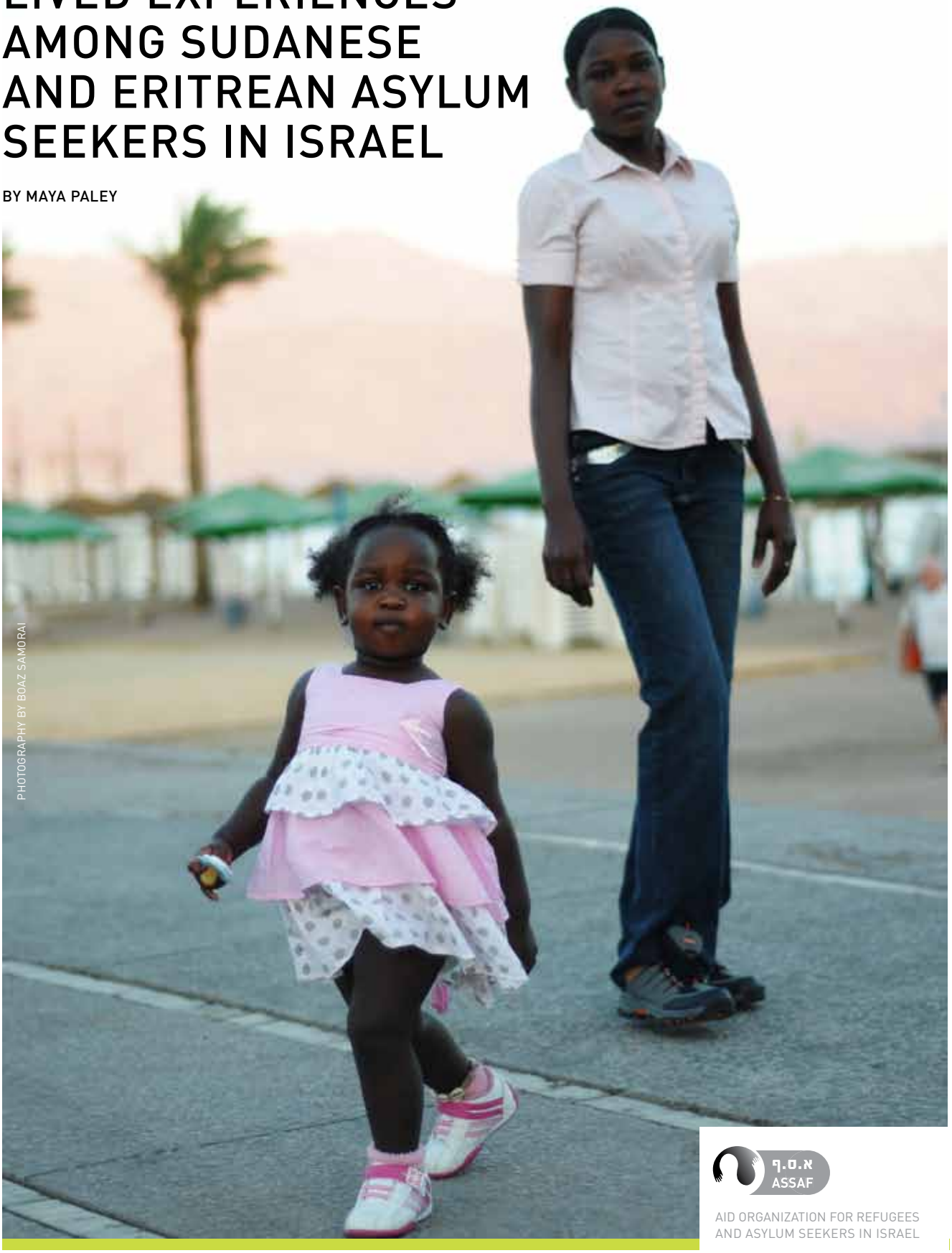
# SURVIVING IN LIMBO

## LIVED EXPERIENCES AMONG SUDANESE AND ERITREAN ASYLUM SEEKERS IN ISRAEL

BY MAYA PALEY



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JUNE 2011

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# SURVIVING IN LIMBO

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BY MAYA PALEY

THIS REPORT IS THE FIRST OF TWO IN THE SERIES ENTITLED 'SURVIVING IN LIMBO'.
THE SECOND REPORT COVERS THE COMMUNITY FORMATION AND CHALLENGES OF THE ERITREAN AND SUDANESE POPULATIONS IN ISRAEL,
WHILE THIS REPORT FOCUSES ON THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF INDIVIDUAL ASYLUM SEEKERS.

# CONTENTS

I'd like to dedicate this report to my grandfather, Saba Lester Paley, a man who believed in me unconditionally, and whose model of ethics and integrity are something one can only aspire to. Thank you, Saba, for teaching me to fight for what is right.

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This project was made possible due to the support, encouragement, and effort of many individuals. I would first like to express my deepest appreciation to all of the respondents, community advisors, and friends from the Eritrean and Sudanese communities who not only took the time out of their busy schedules to meet and spend time with me, but who were more than willing to share their knowledge and experiences, as well as to welcome me into their lives and homes. I would especially like to express gratitude toward the translators who did much more than just translate. Thank you to Domoz Bereket, Tesfu Berhane, Echlas Goma, Guy Josif, Nyadak Michael, Nuredin Musa, Mehari Okbay, Zebib Sultan, and Isayas Teklebrhan for spending countless hours visiting sites, attending events, translating, introducing me to others, and answering any and all of the questions I had for you. Thank you to Sunday Dieng and Morris Mlwal for your assistance throughout the project. This project would never have been accomplished without all of you.

I would particularly like to thank Yiftach Millo for supervising and supporting this research, and for volunteering much of his time to work with me on assessing and analyzing the report. I would also like to thank the rest of the ASSAF staff - Aladin Abaker, Bracha Shapiro, Hamutal Blanc, Merav Bat Gil, Orit Marom, Orit Rubin, Rachel Posner, and Ronen Halabi. I'd especially like to thank Orit Marom for ensuring that my experience as a Social Justice Fellow at ASSAF was meaningful and positive, Aladin Abaker for being a great friend and advisor throughout the project, Rachel Posner for reading through and editing the final draft, and Merav Bat Gil for both editing the final draft and for her incessant care and support throughout the year. Thank you to the ASSAF Board of Directors as well, especially to Michal Givoni for her insights on the purpose and goals of the research. Thank you to all of the transcribers - Abe Paluch, Dora Kishinevsky, Lee Samuel, Linda Livni, Nitzan Lubi, Or Lazmi, Trey Neufeld - Pierce, and Tzipora Henig - for your hard work, and to all the practitioners who met with me and gave me key information for the research.

Thank you to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees for your ongoing support of ASSAF and of this research project. Thank you as well to War Child Holland for your advice and assistance.

I cannot express enough gratitude to the New Israel Fund and Shatil for providing me with the NIF/Shatil Social Justice Fellowship, without which I would not have been able to conduct this project. I would especially like to thank Anat Yona and Dana Pereg for helping me get through some of the personal challenges I faced while conducting this research. Thank you to all of the other NIF/Shatil Fellows - you have been wonderful friends throughout the year.

I am grateful to Devora Liss, Keren Simons, and Rachel Singer, and to my loving father, Robby Paley, for editing the report on very short notice. Thank you to all of my incredible family and friends for all of your support and love throughout the year - you know who you are. To my parents Tiky and Robby - words cannot describe how much I appreciate you both.

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY


PHOTOGRAPHY BY LIOR PATEL

Since 2005, an estimated 35,000 asylum seekers from African countries have entered Israel's borders. The Israeli government estimates that almost 60% are from Eritrea and over 25% come from Sudan. The government has issued temporary 3-month visas to over 26,000 of the asylum seekers, work permits to 2000 Eritreans, and temporary residence permits to almost 500 Darfuris. Nevertheless, the refugee status determination (RSD) procedure in Israel remains inaccessible and acquiring refugee status is almost impossible for non-Jewish asylum seekers who make their way to Israel. And in November 2010, in an effort to contain and deter asylum seekers from entering Israel, the Knesset approved of a plan to build a detention facility to house 8,000-10,000 asylum seekers in an isolated area of the Negev desert.

As the State's policies toward the asylum seekers harshen in order to deter asylum seekers from coming and to encourage those who are in Israel to leave, social, economic, and psychological impacts on the asylum seekers who already live in Israel are increasingly apparent. These policies have resulted in the exclusion of asylum seekers not only from accessing social services, but also from living 'normal' lives within Israeli society. The Sudanese and Eritreans have adapted traditional methods of assisting members of their respective communities and have established various networks and means for aiding themselves. Furthermore, Israeli Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) have stepped in to provide many of the social services asylum seekers do not receive in Israel.

The CSOs, however, are unable to meet all of the needs of the asylum seekers, let alone to fully comprehend the complexities of their daily lives; and, the asylum seekers' community organizations do not have the financial capacity nor the bargaining power to meet all of their community members' needs either. Accordingly, the objective of this research project was to gain knowledge and an understanding of the various self-help mechanisms, both formal and informal, of the South Sudanese, Darfuri, and Eritrean populations currently residing within Israel's borders and to provide recommendations to the CSOs, community organizations, and Israeli government agencies on how to reduce the gaps between what the asylum seekers need or desire and what they receive or aspire toward. This report aims to provide a voice, in their own words, of the lived experiences of the asylum seekers in Israel.

The limbo that asylum seekers experience as their present and futures are uncertain leads many to suffer from anxiety, depression, and hopelessness. Their complicated visa status, employment insecurity, lack of social services, and lack of health insurance and access are only the tangible challenges asylum seekers experience. Beyond financial and physical pressures, many asylum seekers are pessimistic with regard to their personal lives, especially single men whose prospects for establishing families and for achieving stability are slim. Furthermore, traditional gender roles undergo significant changes in Israel, changing family dynamics and affecting gender relations. Also, it is not always possible for asylum seekers to practice cultural traditions and religious rituals, causing feelings of remorse and hindering people from finding outlets to cope with their daily lives. Some asylum seekers become so distressed that they choose to go back to their respective countries, knowing that their decision is risky and that opportunities will likely be minimal for them. Of course, some individuals find positive outlets by becoming active in their communities - religious, political, or cultural.

For asylum seekers who have been in Israel for several years, they feel that they have exhausted their efforts to achieve their goals or to improve their future prospects. Most people simply deal with their sadness or stress by not dealing with it. Many asylum seekers sleep all day long if they cannot find work. Most asylum seekers express that daily challenges like not eating or sleeping in the park are minor problems in comparison to the more complex issues they face like the uncertainty about their futures.

Most of the Israeli CSOs working with the asylum seekers believe that the State of Israel should take responsibility and adequately provide protection for the asylum seekers in Israel, including the implementation of a proper Refugee Status Determination procedure. However, until the government makes the appropriate changes, there are modifications that the CSOs can make to improve the current situation for asylum seekers in Israel.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

**CSOS** CSOs should rely on the participation and voice of the refugee community members themselves, especially when it comes to the decisions CSOs make about the services they choose to provide to the asylum seekers as well as about their political and advocacy goals. Without this change, CSOs will continue to feel burdened by the more vulnerable asylum seekers who lack the necessary information and ability to access services in Israel on their own. Moreover, the community organizations will increasingly isolate themselves from the CSOs, as they grow to feel excluded and silenced by them.

**ASYLUM SEEKER COMMUNITIES AND GROUPS** Community leaders should aim to be as clear and direct about the needs of their communities with CSOs, including how they think the CSOs can help them meet those needs. Community groups should identify major stakeholders for their communities and make direct connections with them with the aim to become less dependent on CSOs to make such connections. On the psychosocial level, it is recommended that community groups form or strengthen existent formal and informal support groups through which community members can discuss their problems and can support each other in their own languages and through their own methods.

**GOVERNMENT AGENCIES** Government agencies are encouraged to recognize the sensitive and challenging situation asylum seekers face while living in Israel. The daily stresses asylum seekers deal with in Israel, as expressed throughout this report, are obvious and overwhelming. Such stress causes long-term psychological harms to asylum seekers. Government agencies are encouraged to establish direct relationships with community groups and leaders in order to increase dialogue and understandings between them with the goal of minimizing the negative experiences asylum seekers face in their state of limbo in Israel. Government agencies are strongly encouraged to prioritize clear and long-term policy decisions regarding the asylum seekers, rather than continuously making policy changes. The most critical policy goal is to set up an appropriate and fair Refugee Status Determination procedure for asylum seekers in Israel.

# INTRODUCTION


PHOTOGRAPHY BY VLADI ESPINOZA

# BACKGROUND

At the time of writing (May 2011), an estimated 35,000 asylum seekers from African countries are residing within Israel's borders. This figure relies on a report published by the Israeli Knesset in January 2011, which quantifies the "Numbers of infiltrators[a] and asylum seekers in recent years":[1]

| YEAR OF ENTRY | TO END 2006 | 2007 | 2008 | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 | TOTAL |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| NUMBER OF INFILTRATORS | 1,070 | 5,005 | 8,698 | 4,827 | 13,686 | 153 | 33,439 |

People from Sudan and Eritrea began arriving to Israel in 2005, with the largest waves arriving since 2007. These refugees make their way to Israel through the Sinai desert after paying high fees to Bedouin smugglers who bring them to the border with Israel. At that point they are required to make their way to the other side, and risk being shot by the Egyptian border police. According to the same Knesset document, among the "infiltrators" currently in Israel, 57.4% are Eritrean and 25.1% are Sudanese.[2]

According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees' Statistical Yearbooks, the number of applications for asylum in Israel increased from 922 in 2004 to 9,087 in 2009.[3] Two years later, the number of applications for asylum is undoubtedly even higher. While surrounding countries in the Middle East, especially Egypt, house significantly larger amounts of refugees from Africa and from other Middle Eastern countries, Israel's political and social order, the relatively stronger economy, and the violent racism against Africans in Egypt and Libya propel people to come to Israel.

[a] Reuven Ziegler of the Israeli Democracy Institute explains that the 'Prevention of Infiltration Law' of Israel "defines an 'infiltrator', inter alia, as a person who entered Israel from Lebanon, Egypt, Syria, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Iraq or Yemen, and is a resident or a visitor thereof." Section 10 of the law states that "an individual who has entered Israel from one of these countries without a visa or who illegally resides in Israel must disprove that s/he is an infiltrator." See 'A Matter of Definition: On 'Infiltrators' and 'Asylum Seekers' in Israel' for more information (Reuven Ziegler, 2011). The word 'infiltrator' is often used by the Israeli government and by the media to portray asylum seekers not as asylum seekers, but as enemies who are illegally crossing into Israel's borders.

# ISRAEL'S CURRENT POLICY

The aforementioned Knesset report states that of the 33,439 "infiltrators" who entered Israel through the end of 2010, "26,164 received a 2(a)(5) permit (2A5)," which is commonly called a "conditional release" visa. The 2A5 visa allows for members of certain groups, who upon returning to their respective countries would be in highly perilous positions, to remain in Israel temporarily with the condition that they will be deported when such conditions change.[4] This visa allows them to reside in Israel, but does not award them any other rights. This visa must be renewed at the Ministry of Interior every three months and, at times, as was the case in Arad in March 2010, every month. Since December of 2010, the visa has included the sentence "this is not a work permit," causing many asylum seekers to either lose their jobs or not get hired by employers who fear retribution from the authorities. After eight non-governmental organizations took the issue to court in January 2011, the High Court of Israel ruled that the Israeli government would not uphold this policy until a solution meeting the basic needs of the refugees was found. To date, 496 Darfuris have received A5 visas, which are temporary residence permits, and 2000 Eritreans received B1 visas, permitting them to work legally in Israel. In 2007, Israel deported forty-eight refugees who were mostly Sudanese and in 2008 Israel deported ninety-one others to Egypt, which put their lives at great risk as the conflict in Darfur persists to the this day.[5]

In 2009, the Israeli government assumed control of the refugee status determination (RSD) procedure from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), but RSD remains inaccessible and acquiring refugee status is almost impossible for non-Jewish asylum seekers who make their way to Israel. Israel has sent back over 600 asylum seekers to Egypt through 'hot returns'[b] in which IDF soldiers send people back over the Egyptian border within a few hours of their arrival to Israel.[6] The Israeli government is also supporting the 'voluntary repatriation' of South Sudanese asylum seekers in Israel.[c]

In November 2010, the Knesset approved of a plan to build a detention facility to house 8,000-10,000 asylum seekers in the Negev desert, but details of what life in the facility will be like are still unknown to the public.[7] The government has already begun building the facility. The Knesset is also building a barrier at the Egyptian-Israeli border to make it more difficult for people to enter Israel's borders.[8]

The lack of a clear or consistent policy regarding asylum seekers in Israel has resulted in the exclusion and inability of asylum seekers from accessing social services. Consequently, Israeli Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) have stepped in to provide many of the social services asylum seekers receive in other countries.

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[b] 'Hot Returns' refers to the immediate return to the Egyptian side of the border, within a few hours or days, of people who cross into Israel. Usually, those who are 'hot returned' are not interviewed regarding their asylum claims. See "Sinai Perils: Risks to Migrants, Refugees, and Asylum Seekers in Egypt and Israel" by Human Rights Watch (2008).

[c] This issue will be discussed in the section 'Repatriation to Sudan.'

# PROJECT OBJECTIVES AND RATIONALE

This report is the result of a research project executed between September 2010 and May 2011 for ASSAF, which in Hebrew is an acronym for Aid Organization for Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Israel. The report is the first in a series entitled 'Surviving in Limbo' in which the first report concerns the lived experiences of individual asylum seekers from Eritrea and Sudan, while the second report discusses the community formations and challenges of the Eritrean and Sudanese populations.

As mentioned above, due to the exclusion of the asylum seekers from state services, they have become reliant on Civil Society Organizations for certain types of aid, primarily humanitarian, psychosocial, health, and legal aid. The dependency has coincided with the challenges of continuous change in Israeli policy regarding asylum seekers over time. However, there is a growing gap between what the asylum seekers describe as their expectations and needs in Israel as opposed to what the CSOs and government agencies perceive these expectations and needs to be. Because the Sudanese and Eritreans are accustomed to assisting members of their respective groups, and because neither the government nor the CSOs are meeting their needs, the asylum seekers in Israel have established various methods, networks, and means for providing for themselves. Nevertheless, there are still needs that are not being met, which points to the rationale for this project.

The objective of this research project was to gain knowledge and an understanding of the various self-help mechanisms, both formal and informal, of the South Sudanese, Darfuri, and Eritrean[d] populations currently residing within Israel's borders. The focus is strictly on the Eritrean and Sudanese populations because these are the two largest populations residing in Israel and because they share similarities: they are collectively permitted to reside in Israel, but may be deported if their country of origin becomes stable enough at any particular point. The questions addressed included:

**WHAT ARE THE NEEDS AND CHALLENGES THAT INDIVIDUAL ASYLUM SEEKERS FROM ERITREA, SOUTH SUDAN, AND DARFUR ARE FACING WHILE LIVING IN ISRAEL?**

**WHAT ARE ASYLUM SEEKERS' SELF-HELP AND COPING MECHANISMS TO MITIGATE CHALLENGES AND MEET NEEDS?**

**HOW CAN CSOS, THE COMMUNITIES THEMSELVES, AND GOVERNMENTAL AGENCIES STRATEGICALLY MEET THE NEEDS OF ASYLUM SEEKERS LIVING IN ISRAEL?**

In addition to the questions above, there is a special section on the voluntary return to South Sudan from Israel, which highlights the needs and opinions as expressed by the asylum seekers on the issue.

All in all, this report aims to reflect and provide a voice for the asylum seekers in Israel. We hope this report will provide Civil Society Organizations, government agencies, and asylum seeker community organizations with useful information and recommendations that will enable them all to work together to achieve the following goals: to decrease asylum seeker dependency on CSOs, to increase their capacity to self-advocate for community and individual needs, to increase their capacity to overcome challenges through self-help and conflict resolution mechanisms, and to strengthen community identities. We hope that this will result in the increased resilience of communities over time, and the improved quality of life and wellbeing of individuals who are asylum seekers in Israel.

[d] While there is diversity within these populations, I am going to continue naming them as aforementioned for the sake of simplicity, but I acknowledge that understanding the diversity within each group is important. More information about the diversity in the Eritrean and Sudanese populations in Israel can be found in the report "Surviving in Limbo: Community Formation among Sudanese and Eritrean Asylum Seekers in Israel" by Maya Paley (June 2011).

# METHODOLOGY

PHOTOGRAPHY BY BOAZ SAMORAI

This research project primarily utilized qualitative data collection tools. The process began with a literature review of relevant articles and books on Eritrean, Darfuri, and South Sudanese refugee populations, community resilience work among refugee groups in other countries, and the history of South Sudan, Darfur, and Eritrea as they relate to the current refugee situation in Israel and globally. Following the literature review, I met with stakeholders from various CSOs that work with the addressed populations. Sixteen meetings were held with practitioners including staff-members of ASSAF, the Mesila Aid and Information Center (Mesila), Physicians for Human Rights-Israel (PHR), the African Workers Union, the African Refugee Development Center (ARDC), and others.[e]

The report is structured chronologically such that the asylum seekers' experiences are examined beginning with the movement to Israel followed by the initial arrival period and concluding with life in Israel.

# COMMUNITY SEMI-PARTICIPATORY APPROACH

After learning about the challenges and history, I drafted an interview guide and sought out Community Advisors. My goal was to use participatory research that would account for cultural needs and understandings while interviewing refugees about their lives. I met with thirteen members of the three populations focused on--Darfuris, South Sudanese, and Eritreans. I was introduced to these Community Advisors by the practitioners from the CSOs with whom I had met.

