we initiated 12 media items and participated in 5 Knesset sessions regarding the rights given to Ukrainian refugees.**

Our expertise proved especially vital in regard to the detention of the Ukrainian refugees at the Yahalom Detention Center at Ben Gurion Airport. [We provided information and assistance to reporters](#) and Members of Knesset and [presented information in relevant Knesset hearings](#). Following the hearing, MK Ibtisam Mara'ana [proposed a bill](#) that aims to strengthen the supervision over the facility.



A tweet by MK Ibtisam Mara'ana from a visit she conducted at the facility

Fighting for Eritrean Asylum Seekers

THE MAJORITY OF ASYLUM SEEKERS IN ISRAEL ARE ERITREAN, THAT ARE RECOGNIZED AS REFUGEES IN HIGH NUMBERS WORLDWIDE (AN AVERAGE OF 80% RECOGNITION RATE IN EU COUNTRIES), BUT IN ISRAEL, THE VAST MAJORITY OF ERITREANS' ASYLUM REQUESTS ARE DENIED (THE RECOGNITION RATE FALLS BELOW 0.5%).

In addition to our ongoing legal cases, on June 30 we published, together with HIAS Israel, [a report](#) analyzing the way Eritrean asylum requests are being considered and the main flaws that lead to the overwhelming rejection rate. The report will serve as a reference for attorneys representing Eritrean asylum seekers, judges, international bodies, and decision-makers.



Putting an End to "Asylum Limbo" and Promoting Legal Status for Darfurians

ONE OF THE MAIN FLAWS OF THE ISRAELI ASYLUM SYSTEM IS THE FACT THAT THERE IS NO TIME RESTRAINT FOR DECIDING ASYLUM REQUESTS, LEAVING MANY WITH NO CLEAR DECISION IN THEIR CASES FOR YEARS OR EVEN DECADES.

We decided to put an end to "Asylum Limbo" (detailed in our September 2020 report "[Trapped in Limbo](#)") and on June 12, 2022, we filed [a petition to the district court](#), requesting that the government set a maximum time frame for deciding asylum cases, according to international standards.

We have also assisted hundreds of Sudanese refugees from Darfur, the Nuba Mountains, and the Blue Nile regions receive temporary residence, following the 2021 Supreme Court ruling in the *Tagal* case. According to the decision, close to 2,500 Darfuri refugees were given temporary residence as they have been waiting for decisions in their cases for over for years to no avail. **In the first half of 2022, HRM has assisted a total of 226 Sudanese to access their status.**

Promoting the Rights of Asylum-Seeking Women

ONE OF OUR GOALS FOR 2022 IS TO PROMOTE THE RIGHTS OF ASYLUM-SEEKING WOMEN AND EMPOWER THEM. WOMEN FORM ABOUT 20% OF THE AFRICAN ASYLUM-SEEKING COMMUNITY (AND A FAR LARGER PERCENTAGE OF THE UKRAINIAN REFUGEE COMMUNITY), THE MAJORITY OF WHOM ARE MOTHERS OF YOUNG CHILDREN.

In the first half of 2021, we have increased the rate of our women clients from 24% to 30%, while focusing on the most vulnerable women – such as victims of human trafficking and domestic violence – who many time refrain from reaching out to assistance because they fear people in their community will know about their situation and socially ostracize them, or because they live outside of Tel Aviv and find it hard to reach our offices.



Reception for asylum-seeking women in Haifa

Therefore, in February, our field team members went for a two-day visit to Eilat, where they hosted two reception hours only for women (one for Eritreans and one for Sudanese) and assisted 32 women. In May, our team held a reception day for asylum-seeking women in Haifa, assisted 40 women, and identified 3 victims of human trafficking. These trips were extremely fruitful and important, as we have learned for example that many of the women were unaware of the fact that their spouse's asylum application did not apply to them too, and that they needed to submit their own individual applications



Reception for asylum seekers in Eilat



Reception for asylum-seeking women in Haifa

Erica's Story

Since 2019, we are supporting Erica (pseudonym), an asylum seeker who was sexually assaulted by a prison guard while being held in Givon Prison. Erica's complaint 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, the state decided not to file charges. In 2021 we successfully appealed the decision, so the prison guard was prosecuted. **In June 2022, based on our clients' testimony, the prison guard was convicted on all accusations.** He is now waiting for his sentencing. Read the article in *YNET* [here](#) (Hebrew).