Below is a breakdown of the gender and group affiliations of the Community Advisors:

| POPULATION | WOMEN | MEN |
|---|---|---|
| SOUTH SUDANESE | 2 | 2 |
| DARFURIS | 1 | 2 |
| ERITREANS | 1 | 5 |

# DATA COLLECTION

Based on the needs and advice of the Community Advisors and after they accepted the goals and methodology of the research project, the interview guide was completed and I began conducting semi-structured qualitative interviews. Initially both the CSO practitioners and the Community Advisors introduced me to informants. I located additional respondents through referrals. Overall I conducted interviews with seventy-two Sudanese and Eritrean men, women, and youth. I made a concerted effort to interview people from various backgrounds, places of birth, literacy levels, and educational backgrounds. I sought tried to interview both people who spoke English or Hebrew and people who did not. Interviews were either conducted directly in English or Hebrew, or with a translator who spoke English or Hebrew and Tigrinya[f] or Arabic[g]. Translators were paid for their services and took an active role in shaping the project by providing feedback about how they felt about the research project and interview guide.

Below is a table showing the basic information and amount of interviewees[h]:

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[e] See Annex Item A for a list of practitioners interviewed for this report.

[f] Tigrinya is the most common language spoken by the Eritrean population in Israel.

[g] While most of the asylum seekers from Sudan speak Arabic, it is not their first language. Different ethnic groups each have their own native languages, but they learned Arabic as a result of the Sudanese government's enforcement of Arabic language education and use throughout the country.

[h] Personal details on interviewees will not be provided in order to protect the identification of asylum seekers in Israel. See Annex Item B, however, for information about the interviewees without names listed.

| POPULATION | WOMEN | YOUTH | MEN |
|---|---|---|---|
| SOUTH SUDANESE | 8 | 3 | 9 |
| DARFURIS | 5 | 1 | 23 INCLUDING 6 FOCUS GROUP MEMBERS |
| ERITREANS | 5 | 3 | 15 |

Lastly, I visited many community sites including churches, community centers, community nursery schools, private homes, and Sudanese and Eritrean owned businesses in five cities - Tel Aviv, Ramat Gan, Ashdod, Arad, and Eilat. I also visited Bialik-Rogazin High School, Cadoorie Youth Village, and Nof Eilot.

# CONSTRAINTS

While I conducted as many interviews and site visits as possible, it is necessary to acknowledge that the pool of interviewees does not reflect the experience of every asylum seeker from South Sudan, Darfur or Eritrea living in Israel. Experiences in Israel have proven to be diverse. I aim to convey the most commonly shared experiences while also highlighting some of the exceptional experiences.

**GENDER** First, women were more difficult to interview as there are fewer female asylum seekers in Israel, and many of them were uncomfortable being interviewed. Some of the women from both Sudan and Eritrea brought their husbands or partners to the interviews with them, which presented a challenge to discussing personal issues. Another constraint that involved the women is that fewer of them speak either Hebrew or English than the men do such that almost all interviews with women were conducted with the help of a translator. Bringing a translator into the interview who is unknown to the interviewee may have made women less comfortable to speak openly. Also, some information was likely lost in translation.

**TRUST** Many Eritrean men were not comfortable being interviewed with a translator whom they did not know and requested to bring their own translators, or to try to speak English or Hebrew when their level of either language was not that strong.

**TRANSLATION** The translators did a fantastic job, but at times there may have been words or expressions that were difficult to translate and questions that did not get fully answered as a result of this. Also, I should have had the informed consent document translated in written form so that respondents could read the consent forms on their own.

**YOUTH** It was difficult to find interviewees between the ages of 14 and 18. Further, meetings with the youth were complicated. Some were more comfortable expressing information about their personal lives and experiences than others and some joked around in order to evade certain questions. Also, I was not able to access young women to interview for this research. Because they are fewer in numbers and due to time constraints during the interview stage of the research, it was difficult to become familiar with young women to a point where they were open to being interviewed.

# FINDINGS


PHOTOGRAPHY BY VLADI ESPINOZA

# MOVEMENT TO ISRAEL[i]

## SUDANESE

**SOUTH SUDAN** Sudan declared independence from Britain in January 1956. The Anyanya War, the first civil war between Khartoum and South Sudan, in which half a million people died,[9] began right before independence and lasted until 1972, at which point an agreement between the parties granted the South regional autonomy. The discovery of oil in the South further caused the government to reject the region's autonomy in 1978. In the early '80s, the Al-Nimeri government instituted Sharia law as part of their Islamicization agenda. Leaders in the South created the Sudanese Popular Liberation Movement (SPLM), led by John Garang with the Sudanese People's Liberation Army (SPLA) serving as the armed force behind it.[10] Sudan's second civil war occurred between 1983 and 2005, resulting in the death of 1.9 million Sudanese from south and central Sudan, 4 million internally displaced people, and half a million people who fled as refugees to other countries.[11] Khartoum and SPLM/A came to an agreement known as the Naivasha Protocols in 2005, which apart from being strewn with inequities, allowed for a regional government to be established. The Protocols were also supposed to result in the disarmament of the para-military militias, which never occurred.[12] Either way, a decision was reached that in January 2011 a referendum would be held that allowed the South Sudanese people to vote on whether or not they wanted independence. The vote was held and an unmistakable majority of those who voted (98.83%) were in favor of independence, which will be realized on July 9th, 2011.[13] While this is a step in a good direction for the South Sudanese people worldwide, it does not erase the fact that millions of people were displaced throughout the decades of civil war endured, with many ending up in Egypt, and some in Israel.

**DARFUR** Darfur, the western-most region of Sudan was almost completely neglected by the Sudanese government in Khartoum until oil was found in the southern part of the region in 1979. A policy of racial preference toward the Arab population was enacted for many years and racial and ethnic tensions in Darfur intensified due to increased desertification of the area and competition over access to resources as well as the impact of the Chadian- Libyan war on Darfur during the 1980s.[14] These tensions led to a civil war from 1987- 1989. In 2001, the Sudan Liberation Movement (SLM) and its armed section the Sudan Liberation Army (SLA) were founded as a secessionist movement. The Janjaweed (Arab militias) became Khartoum's Special Forces in 2003, and began utilizing air force bombs causing massive displacement and slaughter in Darfur - the internationally known genocide[j] began.[15] Also in 2003, Dr. Khalil Ibrahim formed the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM), which called for national reform and a regime change and played a role in opposing the Janjaweed, especially across the border with Chad.[16] While numbers have been disputed throughout the years, the United Nations estimates that almost 2 million Darfuris have been internally displaced in Darfur, about 240,000 have been displaced to other regions of Sudan, and almost 420,000 have become refugees in other countries.[17] Approximately 62,000 people have died as a result of violence, and up to 300,000 have died from hunger and disease from 2003-2008.[18] Violence was the main cause of death in 2004, but famine and disease were the leading causes of death since then, although violent deaths do continue to occur in the region.[19]

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[i] While out of the scope of this report, it is important to acknowledge the experience faced by asylum seekers crossing through the Sinai desert into Israel. Many respondents expressed the terrible treatment and conditions they encountered both by the Bedouin smugglers in Sinai and by the Egyptian police who shot at them at the border. Three Eritrean teenage boys I was able to speak with were kept in the Sinai desert for between one and three months by the Bedouin smugglers. They were tied up and tortured until they called their respective families crying and pleading with them for more money to give to their smugglers for their release. One said the following: "In Eritrea, I had family. It was okay. I was working and okay. In Sudan it was okay. But in Sinai I saw the worst thing so what I remember is the bad thing about Sinai." See the Hotline for Migrant Workers report "Dead in the Wilderness" (2010) for detailed accounts.

[j] In 2004, the United States made a declaration that the conflict in Darfur was genocide. The United Nations has not made this declaration.

## **SUDANESE** PUSH AND PULL FACTORS[k]

Lack of Protection (Egypt): A large number of Darfuris and South Sudanese fled to Egypt throughout the past decade as violence ensued in their regions. While in Egypt they were issued identification cards denoting them as refugees, the governmental policies and racism became increasingly unbearable over time. In December 2005, Sudanese refugees in Egypt held a protest outside of the UNHCR office in Cairo to demand their rights as refugees. Two thousand Sudanese refugees attended. The Egyptian government sent out the police to disperse the crowd and consequently killed at least twenty-seven Sudanese (the Sudanese Popular Liberation Movement put the death toll at 265), arrested and detained at least 2,000, and wounded many others.[20] Many of those who were arrested, including women and children, disappeared into the Egyptian prison system for several months.[21][l] This was the main push factor initiating the move to Israel by the Sudanese population in general, especially by the men, as expressed by most of the Sudanese interviewees for this report.

**'W', FOR EXAMPLE, STATED THE FOLLOWING[m]:**

> *Security is something that belongs to government. It does not belong to UN…One time people gathered in a big number in front of the UNHCR to protest and it was only a peaceful protest and the people were not moving along the street. People went and sat in a square, and slept there, and stayed there for 2 months…Yet, no answer from UNHCR. They used to say go back to your places, where you live. The refugees said we cannot go back. We need shelter. We need guarantees for our safety. Our safety is not guaranteed. They were discussing. One day the security forces stormed onto the people. That was on 25 of December 2005. They killed many people, children and old people. Many people said 25 people were killed. We don't know because they killed people and they buried them by themselves. We doubt the number, actually it's bigger…People were killed and were taken to prison for two months.*

## ERITREA

Eritrea, with a population of 5.5 million, gained independence from Ethiopia in 1991. It is controlled by the People's Front for Democracy and Justice, the only political party permitted to exist in Eritrea. The President, Isaias Afwerki, rules the country through a totalitarian military regime and is known for committing gross human rights violations. The Eritrean government has instilled mandatory military service for all Eritrean men between the ages of 18 and 54 and women between the ages of 18 and 47, which includes civilian work programs as well. The length of one's military service is arbitrary and indefinite, and service members may be sent to any location or to any type of position deemed suitable by the government, and they are paid extremely low wages, if at all. The government has been known to execute people fleeing military service at the Djibouti border as well as to imprison and torture others who try to flee military service or who are deported when seeking asylum from other countries.[22]

Freedoms of speech, press, association, and religion do not exist in Eritrea, as the government is functioning without a constitution and failing to hold elections that have been scheduled twice since 2003. Hundreds of Eritreans have been imprisoned and tortured extensively for their political views or activities.[23]

Eritreans have been fleeing their country since the struggle for Eritrean independence began in the 1960s. Therefore, there are Eritrean refugees throughout Europe and the United States. According to the UNHCR Statistical Yearbook, 99% of Eritrean asylum seekers in Canada, 66% in the United Kingdom, and 97% in the United States were recognized as refugees in 2009.[24]

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[k] The terms 'push' and 'pull factors' refer to the terms used in migration theory. 'Push factors' reflect reasons why one desires or is forced to leave one's hometown or country and 'pull factors' are those that attract a person to move to a particular location. See Everett S. Lee's "A Theory of Migration" (1966, University of Pennsylvania).

[l] Some Sudanese respondents for this report discussed either being imprisoned in the aftermath of the protest in Cairo, or knowing people who had been arrested and disappeared for several months. They reported the use of torture by Egyptian authorities in the prisons and being threatened with deportation to Sudan.

[m] All non-cited quotes and data in this report refer to interviews with respondents, observations, or informal conversations.

## **ERITREANS** PUSH AND PULL FACTORS

Protection: Most of the male respondents indicate that they made the journey to Israel for two primary reasons: to abscond from military service or to abscond from military prison, where they are punished for absconding from service. Military conscription is mandated for 1.5 years, but this time limit is rarely adhered to and most Eritreans in the service are forced to stay in the military for several extra years. Many are kept in the military for up to ten or fifteen years without ever knowing when they will be relieved of their duties. Furthermore, Eritreans in the military are not simply protecting their borders. Rather, they are sent to work on development projects such as constructing roads, and do so for little to no pay.[25] Eritreans come to Israel specifically because it is nearly impossible to make their way to Europe, and because there are no other safe options in the region.[n] Youth who have arrived in Israel also express that they are fleeing from the military round-ups to collect new soldiers that are held in their hometowns. Many have tried to make their way to Europe only to find that their movement is highly limited and perilous since the signing of the Italy-Libya Treaty on Friendship, Partnership, and Cooperation in March 2009. This bilateral agreement[o] includes a provision that obligates Libya to stop illegal immigration from within its borders through the use of an electronic detection system and with other technological means provided by the Italian government.[26][p]

'A', a 25-year-old Eritrean man living in Tel Aviv, did not plan on coming to Israel, but felt that he had no choice. He had tried to make his way to Europe previously, which had resulted in his deportation from Egypt back to Eritrea and his subsequent stay in the horrid Halhale Eritrean prison, where he was tortured repeatedly throughout his year-long imprisonment. He originally left Eritrea because he was fleeing the military service.

'K', a 25-year-old Eritrean man living in Ramat Gan also did not plan on coming to Israel. He tried several times to make his way from Libya to Europe, but was caught and put in jail. He lost $3,000 of his family's money as a result of these attempts. On his reasons for leaving Eritrea, 'K' explains:

> *The thing which made me come to Israel is the life made me come because [at] first when I left Eritrea…there was not any organization so that we can bring change in my country…First place that changed my mind was this - to go to countries which can give me democratic status…so that I can learn a lot and then I can have good influences and know better the world.*

'K' says that "even though I heard rumors that Israel is not good for refugees because my friends said this and I had no intention to come here. Unfortunately, even if there is no any status for refugees, but at least I can get the free movement, freedom, part of freedom." 'K' is happy to be in Israel even if he cannot get refugee status.

Women who followed their husbands to Israel explained the danger they faced in the aftermath of their husbands' disappearance from military service. For example, 'N' states the following:

> *My husband was a soldier. He was taken for many years without salary and we don't have any family to support us. And he left. My husband left. I was with one child and pregnant with seven months and he left me when I was pregnant. And when I give birth, the government asked me where my husband is. They told me either bring him or pay 50,000 Nakfa.*[q] *I told them I can't pay. I don't have. So either the solution: either I stayed there because they are going to trouble me. So, the solution, I decided to escape.*

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[n] In 2008, over 1,200 Eritreans were deported back to Eritrea from Egypt. However, many who were sent back continue to be missing to date. See the United States State Department 2009 Human Rights Report on Eritrea for information.

[o] This agreement is in flux at the point of writing due to the uprising and conflict occurring in Libya with Col. Qadaffi's government.

[p] On the Italian side, the agreement allows the Italian coastguard to deport boatloads of immigrants to Libya without processing their asylum applications at any point (EurActiv. "Italy's Immigration Deal with Libya Sparks Uproar." June, 2009). Aside from the challenges of living within the totalitarian society existent in Libya, the path to Italy is extremely dangerous for asylum seekers. One example is the disappearance of two boats carrying 400 Eritrean and Somalian immigrants en route to Italy in March 2011 (Pisa, Nick. The Telegraph. "Libya: 400 Illegal Immigrants 'Disappear' on Way to Italy." April 3, 2011). Some interviewees for this report explained that they tried as many as five times to make their way to Italy from Libya, but were repeatedly told by smugglers that the path is either impossible at this point or just too risky.

[q] 50,000 Eritrean Nakfa is equivalent to about $3325 at the time of writing.

# ARRIVAL TO ISRAEL

The initial arrival experience differs substantially according to the time period of arrival. Those who arrived between 2005 and 2007 spent between one and two years in detention facilities near the Egyptian border, which were run by the Israeli Prison Services. Although these facilities are technically detention centers, they are perceived as and called 'prisons' by the asylum seekers who have been held in them.

The experiences of asylum seekers who arrived in Israel since 2008 have been different. First, they spent a maximum of two months in the detention facilities at the border, if at all. This is due to the inability of the prison to handle the influx of asylum seekers.

While there is a general agreement among interviewees that they were treated well in the detention facilities, there is also consensus that these facilities were, indeed, prisons, and the effects of imprisoning asylum seekers indefinitely, arbitrarily, and without due process have proven to be quite harmful to both the psychological and physical well- being of asylum seekers, who by international law should not be criminalized in the first place.[r] One Darfuri man who spent 11 months in Saharonim Prison says: "It doesn't matter how they treated me there. What matters is that I didn't know why I was there and when I was getting out. I would ask and they would say I don't know. I don't know. It was very hard for me there."

Upon being released from prison, all asylum seekers were put on buses to either Beer Sheva or Tel Aviv, dropped off in specific locations such as Levinsky Park in Tel Aviv, and told to figure things out for themselves. Informal social networks and formal and informal community groups and organizations have been instrumental to the asylum seekers' initial settlement experience in Israel. Most asylum seekers who have arrived over the past couple of years know, or know of, at least one other person already residing in Israel. If not, they simply ask around in public places where they might locate people from their tribe, village, or region. Phone calls are made by oldcomers[s] to community members of the newcomers' origins who might be able to find them a place to live.

Still, there are many asylum seekers who do not have contacts, or whose contacts are not able to provide them with the support they need. This is especially true for people with serious psychological or physical health conditions, such as those who have been shot at the border or those with severe mental illnesses. These newcomers often rely on the CSOs to assist them in seeking medical and psychosocial assistance. ASSAF, for example, aids at least fifty people a month with such serious cases. Many single mothers with children look to organizations like ARDC, Mesila, and ASSAF for help in finding a place to live, as it is difficult to find shelter for an entire family through one's contacts.

## DARFURIS

Most Darfuris have been able to find a place to sleep through their social networks. Single Darfuri men or those traveling without their families have arrived in large numbers and they have needed the most support upon arriving to Israel. If they do not know anyone, they may call friends in other countries as far away as England to connect them with relatives or friends of theirs in Israel. Others, who do not have friends, relatives, or other contacts, have found assistance through the existent community structures. Other Darfuris or CSOs will contact one of the shelters run by members of the Darfuri community in Tel Aviv and the shelters will take in and provide the newcomer with a roof over his head.[t] Oldcomers will take newcomers into their homes, house them, feed them, and help them find employment, if possible.

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[r] According to the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, Article 31 states that no one will be penalized "on account of their illegal entry or presence, on refugees who, coming directly from a territory where their life or freedom was threatened...enter or are present in their territory without authorization, provided they present themselves without delay to the authorities and show good cause for their illegal entry or presence" (UN Refugee Convention 1951, Art. 31.1).

[s] The term 'oldcomer' refers to asylum seekers who have been in Israel for more than six months while 'newcomers' have been in Israel for six months or less.

[t] Various community shelters are mapped out in the second report of this series.

'A' was visiting Tel Aviv from Eilat for a few days and was asked for a cigarette from a fellow Darfuri man in Levinsky Park. After standing with the man for a few minutes, 'A' learned that he had been sleeping in the park for a week and that he did not know anyone in Israel, or even where he was for that matter. 'A' invited him to stay at his apartment in Eilat, where he was already caring for two other friends.

As Darfuri youth, from the ages of 14-18, have mainly come to Israel alone, their communities, along with the support of CSOs, have initially met their accommodation and board needs. Many have taken refuge at boarding schools that various CSOs have arranged for them to live in with the assistance of the Ministry of Education. They receive an education and are provided with transportation money and food by their boarding schools. Others do not have such luck and end up spending up to several months sleeping in Levinsky Park without any knowledge of where to go to find shelter. When found by someone from the community, or when designated to visit one of the CSOs, these youth are often taken to the 'Lift Your Head Up Ministries' Church and told they can sleep there.

## SOUTH SUDANESE

The South Sudanese asylum seekers include many families along with single men. There are few single women and very few unaccompanied youth. Most of the South Sudanese arrived in Israel between 2005-2007. Thus, they are almost all considered to be oldcomers and they have, at this point, established homes for themselves and their families. Many of them received assistance finding housing from Mesila, ASSAF, and ARDC although due to the influx of refugees, these organizations no longer provide such services other than directing newcomers to the available shelters or trying to allocate emergency temporary solutions like staying with other families known to the CSOs. Many of the South Sudanese were able to find jobs upon arriving to Israel because of their early arrival.

When newcomers arrive in Israel, they utilize informal social networks to find accommodations. The South Sudanese have organized tribal networks that provide community-level support to asylum seekers to find short-term housing. For example, 'S' received a phone call one day and was told that someone from his tribe, the Nuer, was living in Levinsky Park. He agreed to accommodate this man in his home until he was able to get his feet off the ground. The reason 'S' was called was specifically due to the fact that he and the newcomer shared an ethnic affinity.

For some South Sudanese women who arrived to Israel at a time when detention was longer-term, their arrival experiences hold negative memories. 'A', a South Sudanese woman who arrived in July 2007 and is currently living in Arad gives the following account about her arrival in Israel:

> 'A': *So when we came to Israel the first time the soldiers they took us to the UN and the UN they put us in the Kibbutz. We spent 3 months like that on the Kibbutz. Then they took us again to Ketsiot, which is a prison and we spent over there seven months. We stayed there seven months and they sent [us] back to Kibbutz Eilot in Eilat…when they took us to Ketsiot they, you know, they put the men in one camp and the women in another one.*
> Maya: *And the children?*
> 'A': *And the children were with me.*

Her youngest children, 40-day old twins, spent seven months of their lives in Ketsiot prison.

## ERITREANS

Individual informal social networks are also the primary method of finding initial accommodation for Eritreans arriving to Israel. While many do have contacts such as friends or relatives from their home villages to whom they can ask for help, others do not have such contacts or are uninformed as to how to find people they know. Also, some may have contacts in Israel, but may be uncomfortable asking them for help. In any case, many Eritreans end up sleeping in the parks of Tel Aviv upon arriving to Israel for anything from a few days to a few months. Those who came in earlier periods were able to seek shelter at what they call the 'Matalon shelter,' which was run by ARDC until shutting down in April 2008. A few oldcomer interviewees had lived in this shelter and were now helping newcomers as much as possible. 'Y', a single Eritrean man who arrived in 2007 lived at the Matalon shelter for a month and a half. He explained that when the influx of newcomers from Eritrea began arriving, he and his friends gave clothing, food, and money to as many of them as possible. He also provided some of the newcomers with housing, although he did not know them personally.

Eritrean youth often have greater challenges than adult newcomers do upon their initial arrival to Israel. To date, there are up to seventy asylum seeking youth being detained by Israeli authorities for residing in Israel illegally. Most of them are reported to be from Eritrea.[27] Some of the youth have mixed identities - either they were born in Ethiopia of Eritrean origin or they have one parent from Ethiopia and one from Eritrea. This leads Israel to conclude that they cannot confirm their Eritrean identity and to keep them in detention on this ground.[28] Other minors are kept in detention because the State feels that it is the safest and most optimal option for them at this point, arguing that detention is for their own protection and in their best interest when no alternatives, like boarding schools or guardians, are available for them.[u]

# LIFE IN ISRAEL

## STATUS

Visa status was one of the most discussed topics during interviews, with almost every respondent expressing an opinion on the matter. Israel has changed its visa policies over the past few years due to the rising numbers of asylum seekers entering the country. Thus, the date of arrival is often a defining factor in whether a person received a certain type of visa. Some asylum seekers who arrived between 2006-2008 are now considered lucky among their fellow countrymen as they have better visas than the rest. The issuance of different visas and varying amounts of each type has amplified distinctions made by the Israeli government between the three largest populations of refugees in Israel - the Darfuris, the South Sudanese, and the Eritreans - leading to tensions between them.

The 496 Darfuris who received the A5 visa[v] in 2008 were provided with many rights not afforded to the rest of the asylum seekers in Israel. It is likely that increasing awareness about the genocide in Darfur on a global scale as well as the American Jewish community's involvement in such awareness campaigns pressured Israel to make this decision.[w] It seems as though the Israeli government made this gesture to secure its reputation as a humanitarian country. Darfuris with such permits are legally allowed to work, are able to start businesses without obtaining an Israeli business partner, have the same healthcare services awarded to Israelis, and have to renew their visas only once a year. B'nai Darfur, a Darfuri CSO, was given the authority to screen and recommend who would receive the A5 visas in collaboration with UNHCR. The Immigration Authority of the Ministry of Interior granted the lists and visas. The distribution process created divisions and tensions within the Darfuri population in Israel, eventually resulting in the closure of the B'nai Darfur organization for a period of time.

The Eritreans and South Sudanese feel neglected, and believe the Darfuri case for asylum is perceived by Israel as superior to theirs. This has resulted in feelings of jealousy and anger toward Darfuris by South Sudanese and Eritreans in Israel, creating a divide within a population of people who are otherwise in a similar predicament. Furthermore, the fact that Eritreans received work permits has also infuriated the South Sudanese population, a group that has received no special recognition from the Israeli government whatsoever although they were among the first asylum seekers to enter the country in the most current migration wave.

Another exceptional but important occurrence is that some people who were awarded either the A5 or the B1 visa that permits them to work have complained that their visas were taken away from them recently without any explanation.[x] This has caused them high amounts of stress, as their status has suddenly changed and they fear telling their bosses that they have lost the right to work. There is also significant anger towards the Israeli government for taking away these visas. Some of these exceptional cases resulted in people not having a visa at all, until they visited the Ministry of Interior to get a conditional release visa. Others become completely status-less. Some Eritreans who had arrived in the mid-1990s and received B1 visas found that they were revoked over the past year, causing this small community of oldcomers to harbor resentment toward the newcomers

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[u] This is based on conversations with Yiftach Millo, the founder and Chairman of ASSAF.

[v] Refer to the 'Israel's Current Policy' section above for information about the different types of visas asylum seekers have received in Israel.

[w] See "Israeli, US Groups Become One in Fighting for the Darfur Refugees" by Yosef Abramowitz for a summary on how and why American Jewry pressured Israel regarding Darfur (Jewish Standard, March 2007).

[x] It was not possible to find exact statistics on how many A5, 2A5, or B1 visas were awarded to asylum seekers and then taken away from them, but three respondents had their A5 visas taken away and at least 4 other asylum seekers I had personally met had either their A5 or B1 visas taken away over the past year.

for presumably affecting their legal status. Oldcomers from the 1990s have expressed how much more relaxed they were when they resided in Israel without any documentation at all. For many asylum seekers, having an identifying document that they must constantly carry on them and renew causes much anxiety no matter which type of visa they receive.[y]

Sentiment toward Israel's different visa statuses are consistently negative among the Darfuris, South Sudanese, and Eritreans, other than among those who carry the A5 visas, although even the Darfuris who do carry the temporary residence permits are aware of and frustrated that the rest of their community does not have the same visas that they do.

Below are some examples of sentiments expressed in interviews regarding visa status:

**ERITREANS**

A 24-year-old single man living in Tel Aviv who has a B1 visa:

> *Israel is confusing us, playing with the refugees' minds. They change their policies all the time about them, which makes Eritreans not know who they are or where they are all the time. They try to figure out what Israel thinks about them, but they don't know what to think. We even can't get into clubs. They didn't let me in in the past. I love dancing and going out to clubs, but they saw my visa and didn't let me in. It happened even in an Ethiopian club. Since this happened, I have no desire to go out anymore. I don't want to go to Neve Sha'anan either, but I can't go anywhere else. I used to get angry about this, but now I just don't try to go anymore. They let Sudanese people with Aleph5 visas get into clubs. This whole situation broke my heart.*

'Y', a 27-year-old single man living in Eilat:

> *In the beginning it was good. Now it's getting worse and worse, like people are protesting against us. Like we used to get visa for 6 months, now only for 3 months or only for 1 month… It's getting worse…They change it all the time…*

**SOUTH SUDANESE**

'J', a mother and wife living in Arad:

> *Even though nobody's touching anyone here, the Sudanese are in [a] fearful situation. Sometimes they say that we are not going to give you visa. Sometimes they say that we are going to take you to the jail. Sometimes we build a camp. People are in new positions and situations so everybody thinking about it's better for me to quit, to be away from here even [in] the same situation.*

A 15-year-old boy living with his parents in Tel Aviv and attending Bialik-Rogazin High School:

> *We played [basketball] at school. First, before you get accepted to the basketball league they do all kind[s] of physical tests to see if you're fit, and they saw that we're good so we got accepted, but we were the only ones without I.D, so they kicked us out…. like when they kicked us out of the basketball team… If we weren't refugees they wouldn't have done so.*

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[y] Eritreans who were either raised or born in Ethiopia, or had one Ethiopian parent and one Eritrean parent, cause the Israeli government confusion as to their identity. Non-Jewish Ethiopians are deported back to their country upon arriving to Israel as they are not considered to be asylum seekers or to have the need for collective protection the way the Sudanese and Eritreans do. Therefore, some Ethiopians create fraudulent identities and try to pass as Eritreans in order to obtain the conditional release visas to be able to stay in Israel. Others, however, simply remain status-less and Israel does not provide them with conditional release visas because it does not consider them to be Eritreans, but it does not deport them because it does not consider them to be Ethiopians either.

### DARFURIS

'A', a 28-year-old man living in Eilat whose wife is in Chad:

> *We came here [Ministry of Interior in Eilat] 20-30 people to help other refugees. They asked us what should they do in order to get visa. They wait for more than a week. 50, maybe 70 people…reporters came and took photos. Everyday they let 3-5 refugees inside and told them they can't get it. I can't understand how this happens here in Israel. But it will be okay, I hope…If we go to another city, Be'er Sheva or Tel Aviv they don't let us…they tell us to do it only in Eilat, near where we live, and in Eilat it's not possible. This is our problem with the visa.*

'A', a 28-year-old man living in Eilat with his wife and daughter:

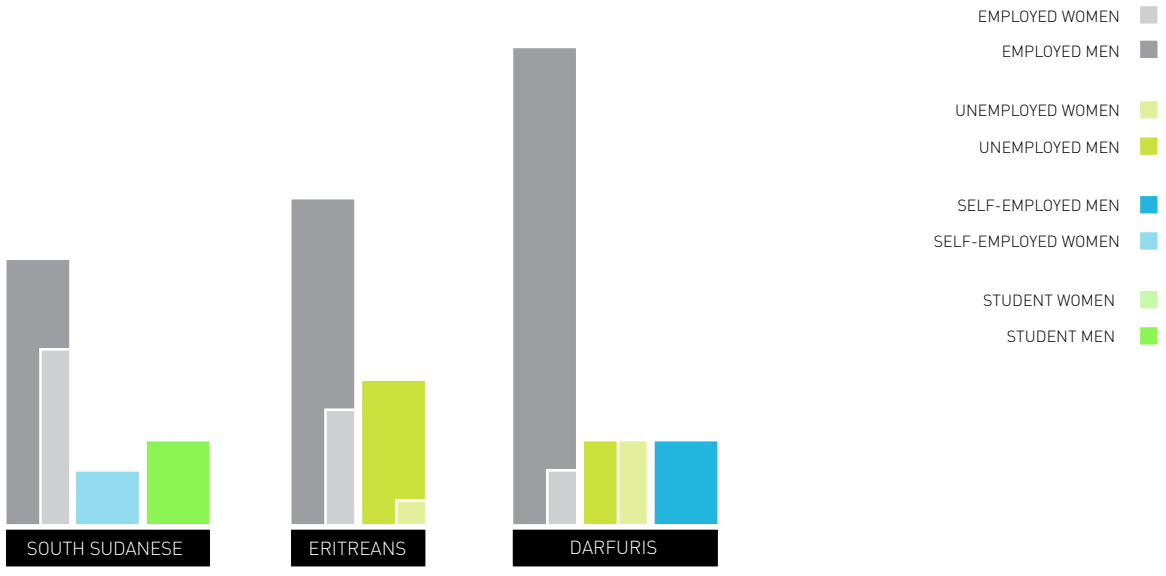
> *I have an ID but my wife doesn't. My child is [a] year and a half old- why doesn't she get a medical card? So after she was born I went to Ministry of Interior as the child is not registered anywhere. If something happens to me and my wife today, what happens to my daughter? So we took it to court, as she is not even registered in our visas! A few years later and nothing changed. And all of us have the same problem. All the children born here have no status, no visa, and no registration.*

'H', a restaurant owner in his early 30s living in Tel Aviv with his wife:

> *And that is what happened here and we opened this restaurant. Now the restaurant is good and we say thank you for the Israeli government because they give us help. When we come from Darfur they help us and some Darfuri people they get IDs, Israeli IDs…They helped, like we are come from Darfur and we have problem and I think we found here people come before us and they didn't get Israeli ID. There is difference from someone who has Israeli ID and someone who has visa. It's a little bit different if you have to do business or you have something you want to do. If you don't have A5 you can't do. If we don't have A5 we can't open this restaurant…Some people now they don't have job and they don't come to get visa and they don't have money to eat…because a lot of things I saw here happen because they don't have money, but it's different in someone he don't have anything. It's very different.*

## EMPLOYMENT

This table portrays the employment status of interviewees:



Livelihood Security: An asylum seeker in Israel is not provided with social services and must work in order to maintain his or her livelihood. Constant changes to the visa situation have resulted in panic over employment. In general, many asylum seekers have found full-time, ongoing employment in Israel either through the help of informal social networks, through Israeli employment agencies, or through CSOs like ASSAF, which lists opportunities on a job board and used to provide direct employment search services.

Vulnerability to Abuse: For those who are employed, there are many problems connected with their visa status. For example, many asylum seekers report not being paid on time, not being paid their entire salaries, not being paid for overtime work, not being paid for transportation costs, not being covered by insurance, and being threatened that they will lose their jobs if they do not work extra hours (up to 16 hours a day) for the minimum wage. Also, for those who receive their jobs through employment agencies, their paychecks are cut down even more so than those who do not, as part of their salaries are given to the agencies. Asylum seekers also report being fired without warning such that they have to look for a new job right away.

Many asylum seekers express fears of bringing up such complaints or frustrations to their employers. They do not want to risk losing their jobs and would rather accept the harmful treatment inflicted upon them than do so. 'Y', an Eritrean man living in Tel Aviv says:

> *I have been to many work places. In some places I worked 12 hours, in some 10. But in order not to lose the work, if they told me to work 15 hours, I will do the work because if you go out of that place, you may not get another work so in order to survive you follow what they have said. The work here is more physical so I get tired. Even though I planned to study I don't have time.*

Others, however, do leave their jobs in protest of the treatment they are receiving by both employers and employment agencies. 'N', a Darfuri oldcomer living in Arad quit his job in the past because they stopped providing him with health insurance when his visa status changed and the conditional release visa was issued with the "not a work permit" line. 'N' states the following:

> *So, then I work[ed] in Arad in Dead Sea in a hotel. For two years and two months. Until I received a visa, which, you know, written on it that I don't have permission to work. So, in hotel there I was working in the kitchen as a cook, so…I asked my manger if, if I would have the insurance and the health insurance and this, and they told me according to that visa I will no[t] be able to receive these services so I quit from the work.*

At the same time, many asylum seekers who have been in Israel for at least two years report good relations with their employers. Some employers take a familial, adoptive role with their employees, especially those who have been with them for several years and who are able to speak with them in Hebrew. Asylum seekers with positive experiences with their employers feel extremely lucky to have found the jobs they have and feel a certain sense of stability as a result. Some have even been able to discuss more flexible schedules or to request which days they would like off of work so that they can take classes or attend community events. Others have been invited to holidays and dinner parties with their employers' families or have been given gifts, clothing, and bonuses from their employers. 'N', for example, is a 25-year-old man from Darfur who came to Israel in 2007. He came straight to Eilat and quickly found a gardening job, which he's had for the past four years. 'N' says his employer is like family for him. He helps him if he needs anything, treats him well, and often invites him to family gatherings and holiday parties.

### 'CHIK-CHAK' WORK

Asylum seekers who are not lucky enough to find full-time work usually wait in public parks for daily work, often called 'chik-chak' jobs by both employers and asylum seekers. Such jobs are hard to come by and many asylum seekers often spend entire days waiting to be picked up, only to find that they have spent the whole day sitting in the park talking to others who are doing the same. Those seeking out chik-chak jobs are coping with completely different issues than those who have full-time employment. They are more likely to be treated poorly by employers in that they are often dropped off and not paid for their work and they have no insurance or proof of employment. Furthermore, they often work extremely long hours for very little pay as they are so desperate for work that the employers often ask who will take the least amount of pay before picking up the workers. Some work only for food for the day.

### SELF- EMPLOYMENT

Some asylum seekers have chosen to take a risk and start a business, usually after at least a couple years of working for an employer. One example is a Darfuri restaurant in Tel Aviv's city center. The restaurant has been open for a little over one year at this point. The co-owners are both Darfuris with A5 visas. One owner explains how his Darfuri social network enabled him to finance the business: "If you want to start a business and need assistance, a group of 5-10 people will give you a loan. Once the

business is developed and profiting, the business owners will pay back those who helped them out."

Another business owner, a South Sudanese woman, started a business in Tel Aviv without having an A5 or B1 visa. She and her husband opened up a hair salon in February 2008. She explains that she and her husband were lucky enough to save three months worth of rent (around 5,000 NIS) that enabled them to open the business in the first place because they both had jobs.

Although their respective communities perceive these business owners as successful, none of them have reported making large enough profits to save any money. All profits go back into maintaining the business with the rest going to pay their rent and for the needs of their family members. Therefore, starting a business, for those interviewed for this project, does not enable asylum seekers in Israel to markedly increase their socio-economic positions in comparison to employed asylum seekers, at least not at this present time. However, business owners expect that profits will eventually increase. They are also in a more comfortable position as they are not susceptible to being laid off and they do not experience the improper treatment of employers that many asylum seekers speak of.

**COPING WITH UNEMPLOYMENT**

Many express that if they do get a daily job, they are happy for the day, but that if they do not, they simply cope with it by sleeping all day long. If they are relying on that daily work to feed themselves, they may not eat at all that day or they may only have one meal. For some, the psychological impacts of lacking any prospect for stable employment and financial security are so severe that they seek to escape from their daily lives by consuming alcohol or cigarettes rather than eat a single meal.

For those asylum seekers who do not have jobs or who are lining up for chik-chak jobs daily, psychological stress seems more considerable than for those who are employed. One 19-year-old Eritrean man explains that every morning he waits in the park to get picked up by an employer: "If we find [a job] - okay. But if we do not find [one], we go back to the place where we rest." In other words, he copes by sleeping through the day.

Others move between cities to seek employment opportunities. One Darfuri man explains that he was living in Ashdod as hewas able to find enough work there, but when he no longer had a job in Ashdod, he quickly moved back to Tel Aviv "because there's more work [so] we are able to help ourselves." Asylum seekers, especially those who are single, are comfortable moving from place to place in order to find work and many have lived in more than one city throughout their time in Israel.

**YOUTH AND EMPLOYMENT**

Youth who reside in Israel with their parents often have more of a choice as to whether they want to work. While they may not receive any spending money from their parents, they may not see working as a necessity as long as they have a place to live and enough food. Others do receive spending money from their parents and see no need to work for that reason. Some, on the other hand, work in order to assist their parents with the bills and the rent. For example, there is one family with six children living in Tel Aviv. The father collects items to sell in the streets of Tel Aviv and expects his children to help him with the collection and sales. The eldest, however, who is currently 19 years old, has decided to pursue an education and works at a restaurant to pay for his tuition. The whole family lives in a two-room apartment. Another family with five children lives in Tel Aviv and has a 17-year-old son who cleans in a hotel during holidays, summer vacations, and sometimes during the school year in order to have extra spending money and to assist his family with bills. After one month of working, he bought an iPhone. After being in Israel for several years, the youth prioritize fitting into young, mainstream Israeli culture. They feel integrated by buying items like iPhones and will work hard to achieve these goals.

For newcomer youth who are unaccompanied and have not had success in finding support from CSOs (because they did not know they existed or how to find them), the situation is rather different. These youth struggle to find jobs as they do not speak Hebrew and do not know that they are allowed to work even if they have conditional release visas. 'Y', an 18-year-old boy who has lived on the floor of a church in Tel Aviv for three months, explains that he goes to Levinsky Park every morning to find a chik-chak job. He has had tremendous difficulty finding jobs: "some days if we don't find a chik-chak, we go and sleep the whole day." When 'Y' cannot find a job for the day, he simply returns to the church to sleep and ignore the sadness and hunger he constantly feels.

## HOUSING

Living Situation: There is not much variation in the types of accommodation asylum seekers from Eritrea and Sudan find in Israel. Most single men share rooms with friends or people from their regions. Rooms might be housing 2-6 young men while only one pays the rent. Families usually reside in small apartments, with one to two rooms for families who have 3-8 children. Other single men who have established themselves in Israel for a few years and who have steady incomes are able to rent one or two-room apartments and to live alone until newcomers they know or with whom they have a connection arrive and request to stay with them for a short period of time. Most couples who do not have children rent two-bedroom apartments with other couples in order to split the rent between all four inhabitants.

Another concern among the many male interviewees is anxiety over whether they will be able to pay rent each month. For many, this issue has been a factor in their choices to move between different cities in Israel. 'T', for example, moved from Eilat to Arad after two and a half years because Eilat was too expensive. He explained that an apartment in Eilat costs 2,700 NIS and in Arad it costs 1500 NIS, a much more achievable amount for an asylum seeker with children.

Access to Housing: Among interviewees, the topic of housing came up mostly during interviews with male asylum seekers. Only four women even brought up the topic or had significant responses to questions about housing. The men, however, seem to be quite concerned about the challenge of finding apartments to live in. 'H', who currently lives in Eilat, discusses discrimination from Israeli landlords:

> *I think that moving from Eilat to Tel Aviv won't solve the problem…three months ago I heard that in Hatikva Neighborhood Israelis said they don't rent apartments to African people. I also went to Ashdod. I tried to rent an apartment there. When I spoke to the owner he asked me where am I from. When I said I'm from Sudan he said that they don't rent to Sudanese people… It's like that all over the country, not only in Eilat. Southern Sudan doesn't belong to us but it might be better for us there… here people don't want us. But we can't decide what to do. The government there is unpredictable. We came here because we couldn't stay in our own country. If it will be solved we will go back. I believe that when it will be solved more than 70% of Sudanese people will go right back.*

Some asylum seekers live in housing provided by employers. This can occur in one of three ways - either as a live-in housekeeper or caretaker, usually a woman, who cleans and takes care of children or elderly Israelis; as a cleaning person who works in a hotel and lives on their property; or lastly, for asylum seekers working on Kibbutzim and living on the premises. There are about one hundred South Sudanese people living, as both families and singles, in Nof Eilot, a segment of Phatal Hotel Group run by Kibbutz Eilot. Phatal provided jobs to several Sudanese people who arrived in 2007 and gave them housing in Nof Eilot. Others living in Nof Eilot work in the hotels in Eilat. One does not have to work on the Kibbutz in order to live in Nof Eilot.

Older men, single women, unaccompanied minors, and newcomers have had taxing and psychologically harmful experiences with regard to housing. Two Eritrean men around the age of 60 are receiving financial support by ASSAF in order to pay their rent, as they are unable to find jobs. Without the support of ASSAF, these men believe that they would be back in Levinsky Park, as they have not found much support from the Eritrean population in Tel Aviv.