Promoting the Rights of Children of Asylum Seekers

NEARLY 8,000 CHILDREN HAVE BEEN BORN IN ISRAEL TO ASYLUM SEEKER PARENTS, MOSTLY FROM ERITREA, AS WELL AS SUDAN, AND THE DRC. THESE CHILDREN ARE EDUCATED IN THE ISRAELI EDUCATION SYSTEM, THEIR PRIMARY LANGUAGE IS HEBREW, AND THEIR CULTURE IS ISRAELI, BUT THEY HAVE NO PERMANENT STATUS IN ISRAEL, AND THEY LIVE WITHOUT SECURITY, STABILITY, OR A GENUINE ABILITY TO PLAN FOR THEIR FUTURES. STUDIES SHOW THAT THIS INSTABILITY AND THE ONGOING THREAT OF DEPORTATION SEVERELY IMPAIR THEIR

DEVELOPMENT. HRM HAS BEEN DETERMINED TO CHANGE THIS REALITY, AND TO CONVINCING DECISION MAKERS TO PROVIDE THOSE CHILDREN WITH A PERMANENT STATUS IN ISRAEL.

Therefore, on World Refugee Day, June 20, we published [a research report](#) criticizing the way the State of Israel treats children of asylum seekers. The report compares Israel's policies with those of ten Western countries and shows that if the children of asylum seekers in Israel had lived in any of the other ten countries for the same length of time as they have resided in Israel, they would have already been entitled to citizenship or permanent residency.



We have presented the report in a special Knesset hearing which called the government to grant permanent status to those children. Teenage asylum-seeking girls and parents presented their stories in the hearing (see [here](#) two of the speakers in the Knesset), and the report and the hearing attracted [significant media attention](#). Aranshi Fithawi, an asylum-seeking teenager, has also published [an op-ed in "At" magazine](#) about her life in Israel as a daughter of asylum seekers from Eritrea. We will continue advocacy on the matter once a new government is formed.



Arsema Teame speaking in the Knesset

To engage the Israeli public to support our fight for the rights of children of asylum seekers, we also organized an art exhibition on World Refugee Day, [presenting photographs by the talented Emmanuel Lam](#) (27), an asylum seeker from South Sudan who arrived in Israel with his mother and sibling when he was 12 years old. In the exhibition, he presented pictures of his friends – all of whom grew up in Israel as children of migrants and asylum seekers. Thousands of people visited the exhibition that was presented in the Dizengoff Center in Tel Aviv. The exhibition was held in collaboration with Elifelet, ARDC, and UNHCR, and curated by Dr. Tal Frenkel Alroy.

>> [Watch here](#) the exhibition's beautiful video clip prepared by Filmon Berhe, Eritrean asylum seeker filmmaker.



Emmanuel Lam gives a speech on the opening evening of his exhibition

Lisa's Story

Lisa (pseudonym) came to us with her two teenage daughters. She has told us that as a girl she was forced to undergo female genital mutilation, and she was terrified that if deported, her girls would face a similar future. We have sent a request to reopen her asylum case, after a decade in it was closed, supporting our request with the results of a medical examination proving her story. The Refugee Status Determination Unit accepted our request and ordered the reopening of her asylum case. She received a visa that allows her for the time being to work and earn a living in Israel, without fear of deportation.

Promoting Asylum Seekers' Self-Representation

During 2021-2022 we developed and conducted a **media and lobbying workshop for new leaders of the asylum seeker community**. The workshop took place from August through June 2021 and included training meetings with journalists, former Members of Knesset, and others. In 2022, the graduates of the workshop practiced their newfound skills by meeting with Members of Knesset, writing op-eds, giving lectures to the Israeli public, and more.

>> [Watch here](#) Kibrom Twelde speaks at the UNHCR's event for World Refugee Day about the asylum seekers' mental strength (Hebrew).



"Speaking for Ourselves": Media and Lobby workshop



Protecting the Rights of Victims of Human Trafficking

IN THE FIRST HALF OF 2022, WE ASSISTED 5 PEOPLE TO FILE REQUESTS TO BE FORMALLY ACKNOWLEDGED AS VICTIMS OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING (ONE TOGETHER WITH THE LEVINSKY CLINIC). OF THEM, 4 WERE RECOGNIZED AS VICTIMS OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING, AND WE ARE REPRESENTING THE ONE NOT RECOGNIZED IN LEGAL PROCEEDINGS AGAINST HIS REJECTION.