Unaccompanied minors have found housing either through the help of Israeli CSOs or through community organizations and networks. 'M', a 17-year-old Darfuri asylum seeker currently living and studying in Ayanot Youth Village, was initially taken to "Another Place," a shelter in Tel Aviv for youth in crisis, by Mesila's staff. 'M' had a positive experience at the shelter. Prior to living there, 'M' was living in a church for almost a year with friends and not attending school, but he was supported and cared for by the Darfuri community organization, B'nai Darfur. His case is similar to many of the unaccompanied minors from Darfur.

For unaccompanied minors from Eritrea, the situation is a bit more difficult as there is no obvious community organization with the capacity to support their needs. Two Eritrean boys both arrived to Israel at the age of eighteen. They currently live in a church. One has lived there for the entire three months that he has been in Israel and the other moved there after living in friends' apartments prior to that. They are friends from their hometown in Eritrea. One of the boys describes why living in the church is difficult for him:

> *The people who stay [a] long time in the church, like two years, three years, they['re] drunk. They come drinking, you know, and then they disturb us…some of them they don't have work, but there are people who have work. They go to work and they don't disturb us, but the people who disturb us from day to day, whenever they get money, of course, they drink.*

Living in the church, as expressed by the two young men, has also impacted their social status among the Eritrean population. They explain how other Eritreans from their region no longer acknowledge them in the street because they see them as having

the lowest status in Israel because they live in a church. This has a very negative impact on their self-esteem. They have prioritized leaving the church specifically so that people will not ignore them in public any longer.

Most Eritrean women did not talk about housing as an issue, but 'M', a single Eritrean woman living in Tel Aviv since 2008 has an exceptional case. When she first arrived to Israel, she lived in the women's shelter run by ARDC for eight months. After that, she moved in with friends only to find that she could not make ends meet. Eventually, 'M' moved into a church and stated the following about her stay as the only woman there: "I do not feel safe because I can't get shower. Boys come here and sit there. I don't have place to change my clothes, to comb my hair so I look bad. Why I'm staying here is until I get some solution either to go back home or to get some solutions from organizations."

'M' also expressed that living there causes her anxiety. Her purse has been stolen from her many times and she does not feel secure or comfortable, but has found no other solution. 'M' has been receiving psychosocial support from various organizations - ASSAF, Mesila, and ARDC - since she arrived to Israel. Regardless of the help she has received, it is apparent from 'M's interview that she is depressed and does not have any motivation to improve her current situation on her own. She also has no social network to fall back on so her dependence on Israeli CSOs is amplified.

Those who sleep in parks like Levinsky Park express sadness, frustration, and embarrassment regarding their need to sleep there. One Eritrean discusses living in the park for one month after being in Israel for five months already. He had lost his job, where he was provided with housing, and had nowhere to live. He did not want to live in a church because of the negative reputation he felt that he would accrue:

> *I was there for one month. I spent six days without eating anything, but I was fine. I slept on a bench with the Sudanese guys. I had no blanket even. I just smoked my cigarettes and went to sleep. It wasn't hard for me. It's much better than what I had before when I think about my time in prison.*

While many asylum seekers complain about their housing circumstances, they often express that such problems are low priorities for them. As compared to the problems they faced in their home countries, sleeping in the park in Tel Aviv is a minor obstacle to overcome.

## PHYSICAL HEALTH

### HEALTH CONCERNS

Women, especially those with children, were more worried about healthcare than men. They both brought it up more often and had more concerns about the issue. Some men did bring up access to healthcare for their children as an issue that plagues them, but this was exceptional. Physical health issues were not a primary concern for single men unless they had specific problems like ongoing diseases or serious physical injuries that needed long-term treatment. Many healthy single men, as well as youth, did not feel the need to go to the doctor for mild health concerns and some had not gone at all since arriving in Israel.

An Eritrean volunteer translator at Physicians for Human Rights has found that asylum seekers do not think to get HIV tested before having sexual relations with each other or to check if the woman is possibly pregnant as a result of being raped during her journey through the Sinai. Many women reach PHR's doors with requests for abortions, as a result of being raped by Bedouin smugglers.[z] The volunteer believes that this neglect of their physical conditions contributes to an increase of HIV rates and the number of babies born to parents who do not have the resources to care for them.

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[z] See "The Dead of the Wilderness: Testimonies from Sinai Desert, 2010" by Hotline for Migrant Workers for testimonies on the experiences of asylum seekers crossing through Sinai.

Some asylum seekers are experiencing anxiety and stress over not being able to manage concerns they have about their health in Israel. 'M', an Eritrean woman who spent her childhood in Sudan and now lives in Tel Aviv, explains that she has had head and ear pain for a while:

> *When I was small in Sudan, I had suffering from my ears and then when I go back to Eritrea, the place where I was living is hot. So when the heat I feel something different in my head and then I go to hospital. They told me to do an operation and it was my first time to hear about operation. I refused to do it. When I come here…I talked to people about my problem and then they told me there is a place for free in Central Bus Station. I went there and they gave me a paper to go to check of the health problem and they write for me that I need an operation and I come back here and they told me I have to have money. So I don't have money, I didn't go…I can say there was time I was very sad, but I feel sad because I'm not healthy. I don't feel healthy. It makes me sad.*

**AWARENESS OF HEALTH SERVICES**

Most asylum seekers from both Eritrea and Sudan reported receiving inadequate healthcare services in their home countries; they did not see doctors or receive treatments and medicines for their diseases, even after being diagnosed. Consequently, many asylum seekers arrive to Israel lacking an awareness of the kind of healthcare system, services, and health-related rights existent in Israel. One young man from Eritrea has not seen a doctor in the three and a half years since he has arrived in Israel. At one point, however, he felt that he was "sick in the chest" and he heard that Ichilov Hospital was expensive and would charge him 30,000 NIS for a visit so he decided to not go anywhere at all.

The CSOs provide information about access to healthcare, but this information is not reaching many asylum seekers who do not visit the CSO premises. Therefore, asylum seekers continue to be unaware of both the services available and unavailable to them.

'A', who was tortured and physically scarred by the Eritrean military prison guards, has wanted assistance in getting his scars treated and removed since he came to Israel in early 2010. He cannot work during the hot months because the scars burn when he's in the sun. 'A' says he visited UNHCR and asked them where he can find a doctor. He left them his phone number a year ago, but has not heard back from them. He is unaware of the PHR open clinic and of other hospitals in Israel.

Unaccompanied youth, if they are not living in boarding schools or Israeli shelters, have less information about accessing healthcare. 'Y', for example, an 18-year-old Eritrean boy spent three months sleeping in a church and only upon being interviewed for this report did he express that his skin had been itching since he arrived to Israel. He did not ask anyone about healthcare access because he had heard that it was too costly and he did not have any money to spend. Because he was too uncomfortable asking others in the church about where to go, he also did not learn about CSOs that could have provided him with information or directed him to healthcare facilities.

**ACCESS TO HEALTHCARE AND COPING MECHANISMS**

Many asylum seekers have learned about the health services available to them at Physicians for Human Rights' open clinic and are satisfied and grateful for PHR's assistance. 'N', a woman from Darfur who has had incessant migraines says that "we the people from Darfur no have the medicine, no have the food, no have the water" and she is grateful that PHR helped her and gave her x-rays and documents about her health problems.

Other refugees have found a way to self-diagnose and seek out treatment on their own. One 30-year-old Eritrean man was sleeping in the park for seven days when he first arrived to Israel and felt that he had developed pneumonia. He decided to go to a pharmacy on his own, explain his situation, and request that they provide him with medication. He had no money to offer, but the pharmacy gave him the medication anyway after he explained himself to them. The main reason why he was able to help himself in this situation is because he speaks English well enough to self-advocate. Many asylum seekers do not have this capacity as they do not speak English or Hebrew.

There were also varied responses from interviewees based on their places of residence. Because there are more support networks from CSOs in the Tel Aviv area, access to healthcare is easier to come by. Many asylum seekers who live in Tel Aviv, Ashdod, Ramat Gan, or other central cities go to PHR to access health services. Others go to the free clinic in the Central Bus Station, which is operated by the Ministry of Health. The Ministry covers rent and equipment costs, but the doctors are volunteers. The clinic lacks resources in that there are only family doctors present who do not have the capacity to provide ambulatory examinations. There are no specialists at the clinic either. For emergencies, asylum seekers will go to Ichilov or Wolfson Hospitals, but often complain about the debt they incur. Others fear the debt so much that they are deterred from going

at all.

Asylum seekers who are working for hotels are provided with health insurance, which differentiates them from all other asylum seekers. In Arad, healthcare has been provided to the children of hotel workers as well, but in Eilat asylum seekers say this is not the case. Interviewees living in Eilat have the most complaints about the healthcare they receive, especially about how their children do not have health insurance, which forces them to travel all the way to Tel Aviv to go to PHR or Ichilov when their children are sick. This trip is time-consuming and costly for Sudanese and Eritrean parents. Hotel workers in Arad can take their children to the hospital, but if something serious comes up, parents cannot afford to pay for the costs for the healthcare services.

Mechanisms for caring for one's health, however, go beyond simply accessing a doctor's services. Time is a factor as well. For asylum seekers who work 12-16 hours a day with only one day off a week, it is almost impossible to find the time to go to the doctor. Therefore, some deal with minor injuries or health issues on their own or by ignoring them altogether. Another factor that makes it difficult for asylum seekers to help themselves is that while they might be able to visit a PHR doctor for free, if PHR does not have reserves of the medicine they are prescribed, the asylum seeker must pay for the medication at a pharmacy, which deters some people with scarce resources from caring for themselves. One Darfuri man living in a community shelter explains that he visited PHR and was given x-rays and tests after which he was told that he needed a specific medication for Hepatitis B. He then found out that PHR did not have the medication and he would have to pay a private pharmacy and pay. While some medications are discounted at certain pharmacies through an agreement with PHR, this asylum seeker did not have any money to spend as he was jobless, living in a shelter, and without close friends or relatives to borrow money from.

There are very apparent correlations between the physical health of an asylum seeker and his or her psychological state. For those who have serious health concerns and are either unable or deterred from accessing medical treatment, the result is sadness, frustration, anger, hopelessness, anxiety, and depression.

Some of these impacts are made clear through the examples of asylum seekers' experiences of accessing healthcare services in Israel:

'N' in Tel Aviv:

> *My baby was sick and they told me he have some water in his heart. I stay in hospital for two weeks and even now I have an appointment. I'm not sure whether I'm going to work or not…I have an appointment tomorrow and I don't know what they are going to say to me. I told them about my problem. I have children at home. Because my husband didn't work for two weeks,to take care of the children, and because of that, they are releasing me…I don't speak Hebrew. I don't understand what they are saying to me. Even when they talk to me about the health problems of the baby, I thought they told me to make an operation, but I say no. That's why my husband stopped working to help me…The doctor didn't say he will have an operation, but I thought he told me like that. I'm scared. I thought my baby will die if he does operations so I say no.*

'A' in Eilat:

> *I don't know what happens in Tel Aviv. I've been in Eilat for 3 years now and I just want to know who can help me when I am in need: the police? Internal affairs? Who? I want to know what the law states. If someone is sick and goes to the hospital because they can't work or do basic things, the only answer he gets if he is a refugee is to drink some water.*

It is apparent that many Eritrean and Sudanese asylum seekers are coping with physical health problems by avoiding them. While many living in Tel Aviv are able to make the time and have the knowledge to find out about access to healthcare, many others are deterred from even finding out about access because of rumors theyve heard, language barriers, or financial concerns. Avoidance correlates with the lack of relationship with a CSO. It also stems from the lack of adequate healthcare services in the asylum seekers' home countries, where hospitals were either inaccessible or medicines are outrageously expensive. Most asylum seekers in Israel simply did not grow up in an environment where healthcare was a guaranteed human right.

# GENDER AND FAMILY RELATIONS

### ENDLESS SINGLEHOOD

For many single men living in Israel, the prospect of finding a wife while here is slim. For some, this causes angst and sadness, as they add it on to their anxieties about their futures being insecure and unstable. For others it is easier to simply avoid thinking or worrying about trying to establish families in order to avoid the sadness. Most single men expressed frustration at their future familial prospects, but said that it is just something they will not or cannot consider at this time because their lives are in limbo.

The Darfuri population includes many young, single men who are jobless and struggling to manage financially. In Arad, there are no Darfuri women, but there are around fifty men between the ages of 20-35 who do not have any prospects for romance or establishing families in the near future. Similarly, there are no Darfuri women living in Ashdod. Almost all Darfuri women in Israel are married and are living in either Tel Aviv or Eilat with their husbands and children. Some young men from Darfur have wives or families in Darfur, Chad, other parts of Sudan, or Egypt. Those who have not yet brought their families here do not plan on bringing them in the near future as they have realized how precarious and costly the journey through Sinai has become Others do try to bring their wives and children after they arrive, but find that they are sent back to Egypt through 'hot returns' conducted by the Israeli Defense Forces.[aa] 'AM' is married and his wife and two children are in Darfur. He came through Sinai twice with his wife and kids who were sent back both times through hot returns to Egypt after he had already made his way across the border. His wife was then put into prison in Egypt for eight months and his friends in Egypt were forced to take care of his children. Upon her release, 'AM' sent for his family again. They arrived to the Egyptian-Israeli border, only to be hot returned again and eventually deported from Egypt back to Sudan, after which they returned to Darfur.

A minority of men decide to bring women to Israel to marry. In general, these men invite women they already know to Israel. The women agree to come to Israel to marry them then the men usually pay for the arrangements with the Bedouin smugglers to bring their fiancées to Israel. This is a marginal phenomenon and is not representative of the general population.

For single Eritrean men, the situation is quite similar. 'Y' explains how he copes with not being able to start a family by not thinking about it. He is in an unstable situation so starting a family is just impossible for him at this time. On the question of bringing a woman from Eritrea to Israel to marry he says: "I never thought of bringing [a] girl to Israel. If and only if I'm recognized as legal and if I'm allowed to bring a girl legally, I will do this. If I get a chance from other countries to get some kind of status, I will do this." Most single Eritrean men feel that this is the wrong time for them to pursue relationships and betrothals, expressing their hope to eventually marry a woman from their country to settle down with, but not worrying about it at this time because there were too many other problems that demand their attention.

For some South Sudanese men, being single for indefinite periods of time can be a push factor when the question of returning to South Sudan comes up. Men come to Israel and believe that they have no chance to meet anyone. They are also frustrated that they cannot bring women to Israel to marry, as there are no family reunification programs like those that exist in Australia or in the United States. One mother and wife who is in the process of returning to South Sudan from Eilat with her husband and daughter explains: "So they came here, they thought with the same concept but they find things here very difficult. Nothing can move out and nothing can come in. So they were worried. But when the flights started, people they become very happy. If I want to go back, I go back."

### EMPLOYMENT AND GENDER ROLES

Beyond the typical challenges of finding employment, there are issues that come up for families as a result of the lengthy work hours that both parents must perform in order to adequately house and feed their children. In their home countries, many

[aa] See "Sinai Perils: Risks to Migrants, Refugees, and Asylum Seekers in Egypt and Israel" by Human Rights Watch (2008).

women living in rural areas did not work for wages, but worked on the farms, while others living in urban areas took care of household duties while their husbands worked wage-earning jobs. The situation in Israel does not allow for these traditional gender roles to continue. One 25-year-old Darfuri woman living in Tel Aviv says that her husband does not want her to work "but it is very difficult here because everything is so expensive so there is no other choice." She said her husband understands that it is a necessity for her to work in Israel. 'T', an Eritrean woman living in Eilat, has had a similar experience with her husband, but explains how it affects the children as the parents have less time for them, a sentiment many mothers expressed throughout the interviews. "In Eritrea," explains 'T', "until a woman gets married she can work, but when she gets married and have kids she doesn't work, and look[s] after the children. Here we can't do this. Both parents have to work, otherwise we can't pay bills, so the parents can't watch after the children." These changes have created immense amounts of pressure and new complications for asylum seekers in Israel. On another note, many men come to Israel and take on new roles in the home, such as cooking, cleaning, and caring for the children because they have no help from their extended families and must assist when their wives are working. According to one woman from South Sudan, husbands from South Sudan are not happy to do such domestic jobs and assume that if they return to South Sudan their lives, including gender roles and norms, will return to the traditional roles that they were accustomed to before their displacement. One man, however, did claim that the men have changed since being in Israel. One example given is that now the family members all eat together instead of the men eating separately from the women and children, which was often the case in South Sudan.

**DOMESTIC AND INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE**

Conclusions drawn from interviews for this report have shown that domestic and intimate partner violence is, in fact, a common problem between couples from both Eritrea and Sudan. There is not enough data to draw conclusions on the impacts of moving to Israel on the amount of domestic violence among these populations. Some respondents indicated that the rate has reduced in Israel while others claimed that it has gotten worse. Most of the women respondents did not admit to suffering from violence or abuse by their partners. However, almost all of them did express that many women they know do deal with violence from their partners on a regular basis. Among the male respondents, most men did not comment on using violence against their female partners, but there were certain occasions when they did admit to doing so.

On reasons for the occurrence of domestic violence, one Eritrean woman explains that financial concerns "makes us to disagree, to create a problem. It's not only us. All people in Israel have the same problem." When asked if the amount of intimate partner violence is different from what existed in Eritrea, the woman says that there is more conflict in Israel due to the lack of options to change the living situations.

The South Sudanese, most of whom lived in Egypt for at least a few years before moving to Israel, are accustomed to dual income families. The equalization of gender roles in Israel does not impact their relationships as significantly. Still, domestic violence among the South Sudanese is just as much an issue as it is for the Darfuri and Eritrean couples, suggesting that the fact that women work is not the cause of the violence. Rather, the evidence suggests that it is a combination of several issues that are at the root of the violence between domestic and intimate partners who are asylum seekers in Israel.[bb]

First, women in Israel have more freedom and power within Israeli society than they had in Egypt, Sudan, or Eritrea. Secondly, the ratio of women to men is so much smaller that it makes men concerned that women will leave them for another man who may have more financial security or for other reasons. There is a widespread lack of trust toward women among the Eritrean and Sudanese men. In the Eritrean population, some men expressed that due to the ratio of Eritrean women to men in Israel,the women have so many choices that they end up feeling desired and powerful, which makes the men trust them less.

Domestic and intimate partner violence are coping mechanisms in themselves to deal with the impacts and societal changes couples from Sudan and Eritrea are encountering upon moving to Israel.[cc]

'Y', the volunteer translator at Physicians for Human Rights finds that:

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[bb] Refer to the upcoming section on 'Identity and Cultural and Religious Practices' for relevant information about how relationships are formed and how marriages are conducted among the populations.

[cc] In research conducted on the Darfuri refugees living in Cairo it was found that rates of domestic and intimate partner violence among the Darfuri population were higher than those before the genocide began. Refer to "Darfur Refugees in Cairo: Mental Health and Interpersonal Conflict in the Aftermath of Genocide" by Susan M. Meffert and Charles R. Marmar (October 2008, Journal of Interpersonal Violence).

> *The Eritrean men know that violence toward women is against the law here, but they do not care. People also don't share their problems with others. They hold grudges and remember past conflicts with people years afterward. They keep all their emotions inside until these conflicts come up again. There are disagreements between couples about whether or not to have babies. Also, women sometimes have relationships with men in order to stay with them for free so that they can send money they make from working home to Eritrea. The men want them because there are no women here so they want the companionship, but it leads to conflicts between couples because they are upset that the women don't pay the rent with them.*

'N', a South Sudanese woman living in Arad, tells a story about a South Sudanese woman from Arad who stabbed her husband with a knife and was then taken to jail by the Israeli police. The entire community was concerned about where she was. Her husband was in the hospital recovering and she was in jail so the children ended up being cared for by neighbors. No one knew the exact reason for the woman stabbing her husband, but it was likely because she was suffering from domestic abuse by him. 'N' says that everyone knows about the laws at this point on violence in families, but that because the situation is so hard for them here in Israel, "people don't have control, self-control, when they become very angry... When he came home and something bothers him so he reacts very violently. That's why there is many problems."

**COPING MECHANISMS**

Individual coping mechanisms often amount to finding someone to blame for the violence. Some men come up with excuses and go so far as to blame the government of Israel or the CSOs for not providing them with enough information about the laws. Others excuse their actions by playing the culture card. At one point, a group of South Sudanese men who are church leaders in their community in Israel sat with me. They brought up the problem of violence with their wives without me asking them. They said that when they arrived to Israel a few years ago no one informed them of the laws on violence within families to the point that they had no idea it was illegal. Thus, when their wives started threatening them to call the police, which many of the women actually did, the men were dumbfounded as to why they were being taken away. These men claim that if they knew of these laws beforehand, they would not have acted violently toward their female partners.

As is typical in cases of domestic violence, women are blamed for provoking violence among their male partners, even by other women. Explaining the reasons why domestic or intimate partner violence occurs within her community in Israel, one South Sudanese woman in Tel Aviv states:

> *Now, we the Sudanese have a problem. The girls don't listen. I lived on a kibbutz and yes you can go with a man and talk, but for those coming from Sudan, life wasn't like this. It's different. Now, because things are allowed like women can walk in the streets, it gives us problems also for the Sudanese. Girls don't want to stay at home. They want to go out and they get pregnant without marriage. It's not good. Many have been pregnant. They go and do something and it's not allowed.*

The self-blame affects how women cope with such situations. For those who are not comfortable calling the police, they will likely not discuss their domestic problems with anyone. 'S' from South Sudan, says:

> *[the women] don't tell anyone. It's not allowed for us to tell people. You have to keep quiet. You know you're going back to your home tomorrow so you stay quiet. Here life is hard in Israel. You know that if you say something your husband will go to jail so you don't say anything. He doesn't hit hard here. In Sudan, he hits much harder. He can hit for no reason without you saying anything. In Sudan, the man doesn't help in the house at all. He just sits and does nothing in the house. The woman does everything in the house. But here, the men help in the house.*

Most women interviewees did not personally admit to dealing with violence from their partners. However, the few who did open up about such problems were informative about how most of their friends are resolving such issues, through utilizing traditional conflict resolution mechanisms. For many Eritreans, it is customary to call upon the husband or wife's close family members to discuss the problems being dealt with at home. Thus, many Eritrean women claim that they can call upon their partner's best friend, brother, or cousin (whoever is closest to them in Israel) and discuss the problem with them. Then the friend or brother will discuss the issue with their friend and try to help him figure out how to handle things in a more effective way so that his wife or girlfriend will not be angry with him. The friend will also discuss the situation with the wife or girlfriend and rationalize with her what she should do so that the violence mitigates. The friend may also mediate a conversation between the couple to help them resolve the problem to reduce chances of separation or divorce. The friend must be well respected by the couple in order to be chosen to perform such an intimate task for them.

Still others do not have any methods for resolving domestic disputes other than avoidance. While many women, upon learning

that they had the power to call the police if their husbands hit them, did do so, many expressed that they would not do so again as they did not realize that their husbands would be taken to jail. They expected their husbands to simply be thrown out of the house for a few hours and that they would calm down and then return. However, most of the men who do get arrested for domestic violence are put in jail for at least one night, and sometimes more, which ends up causing more stress for the women. Several issues are at play. If the man is not there to work, they lose the much-needed money from the husband's income while he is in jail. The husband's job security is threatened if he misses work for too many days. Also, the women are stuck caring for the children on their own. While many couples try to schedule their work hours at different times if they have young children, the women may not have anywhere to put the children during their work hours if their husbands are not home, causing them to either leave the children home alone or to not go to work, which results in more financial stress and more fear of being fired from their jobs. As a result, many women choose not to call the police or seek any help when dealing with domestic violence.[dd]

**INTERGENERATIONAL RELATIONS:** CULTURAL CONFUSION[ee]

There are concerns from parents about the changes their children undergo while living in Israel, both from integration into the Israeli school system and exposure to the mainstream culture, but these concerns are mild. According to Aladin Abaker, the Youth Program Coordinator at ASSAF, most Sudanese parents do not feel that there is a growing cultural gap between themselves and their children. Children, while they may act out at school or outside of the household, are very obedient to their parents, in line with the traditional relations exhibited by families in Sudan.

These concerns were not pronounced among Eritrean or Darfuri respondents. Eritrean mothers said it was not something they were too worried about, as they felt that as long as they raised their children properly, by doing things like speaking with their children in their native language, the cultural gaps between them would not be too vast. A few Eritrean mothers did express that they are not worried as of yet because their children are still young, but that when their children reach the ages of 10-15 years old, it will be a greater concern for them, as at that time the child becomes more independent from his parents and interactions between them change.

One university-educated Eritrean woman living in Tel Aviv believes that part of the problem is that:

> *in Eritrea, all families or parents are not educated so some of them don't have enough knowledge of how to treat children. They don't give them rights to talk in front of people. If they have something they tell them to sit outside and they teach them 'this is wrong, this is wrong'…It is not discipline, it is more. For children it is more and they get afraid. They grow up with less confidence…But here the population is different, but the society is the same--they give good treatment even though they have shortage of money and work hard. It is different. Even if I compare it to Eritrea, almost half the people are on the lower level. They live in crowded rooms and they don't give any freedom to their children.*

One South Sudanese mother in Eilat feels that the South Sudanese children growing up in Israel are less disciplined than children are in South Sudan. She says that in Israel "they make the house to be like a playground. That is why here there is a playground. You come and you play there, and then when you come to the house you must be quiet, like in the school…The children are not disciplined …until now in school they do the same thing: they fight, they beat."

For the South Sudanese, the issue of violence between parents and children was easier to discuss as it had come up as a dilemma in many families at least once since their move to Israel. Some South Sudanese parents claim that the cultural gap between themselves and their children is widening in Israel and it may even be a push factor for those who are considering returning to Sudan. Parents complain that their children do not listen to them and seek solutions to cope with these changes. In Sudan, children are expected to be very obedient to their parents and would be violently disciplined for not doing so. Thus, parents feel comfortable disciplining their children through the use of violence in order to minimize the growing independence

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[dd] Other community related mechanisms for resolving such conflicts are discussed in the second report of this series.

[ee] See "Sudanese Refugees in Australia: The impact of acculturation stress" (Australian Academy Press, 2010) by Karla Milner and Nigar Khawaja for information about intergenerational gaps between Sudanese parents and children in Australia, and how these gaps have impacted family dynamics among the population there.

and impacts of Israeli society on their children.

As was often the case in the beginning for newcomer men who did not know the laws in Israel about violence toward their partners until their wives called the police on them, some South Sudanese fathers have had similar experiences with their children. One man expressed that no one told him the laws and rules in Israel regarding violence between parents and children. He was frustrated that his son told him that if he continued hitting him, he would call the police and send him to jail. He also made clear that he did not want to do anything that is against Israeli law.

The youth respondents did not openly discuss domestic abuse or violence in their homes during interviews for this report.

#### COPING MECHANISMS

There are various methods for resolving such conflicts. Some parents simply try to discuss the issues with their children alone, but others will involve community leaders, especially if the police have gotten involved at points in the past and they would like to avoid similar occurrences from happening in the future. Religion is another tool used by South Sudanese communities to try to maintain cultural and traditional attributes in their families. 'A' believes that the churches in Eilat have helped discipline the children who were having behavioral issues since moving to Israel. 'M', a South Sudanese father living in Arad, explains that usually for such conflicts, the community will get involved. Lastly, many parents living in the Tel Aviv area have access to CSOs that are ready and willing to get involved in such domestic disputes. Aladin Abaker has met with parents he knows have been violently abusing their children. He has discussed forming new, deeper relationships with their children with these parents including the need to speak about problems before resorting to violent actions. Mesila is also heavily involved in assisting families with such disputes. Unfortunately, due to the lack of CSOs existent in Arad, Eilat, Ashdod, and other peripheral cities, it is less likely that children dealing with domestic violence from their parents will have access to organizational support. On the other hand, the lack of CSOs in these cities places more of the burden on community mechanisms for conflict resolution,creating more opportunities for community leaders to assist in the process, which may prove to make sense when working with cultures like the Sudanese and Eritrean cultures that are embedded with traditional familial roles.

## PHYSICAL SECURITY

#### SEXUAL AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE (SGBV)

All the South Sudanese women interviewed felt safe walking around in their respective neighborhoods. They did not fear for their physical safety. Among Darfuri women, there were some feelings of insecurity about their physical safety in Israel. 'E', a 20-year-old living in Tel Aviv, for example, does not feel safe walking around Hatikva neighborhood because she has heard that the neighborhood inhabitants do not like Sudanese people living there. 'M', who also lives in Tel Aviv, feels similarly, but clarifies that no one has ever said anything or done anything to make her feel uncomfortable or at risk of any sort. She also said she does not feel physically safe around men from her own community either.

'A' and 'S' both live with their husbands in Eilat. 'A' fears the police and the Israeli people due to the 'Protect our Homes' anti-migrant campaign[ff] marked by red flags throughout the city and executed by the municipal government of Eilat. She has heard rumors that Israeli people say that if they see Sudanese kids they will kidnap or hurt them so she prefers to stay home with her daughter. Like 'M', 'A' has not had any experiences in which people have made negative comments toward her in public places that would warrant her feeling that walking around alone was risky.

Eritrean women have similar experiences regarding their physical security. 'Z' is not nervous when she walks down the streets of south Tel Aviv, even when she encounters verbal harassment from men. However, since her home was broken into several

[ff] The Eilat municipality removed the Protect our Homes campaign in April 2011.

months ago she has become worried about this type of occurrence happening again. At the same time, 'Z' acknowledges that having your home broken into can happen anywhere and does not think it is specific to Israel. At one point, when she first arrived to Tel Aviv, 'Z' was anxious about the high amount of drug-users who spend time in the streets of her neighborhood. After a year, she found that they are harmless and do not hurt others and she has grown accustomed to their presence.

Other women have expressed that they do feel less comfortable walking around the streets of Tel Aviv late at night in certain areas. One single Eritrean woman worries about walking around at night because if something happens to her she has no one to ask for help from. The most common way women cope with such fears is to simply not go out alone very often, especially not at night, but sometimes these methods are impossible to adhere to as many women work until after dark.

One Eritrean man who has been in Israel since the late 1990s comments that many Eritrean women are afraid to go out of their homes and walk around the streets of south Tel Aviv. He says that because the Eritrean women are more independent in Israel, the men develop anger toward them over the fact that they are losing control and power over the women. There is an element of 'blaming the victim', which is typical at least in Chad and Darfur where women are supposed to be chaperoned at all times so that they do not attract any men.[99] Some of the Eritrean men feel that because women threaten to call the police, the men react by becoming more angry and violent toward them. He says that the violent men figure they are going to jail anyway for hitting their partners causing them to be even more violent than usual, even to the point of murder.

While there have been a few cases of Eritrean and Sudanese men raping women from their own populations, these events are occurring on a small-scale. The Knesset Department of Research and Information has repeatedly reported that the crime rates are lower, including those involving SGBV, among the 'infiltrator' populations than among the general population in Israel.[29] Women generally report not feeling scared to walk around their neighborhoods. They feel safe walking around in Israel in all the cities where respondents reside. They feel comfortable around both asylum seeker men as well as among Israeli men and their physical safety in Israel is not causing them too much concern.[hh]

**MEN**

In the focus group with Darfuri men living in a shelter, several men expressed the dangers they feel walking around in Tel Aviv. They expect that anything can happen to them at anytime because, as newcomers, they do not know anything about the country. A few men had heard that someone had been sprayed in his eyes (probably with pepper spray) by employers, who they claimed happened to be Arabic-speakers. They feared that the same would happen to them. They said that another person went to the police with a problem and they did not understand him because he did not speak Hebrew or English and they told him to leave. Eventually the police sprayed his eyes as well until he got up and left the police station. These stories cause newcomer Darfuri men to fear both employers and the Israeli police. If they fear the police, they will not feel comfortable complaining to them when they have problems with their employers or with others.

Eritrean men experience paranoia when they first arrive to Israel, but their fears are directed at other Eritreans, rather than at Israelis. As newcomers who have lived under a dictatorship in which they could not even trust some of their own family members, they simply do not trust anyone, which results in their going through life full of suspicion about everyone and everything. 'A', for example, says that he is "scared of everybody, especially Eritreans. Even though I'm Eritrean, I'm scared of Eritreans because I can see that, feel that they might be a delegation of the government. I cannot know." 'K', since his election to a community committee, has feared repercussions from the Eritrean government. Part of the fear stems from the wide-spread belief that the Eritrean Embassy in Israel maintains undercover agents throughout the country to collect information to send to the Eritrean government about the activities of Eritreans living in Israel. While this is a fairly common fear, especially in Tel Aviv, many Eritrean men, like 'I', who spent seven years in Eritrean prisons and has plenty of reasons to fear others, feels perfectly safe in the streets in Israel and has never worried about his physical safety here. There do not seem to be any obvious coping

[99] This information is based on a conversation with Yiftach Millo.

[hh] Some women have reported being raped by imposter employers that have picked them up for chik-chak jobs. These reports were given to ASSAF staff-members, but were not revealed during interviews for this report, as occurrences were discovered at the end of the interview phase of this research. These incidents have increased fear and paranoia among asylum seeker women doing chik-chak work in the Tel Aviv area.

mechanisms for such anxieties other than avoiding people that seem suspicious as often as possible.
There were no serious concerns about their physical safety from South Sudanese men or youth respondents.

## IDENTITY AND CULTURAL AND RELIGIOUS PRACTICES

Culture plays an important role both during and after migration occur such that cultural bereavement, grief over the loss of one's cultural identity and social structure, has been a common factor for refugees and asylum seekers throughout the world.[30] For example, a migrant who is unable to fulfill grief and mourning traditions and customs from afar may experience "feelings of guilt" and may feel "stricken by anxieties, morbid thoughts, and anger that mar the ability to get on with daily life."[31] In other words, a person's inability to execute cultural practices can cause him or her psychological harm. Thus, this section focuses on highlighting the types of cultural adaptations and losses asylum seekers are encountering as they settle down in Israel, as well as the impacts such changes may have on both individuals and communities.

### BIRTH RITUALS

ERITREANS

Most of the Eritrean asylum seekers conduct Orthodox Christian rituals following the birth of their babies. When boys are born, they are baptized after 40 days. For girls, they are baptized after 80 days. During this time, the mother does not enter the church, but she is permitted to work if she is physically healthy enough to do so. This tradition takes place in one of the two churches located in south Tel Aviv, and Eritreans living in other cities, like Eilat, generally come up to Tel Aviv to partake in these religious practices. There are no significant differences between what Eritreans are able to practice when their children are born in Israel as opposed to in Eritrea as there are established churches with priests who can perform the same rituals. After baptisms, it is customary to invite friends and relatives over to one's home for a celebration.

At times asylum seeker parents cannot afford to pay the church for their services. While the Eritrean Orthodox churches do not turn people down for not being able to pay for their services, such circumstances may affect the self-esteem of parents, who feel guilty that they are unable to provide their children with the necessary rituals. For Eritreans, asking for help is considered shameful, so it is unlikely that Eritrean parents are comfortable with the fact that they have to request assistance from the church to carry out birth rituals.

### MARRIAGE

DARFURIS

Traditionally, Darfuris undergo arranged marriages through their families. For young Darfuris, polygamy was common among their parents' generation. It is still conducted today among the younger generation and there are some Darfuri men in Israel who have more than one wife, but these wives are not living in Israel. There are no known polygamous marriages among the Darfuri population in Israel.

The families arranging marriages for their children might choose the spouses at young ages. The potential bride's family will give a dowry gift to the groom's family. Others, however, have love relationships and choose to marry whoever they are in a relationship with. For some arranged marriages, the bride and groom are permitted to not accept the marriage if they are not interested in marrying the other person.

For couples making the journey through Sinai to Israel, the lack of the familial conflict resolution mechanisms adds pressure on the couple who have to cope with all the problems and challenges they may face in Israel on their own, This increases the stress on both the individuals themselves and between the couple.[ii]

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[ii] Conflict resolution mechanisms for resolving such issues are discussed in the second report of this series.

## SOUTH SUDANESE

The South Sudanese conduct marriage practices according to both their tribal traditions and Christian marriage rituals. The men from the Dinka tribe, for example, are supposed to pay the bride's family a dowry of cows. The bride's worth is based on her beauty and other physical traits like her height. A tall bride is desirable because she will have tall male children who can protect the family. Sons are desired because they are seen as protectors of the family and the tribe.

Along with the lack of women to marry, South Sudanese men come across financial hurdles to arranging for marriages while in Israel. If the man does not have enough funds to send to his family so that they can give the dowry to the bride's family back in Sudan, then he cannot marry her. The practice is carried out in Sudan between the families still there through the coordination of the couple in Israel. The marriages in Israel are generally love marriages for the South Sudanese, many of whom met their spouses while living in Egypt. However, after the couple decide to wed, the parents will meet in South Sudan, if capable, to discuss the arrangements and to approve of the wedding. Most people wed around the ages of 20 so the high amount of single men in their late 20s and early 30s residing in Israel is most likely a direct result of the migratory uprooting of their lives as well as their status as asylum seekers.

'S' is also from South Sudan, but from the Yei tribe. Her husband is Dinka. 'S' explains traditional weddings from the perspective of the woman. She says that "a woman in Sudan is like money." If a man approaches her and her husband asking to marry their daughter, according to 'S', the decision is completely up to them and the daughter has no say at all in the matter. The parents will then throw a celebration for the couple. For 'S', there is a big difference between these types of customs in South Sudan as opposed to how they deal with marriages in Israel. "Here I see it's not allowed for a mother to tell the daughter what to do," says 'S'. "She comes and goes whenever she wants. It's different here," she adds. While 'S' is concerned about her daughter not listening to her when she grows up, she is happy that girls stay at home until age 18 in Israel and that she will receive a high school education, which 'S' thinks can prevent her from marrying too young.

But the traditional customs 'S' speaks of were already broken by her generation. As a refugee in Egypt, she met her husband there. He did not pay her family a dowry. 'S' says that until now they are requesting that he pay the dowry. Her father can decide that 'S's marriage is not authentic because of the lack of a dowry exchange. Essentially, 'S's father can ask her to leave her husband because of this and she claims she cannot say no to him. The problem for 'S' and her husband is that her husband does not have the money to pay for the dowry. 'S' says that she is not in touch with her father right now, but that if she were living in Sudan, this would be a very problematic situation that causes serious conflicts between families.

If possible, the two families meet if they are both in Sudan to discuss the dowry amount. 'N' for example, received forty cows for her wedding six months after the religious ceremony occurred. She met her husband in Egypt so they were unable to introduce him to her father in person. However, her father was introduced to her husband over the phone. The engagement process was taken care of in Sudan with all communications conducted over the phone. After the agreement was completed, 'N' and her husband had a party to celebrate in Egypt, while their families celebrated without them in Sudan.

Weddings taking place in Israel are considerably different than those that took place in South Sudan. For one, the traditional celebration is not conducted. There is only a modern wedding party after a church service and, as mentioned before, cows are exchanged between the families in Sudan if possible. The husband, rather than sending cows he already owns, must calculate the amount of dollars needed to buy the necessary amount of cows and send the money to his parents who will do the buying.

According to 'N', divorce is not accepted in the Nuer tradition: "No matter what happens you don't leave him. If he beats you, you don't leave him. You will stay." In South Sudan, a divorced woman is stigmatized and gossiped about. In Israel, a divorced woman is less stigmatized and she can also support herself financially. Divorces are occurring in Israel among the South Sudanese, but they are still very uncommon. 'N' believes that there have not been any divorces among the Nuer community in Israel to date. Some couples have decided to not cohabitate with each other anymore, but literal divorces are rare.

## ERITREANS

For Orthodox Christian Eritreans, which is what most of the asylum seekers from Eritrea subscribe to although to varying degrees of practice, weddings occur in one of the two churches located in Tel Aviv. Even Eritreans living in Eilat come to Tel Aviv in order to get married. Because divorce is not accepted, those that wed in Israel are required to bring six witnesses, three for the bride and three for the groom, to attest to the fact that neither one of them was previously married. The family of the groom is meant to pay a dowry of cows, money or gold to the family of the bride, but this is not always done if families do not have the means to do so. In Israel, couples are independent of their families. They do not necessarily pay the dowry, but the grooms will, at times, ask their families to visit the families of the bride and to ask their permission for the marriage.

In Eritrea, many types of conflict would have been resolved by an 'elder' from the community, especially for those coming from rural areas of Eritrea. The elder is a man who is chosen by the community based on his family's reputation and his wisdom. He may be a priest as well. A village, for example, may comprise of a few hundred families that, as they establish themselves, choose a priest (elder) who will act as their advisor from then on. The elders are able to resolve conflicts and domestic disputes without needing to take the issue to the courts. In Israel, because this mechanism has been uprooted, it is customary for the man to approach the closest relative or friend of the woman to help them resolve the conflict.[jj]

**DEALING WITH DEATH**

SOUTH SUDANESE

For the South Sudanese, dealing with death in Israel is a community matter. When someone dies, community members will visit the home of the deceased. The visitors help the family while they mourn and conduct prayers in the church. After the mourning ceremonies, people return to visit the home of the deceased, usually bringing food with them.

If a woman's husband passes away, it is customary that the widow wear black or white during the mourning period, which can last for up to three years. Black and white both signify that the woman is in mourning and she cannot wed during that time period. Traditionally, the widow then becomes the wife of the husband's older brother. While she is now remarried, her children will retain their father's name. Furthermore, if she bears more children from her husband's brother, those children will also take the name of her deceased husband. The widow is never actually considered to be the wife of her husband's brother. These traditions have not continued in Israel. Women whose husbands pass away are likely to remarry as desired.

The mourning process is not very different from the process that occurs in South Sudan. However, the challenge to the family and the community begins with sending the body back to South Sudan. According to respondents, many of the bodies of asylum seekers from South Sudan who have passed away in Israel were not sent back. They were buried in a Christian cemetery because it was too costly for families to send the bodies of their family members back. Nevertheless, when they do decide to send back the body of a deceased South Sudanese, the entire community will pitch in to cover the costs.

DARFURIS

In Darfur, burial ceremonies are conducted according to the religion of the deceased person. Generally, when someone dies, the family and friends of the deceased will gather in his or her home for six or seven days to spend time with the family and to talk about the person's life. In Israel, however, due to time constraints, Darfuris usually only gather in the home of the deceased for three days. Sometimes the gathering only takes place for one day. Darfuris in Israel continue to carry out burial ceremonies and rituals for death that are similar to those conducted in Darfur. Those who pass away in Israel are buried in cemeteries within Israel according to their respective religions.

ERITREANS

When someone dies who is a member of the Orthodox Christian church, the body is brought to the church and a funeral is conducted before the burial. According to the rules of the church, however, the burial should be conducted within one day. The funeral lasts for one hour. The family of the deceased will request help from their regional community to pay to send the body back to Eritrea. Most bodies are sent back to Eritrea for burials. Even though they do not arrive on the day of the death, the bodywill be buried on the same day that it arrives back to Eritrea. Friends may also pay visits to the home of the family of the deceased.