In 2021 we began to share with fellow front-line NGOs our experience in identifying and assisting victims of human trafficking, **In the first half of 2022, we conducted 4 training sessions for relevant organizations and NGOs:** The Public Defender's Office, The Legal Aid Center for Olim (LACO) at the Israel Religious Action Center; CIMI, Elem, and Unitaf. **Following our trainings, at least 2 individuals were identified and recognized as victims of human trafficking.**

Lastly, in November 2021 we sent, together with Kav Laoved, [comments to the Memorandum of the Legal Aid Act](#) which then excluded victims of human trafficking from receiving legal representation as victims of crime. Following our comments, [the bill was changed](#) to include victims of human trafficking as well. On June 28, just before the dissolution of the Knesset, the bill passed its first vote in the Knesset Assembly, so it will continue to be legislated into law in the forthcoming Knesset.

Salach's Story

Salach (pseudonym) was sent by his father when he was only 7 to work as a camel shepherd. He was forced to work throughout his entire adolescence without getting paid, with no access to healthcare, and without being able to work elsewhere or have a family life. He was subject to mental and physical abuse by his employers. As an adult, he managed to flee his servitude and reach Israel. After we assisted him to file for asylum and became aware of his story, we helped him to file for recognition as a victim of human trafficking. He was formally recognized as a victim of human trafficking and slavery and can now start his long journey for rehabilitation.

Protecting Rights in Immigration Detention

AS THE ONLY NGO WITH ACCESS TO IMMIGRATION DETENTION FACILITIES, HRM PLAYS A VITAL ROLE IN PROTECTING THE RIGHTS ON IMMIGRATION DETAINEES IN ISRAEL. IN THE LAST COUPLE OF YEARS, AND MORE SO SINCE THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC, THE NUMBER OF DETAINEES IN IMMIGRATION DETENTION HAS BEEN CONSTANTLY DROPPING. NEVERTHELESS, WE CONTINUE TO CLOSELY MONITOR THE TRANSCRIPTS OF THE DETENTION REVIEW TRIBUNAL, TO MAKE SURE NO DETAINEE IS FORGOTTEN IN PRISON.

Based on our monitoring, **in January we located five decisions in which an adjudicator unlawfully imposed punitive expenses on detainees** in amounts that come as high as 20,000 Shekels. The next day, we sent an urgent request to the head of the tribunal and argued that these decisions were rendered without authority. **The following day, following our request, all of the decisions were overturned.**

In another occasion, while visiting her client in detention, **one of our attorneys witnessed two women migrants handcuffed to each other in Givon Immigration Prison**, in violation of the law and prison procedures, we filed a complaint to the Minister of Internal Security, as well as [initiated media attention](#). Following our letter, Israel Prison Services conducted an examination regarding how detained migrants are restrained in Givon. Moreover, **and the legal consultant of Israel Prison**

Services was instructed to hold occasional visits to the site and monitor the proper implementation of the procedure.

Lastly, and following recurring complaints we filed to the Head of the Detention Review Tribunal regarding poor translation services in the hearings, the Tribunal conducted trainings with the relevant translators, as well as published a manual for the translators, including key terms and phrases.

Vilma's Story

One morning, we received an urgent call from a nurse in a central hospital. She told us one of her dialysis patients, a migrant from the Philippines, was arrested by the Immigration Authority but needed to attend a dialysis treatment scheduled later that day. With the help of our peers at Physicians for Human Rights Israel, we were quickly able to obtain an up-to-date medical summary of her situation and bring it to the relevant authorities' attention. We succeeded, she was released a few hours later, and she was given a three-month visa so that she could plan her return home safely in light of her complex medical condition.

Organizational Development

After a year of work, Asmait Merhatsion, one of the coordinators of our CIC team, has left the HRM for resettlement in Canada. We look forward to seeing all she accomplishes in her future endeavors. She was replaced by Netsnet Tsegay, an Eritrean asylum seeker and a mother of three. We welcome Netsnet warmly to our team!

This year, we have lost two close friends of the HRM. Yuval Frenkel, Amigur's CEO and a supporter of the HRM, and Dr. Tally Kritzman-Amir, a refugee law scholar and an activist. We mourn their passing, and we send our condolences to their families.