For Eritreans in general, mourning and death rituals are mandatory. Furthermore, sending the body back of a deceased relative is imperative, as not doing so can harm one's reputation back in Eritrea, which affects one's entire family there. Sending a body

[jj] While most of the asylum seekers from Eritrea who are living in Israel are from the Tigrinya tribe, there is a minority who are from Tigre. They are mostly Muslim. In this community the men are not permitted to talk to the wives of other men and vice versa. The Tigre come from more rural areas than the Tigrinya, who are generally more urban and socially liberal.

back to Eritrea could cost up to $3,000 and must be paid to the Eritrean Embassy, who sees to it that the body is sent back to the family. Although for many Eritreans requesting services from the Embassy is considered to be highly risky, they will take the risk, portraying the high importance of sending the body back for the Eritrean population. One Eritrean man tells a story of his friend who went to the Embassy requesting that they send back the body of his close relative only to be told that because he had protested against the Embassy in Ramat Gan, they would refuse his request. The man then approached the oldcomers who have been in Israel since the 1990s. They were able to arrange for the body to be sent back through their own connections.[kk]

For some, going through the grieving process in Israel has been very difficult. 'M' does not have friends or family in Israel and explains how she did not get to perform the appropriate mourning ceremonies after being informed that her grandfather and uncle had both passed away: "Nobody shared this with me. Nobody helped me." 'A', who suffered severely from torture in Eritrean prisons after being deported by the Egyptians explains that he was working in the cleaning field, but that he was fired when his brother died in Ethiopia and he took time off to mourn the death. In 'A's culture, if someone dies one is supposed to mourn for at least two to three days. 'A' told this to his employer, but he fired him anyway and 'A' has not been able to secure employment since this occurred almost a year ago.

After forty days, the mourners will partake in another service to remember the person who has passed away. This is called the 'tezkar' service.

**OTHER PRACTICES**

SOUTH SUDANESE

For many tribes of South Sudan there are initiation practices that symbolize becoming an adult. Some Nuer men living in Israel have scars on their foreheads, six horizontal lines across their foreheads, from their initiations. 'S', for example, followed his 15-year- old brother who was going for his initiation ritual, known as 'gaar' for the Nuer. 'S' was not supposed to go through the ritual at that time, but some of his friends had already done it and he did not want to be the only one who had not undergone the ritual. "If you are a boy and your friends do it and you don't, you are considered a woman, which is like being considered not human," explains 'S'. Women are considered to be weaker beings in the Nuer culture and they do not gain respect until after they have raised their children. This practice has been uprooted for many South Sudanese asylum seekers who currently live in Israel. Many of the men left at very young ages to Khartoum, Egypt, Uganda, or elsewhere and were not able to go through the process. However, there are some men who have undergone the practice and who do experience strange looks from Israelis who notice the scars on their foreheads and do not understand what they symbolize. The South Sudanese are not conducting such practices in Israel, but none of the respondents from the region expressed frustrations with this change.

FEMALE GENITAL CUTTING[ll]

Another practice that commonly occurs in many parts of East Africa is female genital cutting (FGC). In Eritrea, the FGC conducted is Type I, meaning that the clitoris is cut off, or Type II, when the clitoris and labia minora are removed, and the labia majora may or may not be removed as well.[32] For the Tigrinya, the practice usually is done to baby girls. For other tribes, the practice might be conducted between the ages of 7-12. In Sudan, there are estimates that the 90% of girls undergo the practice.[33] Infibulation (Type III), described by the World Health Organization as "the narrowing of the vaginal orifice with [the] creation of a covering seal by cutting and appositioning the labia minora and/or the labia majora, with or without excision of the clitoris," is more common in Sudan as well.[34] There are signs that the practice is continuing in Israel on a very small-scale. The practice is passed on between the generations from the elderly women such that due to the fact that the Eritrean and Sudanese women residing in Israel are mainly between the ages of 20-35, there is less incentive and pressure to continue with such traditions, as the societal consequences that would occur in Eritrea and Sudan are minimal.

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[kk] Interview respondents did not provide details on what the methods and connections of the oldcomer Eritreans are with regard to sending bodies of deceased Eritreans back to Eritrea.

[ll] While the term 'Female Genital Mutilation' has become the common title for the practice of in many parts of the world, there are also many people who find the term to be offensive, expressing that it denotes a lack of diversity in the practice and a lack of agency among those undergoing it. Others call the practice 'Female Circumcision,' which is also offensive to those who claim it is not comparable to male circumcision. I have chosen to utilize the term 'Female Genital Cutting' in this report in an effort to not take a position on the practice, as doing so is not an aim of this report. I also do not want to ignore that there is a diversity of practices under the title of FGC along with a range of perspectives regarding each of the different types of FGC existent today.

## RELATIONS WITH CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS

Asylum seekers have varying opinions about the CSOs, but most express that the CSOs are unable to meet their needs. Many single men, especially from the Eritrean population, do not know that the CSOs exist. Others have heard of the CSOs, but have not sought out their assistance as they do not know what services they provide, or have heard that they only assist families.

Those asylum seekers who have established strong connections with the CSOs generally have positive opinions about them. 'K' says that he has "a great belief in them because they do a lot…I came here, I knew nothing about Israel. These people opened our eyes. They guided us a lot." 'K' adds that the CSOs "welcome everybody and they give their advice and it is very appreciated so they are doing a great job." Many asylum seekers volunteer their time and translation services to the CSOs, but feel that their assistance to the CSOs is taken for granted. One volunteer translator explains his frustration for not being paid for his translation services by various CSOs: "I am happy to help, but people need to live somehow and we need money for that." Other volunteer asylum seekers express feeling excluded by CSOs as they are not labeled as 'volunteers', which they do with Israelis and other foreigners who donate their time to the CSOs.

Some asylum seekers complain about the way CSOs handle certain problems that arise among the asylum seeker communities. One Darfuri mother states:

> *ASSAF helps refuges, but not all refugees and they're not giving them enough help. Mesila makes more problems for the refugees sometimes. For example, Sudanese kids run around and play in the streets sometimes until late at night and it is normal for their parents, but this is different for Israelis. In the past, Mesila has called the police and taken the children away from their parents because they were playing in the streets without their parents. They did this without calling and discussing the issue with the parents first.*

Other asylum seekers argue that the CSOs only provide services that are appropriate or necessary for families, but that are not very useful for single people. 'I', a man from Eritrea, explains that he came to ASSAF to look for a job because that is what he heard he could find there. He has read through ASSAF and ARDC's websites and feels that neither organization can "help me beyond their capacities." He was not able to find a job through ASSAF. He adds that the capacity of the CSOs is limited and is not enough to effectively meet the needs of his community.

Many members of the South Sudanese and Darfuri populations are disheartened by the CSOs and have distanced themselves from relations with them. 'A', a South Sudanese man living in Eilat explains:

> *Maybe they (the CSOs) want to talk, but we don't think something because, like I said, the people lost their hope about every organizations, about the rules here in Israel…People come here (to Eilat) to talk and there still is the same way. Nothing has changed. We don't get result from the organizations--never. We have 4 years, 3 years, nothing result from the organizations.*

'A' says that his friends and community members are exhausted from speaking with the CSOs about their problems and no longer want to share their concerns with CSO representatives as they feel that these conversations are futile and do not lead to real results for the asylum seekers.

When asked what the CSOs should do in order to be effective in their work with the asylum seekers, one Darfuri man says: **"I think the organizations shouldn't be handing out things to refugees, but should try and get to the bottom of the problem and ask why things are the way they are instead of offering an instant fix."** One South Sudanese man says he and his friends do not need help from the organizations and that the "only thing I need is a change with the visa." Many believe that if the organizations increased dialogue and conversation with the asylum seekers' community leaders, both the CSOs and asylum seekers could be more effective in achieving their mutual goals. One Darfuri woman states: "The best idea is for the organizations to have meetings with educated Sudanese people explaining these types of differences to them and where to go for different things and they will pass on information to the less educated people."

# REPATRIATION TO SUDAN: HOW VOLUNTARY IS VOLUNTARY?

The flights from Israel returning South Sudanese, as well as some Darfuris, to South Sudan have been a controversial topic for some of the Israeli CSOs to engage with. These CSOs feel apprehensive about supporting the return of refugees to a country whose near future is unstable, possibly putting the lives of those returning from Israel at risk. However, most do believe that it is an individual choice at the end of the day and that they should not intervene in such decision making processes. To date, 500-600 asylum seekers have returned on these flights. The first flight, which departed in 2009, only had ten Sudanese returnees on it, but the last three flights have been full with between 140-150 passengers on each. While many CSOs supported assisted voluntary return (AVR) during the first year it was implemented, some are increasingly critical of the return flights, claiming that people are returning out of desperation over their difficult situations in Israel. These CSOs are questioning how voluntary and transparent the repatriation process truly is. There is a sense among them that those who are returning are not making informed decisions when deciding to go back to South Sudan at this shaky time in the country's history, right before it declares independence and while some regions are still disputed by the Khartoum and Juba governments.

The goal of this section is to include the voices of the South Sudanese and some Darfuri asylum seekers who are still living in Israel, who feel that their opinions in this debate have not been requested or accounted for by the CSOs or the organizations involved. This section is solely based on interviews conducted with eight women and nine men from South Sudan still living in Israel, as well as an additional two interviews conducted with South Sudanese men about this topic specifically. Several of the Darfuris interviewed for this project also brought up their concerns on the subject matter. Views from informal conversations with South Sudanese and Darfuris living in Israel were also incorporated into the analysis. This section does not attempt to discuss the debate between CSOs nor does it include the opinions of those who have already returned. Rather, this section aims to recognize that it is important for CSOs and government agencies to consider the reasons why people repatriate or stay in Israel and how they are making such decisions. The organizations mentioned in this section were not interviewed nor were the South Sudanese who have returned through the voluntary repatriation program. Further research on this subject matter is recommended, including an assessment that includes the opinions of the organizations involved as well as those of the South Sudanese who have already returned through the program.

Operation Blessing International (OBI) is carrying out the AVR program with the financial support of the Israeli government, the technical support of the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS), and the oversight of UNHCR.[mm] The National Director of OBI in Israel is Charmaine Hedding, who was mentioned by most of the asylum seekers from South Sudan during interviews for this project. Every South Sudanese encountered for this research knows who the director is, and many of their sentiments regarding the repatriation process are directed at her as though she is a symbol of the entire concept of returning to South Sudan for them.

There are asylum seekers in Israel who are working with Operation Blessing to recruit and translate for asylum seekers who wish to go back to South Sudan. In an interview conducted in Eilat, One man who returned to South Sudan for four days and then came back to Israel with the help and support of OBI, says he interviews people regarding their desire to return to South Sudan. He says he does not seek people out to send them home. Rather, they call him because they do not know who they are supposed to call if they do decide to go back. He acts, essentially, as the liaison between Operation Blessing and the people. He does not believe that it is dangerous to go back to South Sudan and is optimistic about both the support returnees can receive from the South Sudanese government as well as what is received from Operation Blessing and the Israeli government. He says the country needs people to return now. "The main thing," he says, "is security and I can assure you there is security in South Sudan."[nn]

Asylum seekers still living in Israel say that one of the draws of returning to South Sudan is the benefits returnees receive from Operation Blessing. A number of South Sudanese respondents say that returnees sign up on a list and are called up around two

[mm] UNHCR suspended its involvement in the Operation Blessing repatriation process in May 2011.

[nn] In May 2011, the Sudanese government burned and looted the contested villages in the Abyei region, an area claimed by both South Sudan and Khartoum. According to BBC reports, up to 150,000 people have been displaced (see "Sudan: 150,000 Flee Abyei Clash, Says Southern Minister" by BBC World News, May 27 2011). Conflicts in Abyei have the potential to disrupt and destabilize the entire independence process South Sudan will be undergoing in July 2011.

weeks before their flights are going to depart. However, HIAS explains that this has not been a common practice and that most returnees were given sufficient notice to prepare for their departure. Most of the time potential returnees were given notice about their flight dates at least one month, and often time several months in advance, according to a statement from HIAS. During this time, they may take courses offered by Operation Blessing, most of which last for two weeks or longer. The course topics to choose from include agriculture, business, and driving courses. Some asylum seekers say that people they know who went back were not provided with such courses. Others say there are plenty of courses available before flights. The courses take place in Tel Aviv, Arad, Eilat and sometimes at Ben Gurion University and participants receive a certificate at the end of each course. Returnees are also promised a stipend of $500 upon landing in South Sudan to help them get off their feet. However, some asylum seekers in Israel claim that their friends did not receive any money at all upon returning, or that they received much less than what they were promised.

Most of the respondents plan or expect to leave Israel and go back to their home country at some point in the near future. One man living in Eilat says:

> *What divided us from home is the civil war that was happening for 21 years. It separated us all over the world, all the Southern Sudanese, this violent war. And the moment that we spent in Egypt, we lived in Egypt, and we are here now, for the moment, not to live here for a long time. So of course we will go back home, I think...all of the Southern Sudanese.*

However, none of the respondents feel comfortable going back at a time in which the country is undergoing its self-determination process. All respondents for this research expressed that they would rather wait until they know there is peace and stability in the region before making such a serious decision. The South Sudanese still in Israel and those awaiting upcoming flights reinforce the idea that the push factors are the primary impacts encouraging them to go back to South Sudan at this time, while the pull factors are secondary in the decision-making process, if they are factors at all. 'T', the leader of one of the Nuer communities who lives in Arad, wants to go back soon after independence. For him, going back is a choice and no one is forced to move back, but the pressure to go back exists because of three main push factors: unemployment, visa problems, or the lack of potential to receive an education in Israel.[oo]

Some South Sudanese do not want to leave Israel at all, mainly because they have nothing to go back to and have not lived in South Sudan for many years. 'W', for example, was abducted as a young child from his village in South Sudan by the Janjaweed. He lost his entire family and eventually escaped slavery and made his way to Khartoum, then to Cairo before moving to Israel in 2007. 'W' has nothing to go back to in South Sudan other than childhood memories of hardships faced there. 'W' would prefer the ability to go back and forth between Israel and South Sudan. He is patriotic about both countries and cares very much for the future of the South, but would like the freedom to come back to Israel if desired, probably out of fear that war and instability might ensue again and he will have to relive the terrible memories from his past:

> *I like Israel. I can stay here and I can go back to my country and stay there for some time and come back. If we don't have any problems between Israel and South Sudan, it can be like one place. Someone stays here as he or she wants and stays there as he or she wants. This is really something in my heart. I like Israel and all South Sudanese [do]...not me alone. They like Israel so much. We used to pray everyday that peace can be here because this is the 'holy land'. We like Israeli people so much.*

Another factor pressuring people to repatriate is the increased discrimination against African asylum seekers in Israel. 'M' discusses the perspective of asylum seekers living in Arad: "Well, in here the situation has become very hard in Arad – you are just looking to get back, you know. 'I don't want to die here, I need to get back,' – something like that." While 'M' feels that the increasing amount of protest against asylum seekers in Arad is causing much anxiety among his friends, he wants his community to "be patient. We have to wait...They cannot go there while the country's not real quiet – you have to wait, and then

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[oo] See section on 'Life in Israel' for details on the effects of status and unemployment among the asylum seeker population.

after that you can get back." While 'M' desires a life in his home country, his personal reason for going back sooner than later is because he is thinking about his future, his dreams, which he feels cannot be realized in Israel: "I need to get back to my school to complete my university. Here, they're not letting me [study] here." The inability to receive an education came up in almost every conversation about moving back to Sudan. While most South Sudanese are very excited about independence, they feel that if they go back with nothing, meaning no education or skills to bring back to their country, they will be looked down upon and will end up either jobless or at the very least in more challenging financial positions than they are currently in. Furthermore, there is a strong desire to help develop their new country and to support and assist the new government, but asylum seekers in Israel fear that their lack of skills and education will exclude them from participation in development projects.

Three asylum seekers interviewed argue that their communities are pressured by OBI to return to South Sudan. These interviewees claim that the organization ignites fear in the people by reminding them of the upcoming detention facility Israel is building in the Negev desert. Most respondents find that the South Sudanese asylum seekers are divided over whether they support the AVR program. Some of them claim that even the celebrations for the referendum results were divided between those who celebrated in Tel Aviv, who claim to not support OBI's work, and those who went to Jerusalem, who do support it. Other respondents, like 'T', a leader in the Nuer community in Arad, do not think the South Sudanese population is divided over this issue. People make a choice, but he advises them to wait until after independence.

While it is true that people are entitled to making their own decisions about their futures, the controversy over this issue is indisputable. Many of the people who have returned have been women and children, while husbands have stayed in Israel to earn a living and send money back. Some respondents stated that some of these families have returned without anywhere to return to and have had to find their way on their own upon landing. While there have been claims made that everyone who has gone back has found a job and is content, there are many who have not found jobs. According to respondents, many returnees are struggling to make ends meet. (OBI is conducting follow-ups on the livelihoods of returnees several months after their return, but this information is not part of the scope of this project.)

Many women from South Sudan define their reasons for returning as related to their children. 'A', who is on the list to return to South Sudan decided to go back because she does not like how her 7-year-old daughter was treated in the school for refugee children at Nof Eilot. She feels that her daughter is not getting a good education and that the teacher was picking on her daughter, so she pulled her out of school for a few months before they will board their flight to South Sudan. In the meantime, 'A's daughter is spending her days in their apartment while her parents are at work. 'A' says that if her daughter could get a good education in Israel, she would stay in the country.

One woman respondent feels that women return without their husbands in order to obtain more support from family and friends back home, as people take pity on women and children and help them more than they do if they return with a man, who is expected to support his family. She explains that if the man goes back with the family, those who remained in South Sudan will expect him to bring them money and gifts and will not understand why he and his family are requesting financial assistance from them.

Another mother, 'M', does not want to go back to South Sudan at all. She ran away from the violence there and is uncomfortable with the possibility that her children's lives could be in danger if they go back. She and her husband have never discussed returning. Her children like Israel and she would rather stay here for the time being. In the meantime, if she is not physically forced to return then she will not, even though she is fearful that she will be put in jail in the near future, which she has been hearing a lot about from her peers.

Half of the respondents for this section explain that many people who return on the Operation Blessing flights are landing and going straight to Uganda or Kenya. Some respondents who themselves are thinking of returning are also preparing to go directly to Uganda or Kenya as well. Those who are making their way to those countries plan to do so before embarking on their journeys to Juba. Reasons for this include getting an education, cheaper rent, and more stability (less fears of future wars over certain regions). In Uganda they can feely cross borders and rent apartments for cheaper prices.pp For women and children who left their fathers and husbands in Israel, if the husband has a secure job he can send enough money to afford apartments in Kenya and Uganda to support his family with greater ease. Some say that life in South Sudan is still very expensive as there are no jobs and everything has to be imported from other countries. Living in Uganda or Kenya is just another way to cope with the tumultuous lives the asylum seekers have grown accustomed to. It is a normalized mechanism for them – to keep moving to the next best place, with the most security and the best prospects for their future lives and for the lives of their children.

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[pp] This is based on information provided by South Sudanese asylum seeker respondents in Israel who know and are in contact with people who have returned to South Sudan.

# PSYCHOSOCIAL COPING MECHANISMS: SADNESS, DEPRESSION, FEAR, AND ANXIETY

As the State's policies become harsher toward the asylum seekers in an effort to deter more asylum seekers from crossing Israel's borders and in order to encourage those who are in Israel to leave, psychological impacts on the asylum seekers who are already in Israel are increasingly apparent and are becoming more severe. Almost all of the interviewees expressed feelings of sadness, stress, constant confusion and anxiety over their futures. They all called the detention facility that the Israeli government is building a prison. They all brought up the conditional release visa as one of the most stressful elements of their existence in Israel, both because of the constant need to renew them and because of the confusion over whether they can work or not. They are also worried that they can be deported from Israel on any given day.

'Y's fears of being deported have caused him to only be able to sleep for two hours a night. He cannot stop thinking about how if he is deported he will be put into an Eritrean prison. This also discourages 'Y' from getting involved in community organizations and political activities such as protests.

Almost all of the respondents express fears about the detention facility that the Israeli government is in the process of building. They believe that it is going to be a prison and feel that the Israeli government is treating them like criminals. There are numerous rumors spreading throughout the asylum seeker communities about who will be sent to the detention facility and what life there will be like. Many asylum seekers discuss wanting to find a way to leave Israel before they are imprisoned in the facility. 'N' discusses the anxieties people have over the detention facility:

> *If somebody thinks about the prison, so I am going to stay in one place like in 200 square meters, so you will be over there like 100, 200 people and they will put this people in that place…they will not be able to communicate with their families, with their friends so you will be out of this world in general.*

While their lives are not in danger while in Israel, the psychological impacts on the asylum seekers are extremely harmful. For those who have been here for several years, they feel that they have exhausted their efforts to achieve their goals or to improve their future prospects. Some tried to seek out resettlement from UNHCR only to be told that it would not be possible. Some sought out an education and even got accepted to programs only to find that they were unable to begin their studies because they could not receive a scholarship and did not have the funds to attend the programs.

Many asylum seekers have become depressed, stressed, or have "gone crazy" throughout their time in Israel.[qq] One man discussed how his friend, a 33-year-old Darfuri man, tried to commit suicide recently because he felt he had nothing to live for anymore as Israel was not what he expected it to be.

Most people simply deal with their sadness or stress by not dealing with it - by avoiding talking about it although they are constantly thinking about their problems. 'A', for example, says that he is angry with himself because he is not able to work due to a disability. To cope, he stays at home, sleeps all day long, and watches television throughout the night. There is a cultural attitude among Eritreans that one should keep his or her problems inside so as not to burden others who have problems of their own. For the Eritreans, there is a lack of trust among the population so people usually keep things to themselves or they discuss their problems only with a few close friends.

One 23-year-old Darfuri man lost his entire immediate family in 2003. He explains: **"I don't think about my family. I think about my land. My family is not important to me because everyone is in the same situation. I think about my future - my land."** Many of the Darfuri men deal with the loss of their family members by channeling their energies into advocating for political change in Darfur. The women from Darfur, however, tend to discuss the sadness they feel about how their family members

[qq] The terms 'depressed', 'stressed', and 'gone crazy' were all specifically utilized by many of the respondents for this report to describe the issues they or others they know are dealing with.

were killed more openly.

The Sudanese, both Darfuris and South Sudanese, have community mechanisms for talking about the issues they face that allow them to express themselves quite often - as often as once a week - with a group of people. Also, many Eritreans and South Sudanese are religious and seek support from their churches, where they find comfort in prayer and in the community relations they have built through their religious practices.

The asylum seekers consider sleeping in the park and not having enough food to eat as really difficult experiences to go through, but as minor problems in comparison to the more complex issues they face like what their futures hold, where they will be able to settle down, whether their countries will ever be peaceful enough for them to go back, and whether they will ever see their family members again.

For those that do have family members in other countries that they speak with every few months, they do not choose to tell them the truth about how they are doing if it is negative. They do not want to burden or worry their families with their problems. Sometimes people living in Israel go as far as to tell their families that they are doing much better than the reality.

Drinking and smoking cigarettes are common coping mechanisms. Many unemployed asylum seekers have resorted to drinking and asking friends for money to do so on a daily basis. The alcohol abuse is something that is not inherently part of either the Sudanese or Eritrean cultures, but alcohol consumption has increased in these communities, especially among single men, in order to escape the anxieties they have about not having jobs and not knowing what their futures hold. Many asylum seekers incessantly smoke cigarettes throughout the day and find that smoking serves as both a relaxant and as a stimulant for them - they calm them down when they are upset or stressed, but they also keep them awake when they are working 12-16 hour long work days.

On top of this, many single men simply smoke and drink rather than eat. There are many places and methods of finding food to eat for a low cost (in Tel Aviv at least) so the issue seems to be less about financial restrictions, and more about psychological reasons causing people to not feel hunger. The lack of care about one's physical health is a sign of the growing hopelessness existent among the asylum seekers in Israel, especially among single men. Those who are in relationships, both men and women, seem to have healthier habits than those who are single. While people in relationships cope with traumas just as much as single people do, they tend to be more hopeful and positive about their futures.

One single man from Eritrea claims to not feel hunger ever. He works about sixteen hours a day and is on his feet the entire time. He claims that he does not eat all day long because he does not have the time to eat. He is offered a salad at work for lunch, but is not interested in it as it is not appetizing to him. Instead of food, he drinks coffee and smokes cigarettes throughout the day to help him stay alert. There have been times when he did not eat for three days in a row and only consumed coffee and cigarettes, although he has the financial capacity to buy himself food. When he arrives home late at night he is still not hungry. He believes that the root of this problem is the fact that he is constantly stressed about his finances and his future so he does what he can to avoid feeling hunger or fatigue.

Some single men who are unemployed, especially among the Eritrean population, do not even choose to live with friends who are willing to house them, but rather choose to stay in the parks and sleep outside out of pure embarrassment. Cultural pressures from their own community members often compel people to hide out while they are undergoing tough circumstances, like losing their jobs. Thus, they will sleep in the park and not share their problems with others unless they have an organizational contact or an Israeli friend they might reach out to. For these people, they are more comfortable seeking help from people from outside of their own community rather than asking for help from people who might know them from before. For many Eritreans sleeping on the floor of a church causes social exclusion.

For many of the asylum seekers, they feel that the situation they are facing in Israel is not such a physical challenge for them, and even the emotional and psychological state they are in are symptoms they are used to from before their move here. 'K' says: "To be honest, our life has already been like that...Because since our creation or since the time I know as a human being, I have been in sadness, mess, crisis, anger, and already my brain is adapted to this stuff." Other than keeping these thoughts and feelings to themselves, many people find comfort in prayer. 'Y', a deacon in one of the churches tries to resolve his problems with prayer. His sentiment that he "accept[s] everything as God's will" is common among the more religious Eritreans in Israel. For others who are less religious, they may still pray even if they do not attend church services. 'I', for example, says that in tough situations "I'm just thinking all to myself and I'm praying to my God and just he can help me." As 'I' was in prison for seven years in Eritrea for political activism, he is already accustomed to dealing with sadness, depression, and an uncertain future so he has also grown accustomed to his own coping mechanisms, which are to think things through with himself and only share

his ideas and thoughts with a few trusted people, namely, those who were with him in prison.

'W' from South Sudan exemplifies how many South Sudanese men deal with sadness:

> *So when I'm sad and I just stay alone. I come and lay down here and stay. I don't talk to any person because I don't even have a person that I can talk to until now. But if I see there is no way to do something, to achieve something, I have to forget about it. If I think a lot, it causes mental problems.*

Many South Sudanese also find comfort in prayer. It is common for South Sudanese in Israel to attend church services regularly and they have developed communities based on religious networks that have proven to be very fulfilling in allowing them to cope with common problems.

Aziza Kidane, the Eritrean Catholic nun and nurse who volunteers with Physician's for Human Rights, says she can decipher through an Eritrean woman's body language whether or not she is depressed. This is vital for her work with women who have been sexually assaulted and raped on their journeys to Israel through Sinai, which according to Aziza, is most of the Eritrean women. Aziza explains how she determines when a woman is depressed or in need:

> *Sometimes, an Eritrean woman's actions are how I can understand what's going on with her, rather than just paying attention to what she's saying to me in words. For example, if a woman is not being sociable with people or she is not speaking much at all, it can mean that she is not solving her problems because she is not talking to anyone about them. It could be good to ask people whether or not they're socializing in general with people.*

Many people feel stressed and upset about the situation in their home countries. There is a lot of anxiety about the state that family members or loved ones are in, and asylum seekers in Israel are often expected to help support their family members who are back home or in refugee camps, which adds to the level of stress people are dealing with here. Many Eritreans are forced to borrow thousands of dollars from their families, who may be borrowing such funds from their entire village, in order to escape the torturous conditions they face under the Bedouin smugglers in Sinai. Thus, their primary goal upon arriving to Israel is to work as much as possible to pay back their families as soon as possible. This can cause severe depression among youth from Eritrea who are already arriving to Israel with severe cases of psychological trauma from the torture they endured from their smugglers. For those who do find jobs, they are willing to work sixteen hours a day and to revolve their lives completely around work so that they can pay off their debts as soon as possible. Some have developed serious health problems because they have run down their bodies or have injured themselves on the job, which is likely related to their lack of sleep and overworking. Accordingly, some have had to stop working for several months to deal with these problems.

'I' from Eritrea recently lost his mother, who passed away because 'I' could not afford to send her money for medication while she was in the hospital for several months, so the doctors let her die there. 'I' was not able to cover the costs of his mother's funeral, whichis about $1000, causing him to fall into a depression. He dealt with it by drinking at least five bottles of beer each night in order to fall asleep. Around the same time, 'I' left his job and a few weeks later he ended up sleeping in the park for several weeks because he had lost all hope and was too uncomfortable and embarrassed to sleep on the floors of his friends' apartments.

For asylum seekers who do not have steady incomes, they often find out from people in similar situations that there are places where they can get food for free. The two young Eritrean men previously mentioned who live in the church, eat at soup kitchen, La Sova, three days a week. The lunch meal costs them one shekel. They eat only once a day and then sleep the rest of the day if they do not find jobs. They do not complain about their hunger. One South Sudanese man explains the hunger issue as follows:

> *What I learned in the war is that it gave us a strong heart. If you stay a week without food you will suffer a lot and I will not. Now I can do anything…I have to concentrate on things that give me strength. We learned how to deal with difficulties in this war.*

Of course, some individuals cope by becoming active in their communities - religious, political, or cultural.

Other than vulnerable cases for which CSOs like ARDC, ASSAF, and Mesila might provide psychological counseling, CSOs have provided certain tools for dealing with less severe psychological issues to stronger individuals. For example, 'Y', an Eritrean man, took a writing class at ASSAF in the past, which took place every week for several months. He wrote poetry, which he said is something he often does just because it makes him happy. For others, it is helpful at times to seek out help from CSOs to

resolve conflicts. Another Eritrean man says that if he has a problem with his wife, he calls up one of the counselors at Mesila and he and his wife will visit her together to discuss the matter. He has advised other friends of his to do the same, rather than to speak with other Eritreans because of the lack of trust between them. Even the youth expressed that they approach both their school counselors and the volunteers and staff at the various organizations, especially at ASSAF where there is a youth club, to discuss certain issues they are dealing with at home or at school. ARDC encourages community development by providing their offices as a meeting space to community groups like the Congolese asylum seekers, the Eritrean Political Asylum Seekers Committee, and *The Refugee Voice* newspaper.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

PHOTOGRAPHY BY LIOR PATEL

# CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS

### STRENGTHENING, DIALOGUE, INFORMATION EXCHANGE, AND CAPACITY-BUILDING

ASSAF, along with most of the Israeli CSOs working in this field, believes that the State of Israel should take responsibility to adequately provide protection for the asylum seekers in Israel, including the implementation of a proper Refugee Status Determination procedure. However, until the government does make appropriate changes, there are modifications that the CSOs can make to improve the current situation for asylum seekers in Israel. Yiftach Millo, founder and Chairman of the boardof ASSAF, states the following:

> *The problem in Israel is that Israeli CSOs put most of the emphasis on attempting to influence policy and encourage the Israeli government to take responsibility over the refugee community, which is the most crucial need for the asylum seekers. On the other hand, they focus on maintaining the individual lives of the most vulnerable asylum seekers. This leaves out most of the asylum seekers residing in Israel from voicing their own needs and directing their own political agenda directly with the government and authorities.*

There have been successful models in other countries for how refugee community groups and CSOs can successfully work together to achieve common goals.[rr] These models rely on the complete participation and equal voice and power of the refugee community members themselves when it comes to the CSOs making decisions about the services they aim to provide the refugee populations with, as well as their political and advocacy goals. Without this type of change, CSOs will continue to feel burdened by the more vulnerable asylum seekers who lack the necessary information and ability to access services in Israel on their own. Moreover, the community organizations will increasingly isolate themselves from the CSOs as they grow to feel excluded and silenced by them.[ss]

Racial sensitivity trainings, such as those that include discussions on racial power dynamics, are recommended for the CSO practitioners and Israeli volunteers. This is a sensitive topic that most people do not feel comfortable confronting, but many asylum seekers express feeling that their voices are not heard or that they are belittled or looked down upon both directly and indirectly by Israelis and by CSOs in Israel. Discussing the power dynamics between CSO practitioners and asylum seekers and between Israelis and Africans in Israel in general could be effective in increasing the capacity of CSOs and asylum seekers to work together to achieve common goals.

It is important that CSOs ensure that all newcomers are made aware of the resources and options available to them so that they can make informed decisions about how to help themselves as individuals. There are activities being executed by CSOs to increase awareness of such options. ASSAF, for example, is making concerted efforts to outreach to newcomers by executing visits to the parks and shelters and by conducting

CSOS ARE RECOMMENDED TO WORK CLOSELY WITH COMMUNITY LEADERS WHO HAVE THE ABILITY TO REACH MANY MORE INDIVIDUALS THAN THE ORGANIZATIONS DO AS THEY ARE RESPECTED IN THEIR COMMUNITIES AND ARE ABLE TO RELATE TO AND UNDERSTAND THEIR OWN COMMUNITY MEMBERS IN A WAY THAT ISRAELI CSOS AND VOLUNTEERS SIMPLY CANNOT.

PERIPHERAL CITIES ARE ESPECIALLY IN NEED OF ACCESS TO INFORMATION. IT IS CRITICAL THAT CSOS INCREASE COMMUNICATIONS WITH THE COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS AND LEADERS AND PROVIDE THEM WITH ADEQUATE INFORMATION ON EMPLOYMENT, VISAS, AND POLICIES SO THAT THEY MAY PASS ON THE INFORMATION TO THEIR COMMUNITY MEMBERS.

[rr] Refer to "Two Cultures: One Life" by Jenny Mitchell, Ida Kaplan, and Louise Crowe (2006, Oxford University Press) for an example of a successful community strengthening program with South Sudanese Dinka refugees in Australia.

[ss] See Peter Westoby's "Developing a Community-Development Approach through Engaging Resettling Southern Sudanese Refugees within Australia" (Oxford University Press, 2008) for an effective example of how South Sudanese refugees and CSOs in Australia worked together to come up with and execute programs that met the needs of the refugee population there. The refugees themselves expressed the priority needs that they felt the CSO could help them with and they subsequently came up with a collective strategy to achieve these goals.

orientation tours. However, there are many newcomer asylum seekers who fall into the cracks either because they are uncomfortable speaking with people who are not from their own communities, or because they simply are not found by the CSOs.

Therefore, CSOs are recommended to work closely with community groups. While this is occurring to a degree through the close ties of the CSOs with the Lift Your Head Up Ministries and with the Darfuri shelters, there are still improvements that can be made. For example, many asylum seekers are simply taken to the church to sleep there without any explanation of what living at the church is like, or about what other options exist for them. Also, new arrivals often do not know much, if anything at all, about Israel and about the resources they can access here, such as the open clinic of PHR, the reception program of ASSAF, or the counseling services at Mesila and ARDC. The community leaders have the ability to reach many more individuals than the organizations do as they are respected in their communities and are able to relate to and understand their own community members in a way that Israeli CSOs and volunteers simply cannot. Thus, such joint efforts can help prevent cases in which people are sleeping in the park for months at a time or not accessing healthcare due to lack of information about what is available to them.

A few more specific goals can make valid differences for newcomer asylum seekers especially. The Eritrean population specifically is in need of community shelters and community members express a strong desire to meet this need from within the community. CSOs can be of great assistance to the Eritrean community in helping them find a location and organize a shelter for their community members.

Also, the asylum seekers lack information about the changes in the visa policy. Individual asylum seekers are constantly requesting information from CSOs and Israeli contacts they may have as to what the changes are and if there will be any changes in the near future. Information should be provided to the leaders of each group or community on a regular basis with details in the native languages of the asylum seekers. Included in these updates, which should be provided even if there are no changes to the visa policy in order to minimize rumors and paranoia among the populations, should be information on where to go for assistance if one's visa was inexplicably taken away or if one does not have any visa or documentation whatsoever. Increased support should be provided for the aforementioned groups as they are dealing with considerable unease and anxiety as a result of not having any documentation at all. This is especially necessary in peripheral cities where there is a lack of access to attorneys and CSOs. Without informed leaders, communities are left without any information on visa policy or access to assistance related to visa issues.

Currently, most asylum seekers do not have information or an awareness of their rights as employees and it is increasingly found that they are not being properly treated by employers. This information is especially needed in the peripheral cities where many asylum seekers, including community leaders, believe that they are not permitted to work in Israel. The information on the High Court case that upholds the asylum seekers' right to work is not circulating in Eilat and Arad the way it is in Tel Aviv. In order to mitigate the violations of their rights as employees, CSOs are recommended to increase communications with the community organizations and leaders and to provide them with adequate information on employment so that they may pass on the information to their community members.

It is also suggested that information be distributed to asylum seekers who seek out chik-chak jobs in public places. Information can be posted and distributed in public places, but community leaders and church leaders are encouraged to provide the necessary information about chik-chak jobs to asylum seekers so that they know their rights and ensure that they are being paid fully and promptly for their labor.

ASYLUM SEEKERS SHOULD BE CONSIDERED AS EQUAL PARTNERS IN ORGANIZING ADVOCACY CAMPAIGNS THAT ARE GOING TO PRIMARILY AFFECT THEIR LIVES AND FUTURES.

IT IS RECOMMENDED THAT A JOINT ASYLUM SEEKER/CSO TASK FORCE BE ESTABLISHED TO COME UP WITH POLITICAL ADVOCACY AGENDAS AND GOALS TOGETHER.

**PARTNERSHIP**

In order to maintain true and valuable partnerships between asylum seekers and CSOs, the voices of the asylum seekers should be heard and accounted for by the CSOs. Asylum seekers should be considered as equal partners in organizing advocacy campaigns that are going to primarily affect their lives and futures.

Beyond partnerships between groups, asylum seekers should be included in CSOs as both staff-members and volunteers. CSOs are hesitant to hire asylum seekers as staff- members, disregarding their message to the Israeli public that Israelis should hire asylum seekers, as they are good workers, many of whom are educated and capable of holding professional positions. It is recommended that CSOs aspire to integrate more asylum seekers into CSO staffs.

Also, many asylum seekers volunteer translation and other support services to the CSOs, but are not treated as volunteers in the same light as the Israeli or non-asylum seeker volunteers. This also maintains a dynamic in which the Israeli and non-asylum seeker volunteers possess more power than the asylum seekers do as they are more respected and appreciated than the asylum seeker volunteers are. It is also recommended that CSOs treat asylum seekers who are acting as volunteers for the CSOs with the same regard as Israeli or non-asylum seeker volunteers. This translates into the inclusion of asylum seekers in volunteer meetings, the use of the title 'volunteer', and the providing of volunteer trainings to asylum seekers that are equal to those received by other volunteers of a CSO.

It is highly recommended that a joint asylum seeker/CSO task force be established to come up with political advocacy agendas and goals together. Rather than the CSOs continuing to advocate on behalf of the asylum seekers, it is imperative that asylum seekers be included in every advocacy campaign and process that has the potential to impact their lives.

**SPECIFIC ISSUES**

PHYSICAL HEALTH

Many refugees fear accessing health services and lack the information about services available to them. Thus it is recommended that CSOs make a concerted effort to reduce such fears by raising awareness within the refugee communities about what health services are available to asylum seekers and how to access such services. This information includes where to go and what the difference is between going to a public hospital or to a CSO open clinic like PHR's. The most effective method to increase awareness is by providing the information to community leaders, including what to expect when visiting a hospital or clinic, what to ask, what one's rights are, and what one's options are so that patients can make informed decisions about their health. Furthermore, there should be a serious effort made by PHR and the hospitals to increase feedback from the refugees on their experiences obtaining healthcare services from them. While acknowledgin that PHR and the hospitals are understaffed and under-funded, making it difficult to find the resources to implement goals like collecting feedback or raising awareness, these are exactly the reasons for increasing partnerships with community leaders and groups, who can be instrumental in implementing such goals if they are given the capacity to do so.

Concerning the peripheral cities, it is recommended that CSOs increase advocacy efforts in urging hotels in Eilat to provide health insurance to family members of employees.

The CSOs and Israel's Ministry of Health are recommended to address certain specific needs of the asylum seekers. More HIV/AIDS prevention programs, more information and awareness-raising about birth control options, and more psychological support for people with serious health conditions are some of the needs that both the CSOs and the Israeli government can meet for the refugees. Including community groups in awareness-raising and prevention campaigns can be the most effective strategy to relay the information. Training community members in peer education on HIV/AIDS could be especially effective, as this topic is sensitive among the refugee communities and people may be uncomfortable discussing it with Israelis they are not familiar with.

The final recommendation is to promote healthcare and health education to youth and mothers with children, who are coming from countries where they are not provided with proper health and nutritional services and health education. It would be most effective if CSOs trained community members to teach courses to each other in their own languages on such topics.

## FAMILY CONCERNS

### GENDER RELATIONS

Both Eritrean and Sudanese men need information about laws on family violence in Israel and it is imperative that the CSOs and the Ministry of Welfare make solid efforts to outreach to the men in these communities about such laws. Providing the information to community leaders who can pass it on to their members is highly recommended, especially because the topic is sensitive for most family members.

Women in all cities and communities are interested in forming women's groups. These groups depict opportunities for working on gender relations as women support each other and provide each other with information on how to deal with domestic violence. CSOs are encouraged to support women's groups both by providing organizational support and by providing the women with information on their options if they are dealing with domestic disputes.

Further, more in-depth research is needed on the mechanisms used to solve domestic violence and disputes, specifically on the utilization of blaming and silencing the women as a mechanism to mitigate the problems. Also, research is needed on the impacts of moving to Israel on the amount of domestic violence among the asylum seeker populations. Some respondents indicated that the rate has reduced in Israel, while others claimed that it has gotten worse.

### INTERGENERATIONAL RELATIONS

Increasing awareness to community leaders and elders on the laws on violence toward children within families is recommended. It is especially necessary that such information be dispersed and discussed in peripheral cities where there is less access to CSOs and community level conflict resolution mechanisms are central to the refugee communities. CSOs are encouraged to increase contact and dialogue with community leaders when cases of domestic violence toward children come up. Community mechanisms are providing vital support for dealing with domestic violence problems and CSOs should work with community leaders to strengthen such mechanisms.

Unaccompanied youth are not being given the opportunity to make informed decisions about their futures at the moment. It is important that community leaders and CSOs work together to inform unaccompanied youth about their options for education and shelter including what it means to be under the responsibility of the State, what different types of shelters exist, what it is like to live and study in a youth village, and what it is like to study in the municipal school system. Concerning housing, there are options for youth to be formally adopted by Israelis or informally adopted by their own communities. The adoption criteria are strict and difficult to achieve, which makes it almost impossible for asylum seeker families to adopt members of their own communities. Mesila facilitates a 'child care' program in which they pair up unaccompanied minors with asylum seeker families who they feel are capable of supporting the youth, at least part of the time. With many options available, youth should have the capacity to make informed decisions about their education and about their options in general.

It is highly recommended that more research be conducted to examine the lived experiences of asylum seeker minors in Israel, including both accompanied and unaccompanied minors. This research would assist CSOs, community groups, and government agencies in addressing the needs of the minors as effectively as possible. Topics for such research should include whether or not minors were included in the decision-making processes concerning their housing, health, and education while residing in Israel as well as how they feel about the process of integration they have experienced in the country.

### PHYSICAL SECURITY

On the issue of sexual and gender-based violence, CSOs are recommended to work with community groups to increase awareness and to prevent sexual harassment and assault within their communities. Community leaders are encouraged to increase dialogue among their communities for the same purposes. CSOs can provide the community leaders with critical information about hotlines, assault support centers, and legal methods for dealing with such issues. As stated before, women's groups should be treated as partners with the CSOs in providing support and information to women on sexual harassment and assault prevention.

CSOs have the capacity to assist community organizations in facilitating dialogue with the Israeli community concerning the physical security issues asylum seekers face in Israel (non SGBV-related security issues). Such dialogue can be instrumental in reducing negative experiences of asylum seekers as well as negative perceptions toward them by the Israeli public.

CSO practitioners have received various inquiries from asylum seekers about divorce and marriage processes in Israel. It is recommended that CSOs provide information as well as attorney contacts to people with such questions as well as provide

information to the community leaders about what the processes entail.

More research is needed on the issue of Female Genital Cutting among women refugees in Israel. While rumor suggests that it is not occurring on a large-scale, it is important to gain knowledge and information on this phenomenon in Israel.

**PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT**

CSOs should develop and strengthen an alternative approach, along with community leaders, for individuals dealing with psychological problems. Community groups are able to provide much-needed support to such individuals and can also assist with increasing their knowledge about their diagnosis and about what types of services CSOs can provide them to deal with it. The current focus of psychosocial support among Israeli CSOs is on the individual level. As the needs are enormous and resources are limited, a shift towards community well-being and community mental health strengthening is needed in order to replace dependency of individuals on CSOs and strengthen communal solidarity, self-help mechanisms, culturally based intervention and community empowerment.

CSOs should aim to understand cultural factors that affect how asylum seekers cope with certain issues, such as the example of people preferring to sleep in the park over sleeping on the floor of a church. These decisions should be made by the individuals themselves, and the CSOs can only provide the options and accept the outcomes as such. CSOs should discuss depression and other psychological disorders with the church and community leaders as a means to pass down important information on how to detect symptoms and what options are available for those suffering from depression. When meeting with or working with people with psychological issues or disorders, it is recommended that the CSO practitioners invite a liaison from the community of the individual to be present at meetings, if desired by the individual, in order to provide the most accurate translation possible during counseling sessions.

More specifically, more support is needed for unaccompanied youth who arrive to Israel. Some of them sleep in the church or in the park for several months at a time. Others are placed in Israeli shelters or boarding schools, but find that they are depressed and uncomfortable there without people from their own communities to speak with. It is important that adult liaisons from the Eritrean and Sudanese communities be in constant and consistent contact with the youth as well as with the CSOs to ensure that they are content with their housing situations and are not suffering from psychological or physical harms. This recommendation is more specific to the Eritrean population, as there are more organized community mechanisms to assist unaccompanied minors in the Sudanese communities. The CSOs can work with community leaders to establish a system of caring for and communicating about unaccompanied youth from Eritrea so that the most effective and substantial support possible is provided to the youth. However, it is important that CSOs recognize the issue of trust in the Eritrean population and that they seek out individuals either from the same region or village as the youth so that they are more inclined to trust them. The youth are not always comfortable sharing their feelings and experiences with staff-members of the CSOs and the language barrier is apparent under such circumstances. Therefore, finding Eritrean adults to take on such tasks is vital.

Related to the above recommendations on the ability of asylum seekers to access the CSOs, it is critical that all important documents and reports on or about the asylum seeker communities be translated into their own languages, primarily Tigrinya and Arabic. This report, for example, will be translated into both Arabic and Tigrinya. Without translations, this report will have a minimal influence on the community organizations and on their relationships with the CSOs and government agencies.

AS THE NEEDS ARE ENORMOUS AND RESOURCES ARE LIMITED, A SHIFT TOWARDS COMMUNITY WELL-BEING AND COMMUNITY MENTAL HEALTH STRENGTHENING IS NEEDED IN ORDER TO REPLACE DEPENDENCY OF INDIVIDUALS ON CSOS AND STRENGTHEN COMMUNAL SOLIDARITY, SELF-HELP MECHANISMS, CULTURALLY BASED INTERVENTION AND COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT.

# COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS AND GROUPS

Community organizations and groups have the capacity to provide important and much-needed services, cultural spaces, educational opportunities, and aid to their community members. Therefore, community strengthening and capacity-building, are the main goals the community organizations should continue to develop, as they aim to reach as many of their community members as possible and do so as effectively as possible. Through lessons learned and challenges expressed by the asylum seeker respondents for this project, certain changes in how the community organizations operate have the potential to enhance and increase the effectiveness, sustainability, and strength of the community groups.

Community leaders should aim to be as clear and direct about the needs of their communities with CSOs, including how they think the CSOs can help them meet those needs. It is often the case that community members harbor frustrations with the CSOs and claim that they are not meeting their needs, but they do not provide the CSOs with information about what their priorities are and how the CSOs could assist them in achieving their goals, if at all. It is also acceptable for the community organizations to express to the CSOs their feelings that their needs cannot be met with the help of the CSOs if these are their feelings. In other words, open communication and dialogue between community leaders and CSOs is extremely important.

Community leaders and groups are encouraged to increase communications with CSOs concerning policy changes and advocacy campaigns they would like to prioritize. While working together to execute such campaigns, community groups should ensure that they are passing information along between the CSOs, the community members, and the government stakeholders so that the opinions of all stakeholders are being voiced.

While community groups are highly involved in assisting newcomers upon their arrival to Israel, much of this assistance revolves around finding the newcomers housing and meals. Therefore, it is recommended that community groups prioritize providing newcomers with important information upon their arrival to Israel so that they can make informed decisions about their livelihoods. Examples of vital information that newcomers would benefit from knowing include an awareness of health services available in Israel and access to such services, educational options, housing options, and what their visa status means and requires of them.

Community groups should identify major stakeholders for their communities and populations in Israel and make direct connections with them in order to become less dependent on CSOs to make such connections. For example, CSOs are often relied upon by asylum seekers to contact the police stations asylum seekers are often taken to or the schools asylum seekers attend, but direct communications by the communities with such stakeholders can only increase the knowledge and understanding of who the asylum seekers are, while decreasing biases and miscommunications between them.

On the psychosocial level, community groups are recommended to form or strengthen existent formal and informal support groups through which community members can discuss issues like depression, alcohol and drug abuse, and can support each other in their own languages and through their own methods. Community leaders are encouraged to suggest positive outlets for those suffering from depression such as becoming active in their community groups.

COMMUNITY LEADERS SHOULD AIM TO BE AS CLEAR AND DIRECT ABOUT THE NEEDS OF THEIR COMMUNITIES WITH CSOS, INCLUDING HOW THEY THINK THE CSOS CAN HELP THEM MEET THOSE NEEDS.

COMMUNITY LEADERS AND GROUPS ARE ENCOURAGED TO INCREASE COMMUNICATIONS WITH CSOS CONCERNING POLICY CHANGES AND ADVOCACY CAMPAIGNS THEY WOULD LIKE TO PRIORITIZE.

ON THE PSYCHOSOCIAL LEVEL, COMMUNITY GROUPS ARE RECOMMENDED TO FORM OR STRENGTHEN EXISTENT FORMAL AND INFORMAL SUPPORT GROUPS THROUGH WHICH COMMUNITY MEMBERS CAN DISCUSS ISSUES AND CAN SUPPORT EACH OTHER IN THEIR OWN LANGUAGES AND THROUGH THEIR OWN METHODS.

# GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

Government agencies are encouraged to recognize the sensitive and challenging situation asylum seekers face while living in Israel. The daily stresses asylum seekers deal with in Israel, as expressed throughout this report, are obvious and overwhelming. Such stress causes long-term psychological harms to asylum seekers. Therefore, it is recommended that government agencies prioritize clear and long-term policy decisions regarding the asylum seekers, rather than making policy changes every month. The most critical policy goal for the government agencies should be to set up an appropriate and fair Refugee Status Determination procedure in Israel. A clear policy on family reunification must be established once an adequate RSD procedure is in place.

Concerning the upcoming detention facility being built in the Negev desert, ASSAF objects to the detention of asylum seekers. Instead of detention, ASSAF supports the establishment of reception centers for the absorption of newcomer asylum seekers. The aim of the reception centers would be to provide basic social services and needs to the asylum seekers while they undergo RSD procedures within a reasonable period of time. Unlike detention facilities, reception centers are open facilities that provide basic services to asylum seekers while they undergo RSD procedures within a reasonable amount of time. Unlike detention, reception centers are open facilities that are not managed by the Israeli Prison Services and not maintained like a prison.

The exclusion of and racism toward African asylum seekers in Israel causes depression, anxiety, and stress for large numbers of the population. It reduces the asylum seekers' capacity to integrate into Israeli society and increases their isolation from mainstream society, which only causes Israelis to generate more prejudices toward the asylum seekers. Thus, the government agencies are highly recommended to make concerted efforts to reduce the exclusion of and racism toward asylum seekers through implementing public campaigns with such goals in mind and through implementing policy changes such as ensuring that hate crimes toward asylum seekers are properly and legally dealt with by government agencies.

Government agencies are encouraged to establish direct relationships with community groups and leaders in order to increase dialogue and understandings between them. There is no real reason to not communicate directly with the asylum seekers, as thereare plenty of English and Hebrew speakers in leadership positions, as well as people who can translate for those who do not speak Hebrew or English. Such communications can reduce misunderstandings and misgivings between asylum seekers and government agencies in Israel. The Israeli police force itself is encouraged to discuss issues related to domestic violence in the refugee communities with the community leaders themselves. The police are unaware of the cultural factors, reasons for violence, and methods of conflict resolution existent within the refugee communities in Israel. Rather than the police simply taking men away to prison, they should increase contact with community leaders who may assist them with communication and conflict resolution within families and who may help prevent such conflicts from occurring in the first place if they have the proper information about the laws in Israel.

Lastly, it is suggested that municipal schools where asylum seeker children study increase personal contact with parents of the children, seeking out assistance from community leaders and groups if there are language barriers or time constraints. It is important that schoolteachers and administrators provide parents with information and updates about their children. It is also important that the schools provide general information about the school system in Israel to the community leaders, who can pass on important information to the parents and assist them in understanding the school system, including topics like a child's educational rights and how children can seek support and assistance in their studies while living in Israel.

IT IS RECOMMENDED THAT GOVERNMENT AGENCIES PRIORITIZE CLEAR AND LONG-TERM POLICY DECISIONS REGARDING THE ASYLUM SEEKERS, RATHER THAN MAKING POLICY CHANGES EVERY MONTH.

THE MOST CRITICAL POLICY GOAL FOR THE GOVERNMENT AGENCIES SHOULD BE TO SET UP AN APPROPRIATE AND FAIR REFUGEE STATUS DETERMINATION PROCEDURE IN ISRAEL.

THE GOVERNMENT SHOULD DISCONTINUE THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE DETENTION CENTER AND CREATE RECEPTION CENTERS FOR THE ABSORPTION OF NEWCOMER ASYLUM SEEKERS.

# REPATRIATION TO SUDAN

Those who are returning to South Sudan are making choices based on their lived experiences and needs to go back to their country of origin. However, it is obvious that these choices are not necessarily out of desire to go back. Rather, they are due to the increasingly challenging lives the asylum seekers face in Israel. Thus, it is recommended that the CSOs become more involved in preparing those that do decide to go back. People are desperate for an education, and if they do want to go back they need skills that will help them sustain their livelihoods.

Also, dialogue should be ongoing with Operation Blessing International and with the government agencies working on repatriation in order to ensure that the promises being made to the asylum seekers are truly upheld and that monitoring results will be shared with the community. While this report is not an evaluation of the program, five South Sudanese respondents brought up that they had friends or relatives who had returned and who have expressed that promises leading to their expectations about monetary compensation upon repatriation, the effectiveness of training courses, and life back in South Sudan were not upheld. Also, adequate time is needed for asylum seekers to prepare for their return and CSOs should advocate for returnees to receive sufficient warning on when their flights will be leaving.

Another consideration with regard to the return to South Sudan is that there are some Darfuris who have flown there, and then made their way to Khartoum or other areas. Some Darfuris who have returned have gone missing or have been put into prison very soon after landing in Sudan.[tt] It is exceptionally perilous for Darfuris to return to Sudan from Israel at this time. The fact that Darfuris are going back to Sudan demonstrates how challenging life in Israel is for some asylum seekers. While there are no obvious solutions to this dilemma, it is important that awareness about this issue be raised with the Israeli government. Darfuri community members are already discussing this issue among themselves, but it would be most effective if they had the opportunity to dialogue with government agencies about their concerns.

As mentioned before, comprehensive research is recommended on this topic that includes the opinions and data obtained from OBI, HIAS, and the Israeli government agencies involved, as well as in-depth reports and reviews from South Sudanese who have already returned from Israel both several months and at least a year upon their return. This type of research will assist the Israeli government, the CSOs, and the asylum seekers themselves to execute the most effective assisted voluntary return program possible, based on the needs and desires of the South Sudanese people.

CSOS SHOULD BECOME MORE INVOLVED IN PREPARING THOSE THAT DO DECIDE TO GO BACK FOR THEIR RETURN ON THE PSYCHOSOCIAL LEVEL.

THE PROCESS SHOULD BE TRANSPARENT AND ACCOUNTABLE TO THE RISKS AND OPPORTUNITIES ENCOUNTERED UPON RETURNING TO SOUTH SUDAN.

COMPREHENSIVE RESEARCH, INCLUDING A FOLLOW-UP WITH RETURNEES ALREADY BACK IN SOUTH SUDAN, IS NEEDED TO ADEQUATELY ASSESS AND IMPROVE THE REPATRIATION PROCESS.

[tt] This is based on several respondents' interviews who have personal relationships with the Darfuris who returned on the Operation Blessing flights.

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# ANNEX

## ITEM A: PRACTITIONERS INTERVIEWED

| NAME | ORGANIZATION |
|---|---|
| Aladin Abaker | ASSAF, Youth Program Coordinator |
| Aziza Kidani | PHR-Israel, nurse and translator |
| Esther Doron | Community Social Services, Ministry of Welfare, Israel |
| Galia Sabar | Tel Aviv University, Chair of African Studies Department |
| Hamutal Blanc | ASSAF, Advocacy and Support Center Coordinator |
| Ido Lurie | PHR-Israel, Medical Director of Open Clinic |
| Jeremiah Sunday Dairo | 'Lift Up Your Head' Ministries, SeniorPastor and Founder |
| Mickey Sagi | ASSAF, youth club volunteer |
| Ofir Malki | Social Worker, Eilat |
| Ofira Ben Shlomo | Mesila Aid and Information Center, Refugee Department Coordinator |
| Orit Marom | ASSAF, Advocacy Coordinator |
| Orit Rubin | ASSAF, Psycho-Social Coordinator for Families and Individuals |
| Ran Cohen | PHR-Israel, Executive Director |
| Rebekhah Frei | Association of Sudanese Refugees in Israel, Co-Founder |
| Swaray Alusine | African Workers' Union, Founder and Director |
| Yohannes Bayu | African Refugee Development Center, Director |

# ITEM B: RESPONDENT DEMOGRAPHICS

## WOMEN

| Women | Ethnicity | Age | Level of Education | Arrival | Marriage Status | Children | Location in Israel |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Darfur | Fur | 20 | high school | 2008 | yes | yes | Tel Aviv |
| Darfur | Fur | 25 | some high school | 2009 | yes | yes | Tel Aviv |
| Darfur | Fur | 25 | university degree | 2010 | yes | yes | Arad |
| Darfur | Fur | 23 | university degree | 2008 | yes | yes | Arad |
| Darfur | Fur | 18 | 11th grade | 2010 | yes | no | Arad |
| Eritrea | Tigrinya | 25 | 5th grade | 2008 | yes | yes | Eilat |
| Eritrea | Tigrinya | 27 | university degree | 2009 | yes | no | Tel Aviv |
| Eritrea | Tigrinya | 28 | 11th grade | 2007 | yes | yes | Tel Aviv |
| Eritrea | Tigrinya | 27 | 8th grade | 2010 | no | no | Tel Aviv |
| Eritrea | Tigrinya | 27 | 6th grade | 2008 | no | no | Tel Aviv |
| South Sudan | Dinka | 36 | 4th grade | 2007 | yes | yes | Eilat |
| South Sudan | Dinka | 30 | none | 2008 | yes | yes | Tel Aviv |
| South Sudan | Dinka | | | | yes | yes | Tel Aviv |
| South Sudan | Bari | 42 | university degree | 2007 | yes | yes | Eilat |
| South Sudan | Baria | 33 | 4th grade | 2010 | yes | yes | Tel Aviv |
| South Sudan | Yei | 23 | some high school | 2007 | yes | yes | Eilat |
| South Sudan | Nuer | 29 | high school | 2006 | yes | yes | Tel Aviv |
| South Sudan | Azande | 43 | | 2007 | yes | no | Eilat |

# MEN

| Men | Ethnicity | Age | Level of Education | Arrival | Marriage Status | Children | Location in Israel |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Darfur | Fur | 35 | high school | 2008 | no | no | Arad |
| Darfur | Fur | early 30s | university degree | 2007 | no | no | Eilat |
| Darfur | Fur | early 30s | | 2007 | yes | no | Eilat |
| Darfur | Fur | 28 | | 2008 | yes | yes | Eilat |
| Darfur | Fur | 23 | high school | 2008 | no | no | Tel Aviv |
| Darfur | Fur | 33 | university degree | 2008 | yes | yes | Tel Aviv |
| Darfur | Fur | 23 | high school | 2009 | no | no | Tel Aviv |
| Darfur | Fur | | | 2008 | no? | ? | Eilat |
| Darfur | Fur | 17 | currently in high sch | 2008 | no | no | Tel Aviv |
| Darfur | Fur | 24 | some university | 2008 | no | no | Tel Aviv |
| Darfur | Fur | 38 | high school | 2007 | no | no | Tel Aviv |
| Darfur | Fur | early 30s | | 2007 | yes | no | Ayanot Youth Village |
| Darfur | Fur | mid-30s | | 2007 | yes | yes | Arad |
| Darfur | Fur | 29 | | 2008 | no | no | Tel Aviv |
| Darfur | Fur | 27 | | 2011 | no | no | Tel Aviv |
| Darfur | Fur | 26 | | | no | no | Tel Aviv |
| Darfur | Fur | 21 | | | no | no | Tel Aviv |
| Eritrea | Tigrinya | around 60 | none | 2010 | yes | yes | Tel Aviv |
| Eritrea | Tigrinya | 25 | some high school | 2009 | no | no | Tel Aviv |
| Eritrea | Tigrinya | 61 | none | | yes | yes | Tel Aviv |
| Eritrea | Tigrinya | 31 | university degree | | no | no | Ramat Gan |
| Eritrea | Tigrinya | 25 | 1 year of university | 2010 | no | no | Tel Aviv |
| Eritrea | Tigrinya | 43 | 1 year of university | 1997 | yes | yes | Tel Aviv |
| Eritrea | Tigrinya | 24 | some high school | 2007 | no | no | Tel Aviv |
| Eritrea | Tigrinya | 25 | 11th grade | 2007 | no | no | Tel Aviv |
| Eritrea | Tigrinya | 30 | university degree | 2010 | no | no | Tel Aviv |
| Eritrea | Tigrinya | 18 | 9th grade | 2010 | NA | no | Tel Aviv |
| Eritrea | Tigrinya | 19 | 5th grade | 2010 | no | no | Tel Aviv |
| Eritrea | Tigrinya | early 20s | | 2008 | no | no | Tel Aviv |
| Eritrea | Tigrinya | early 20s | | 2008 | no | no | Eilat |
| Eritrea | Tigrinya | 27 | high school | 2008 | no | no | Eilat |
| Eritrea | Tigrinya | 27 | high school | 2008 | no | no | Arad |
| Eritrea | Tigrinya | 15 | | 2011 | NA | no | Arad |
| Eritrea | Tigrinya | 17 | | 2007 | NA | no | Arad |
| South Sudan | | 14 | in 7th grade | 2008 | NA | no | Tel Aviv |
| South Sudan | | 15 | in 10th grade | 2008 | NA | no | Tel Aviv |
| South Sudan | Dinka | 34 | high school | 2007 | yes | yes | Eilat |
| South Sudan | Nuer | 27 | high school | 2006 | yes | yes | Eilat |
| South Sudan | Dinka | around 30 | none | 2007 | no | no | Eilat |
| South Sudan | Nuer | mid-30s | | | yes | no | Tel Aviv |
| South Sudan | | early 40s | | | yes | yes | Cadoorie Youth Village |
| South Sudan | Nuer | 26 | | 2006 | no | no | Tel Aviv |
| South Sudan | Nuer | 24 | high school | 2007 | | | Tel Aviv |
| South Sudan | Nuer | 28 | high school | 2006 | yes | yes | Ashdod |
| South Sudan | | 27 | | 2006 | no | no | Ashdod |
| South Sudan | | 17 | | 2008 | NA | no | Tel Aviv |
| **Focus Group Members** | | | | | | | |
| Darfur | Fur | 23 | | 2010 | | | Tel Aviv |
| Darfur | Fur | 22 | | 2010 | | | Tel Aviv |
| Darfur | Fur | 23 | | 2010 | | | Tel Aviv |
| Darfur | Fur | 32 | | 2011 | | | Tel Aviv |

*IN A PLACE WHERE THERE IS NO PERSON TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE, STRIVE TO BE THAT PERSON.*

RABBI HILLEL