

# ISRAEL

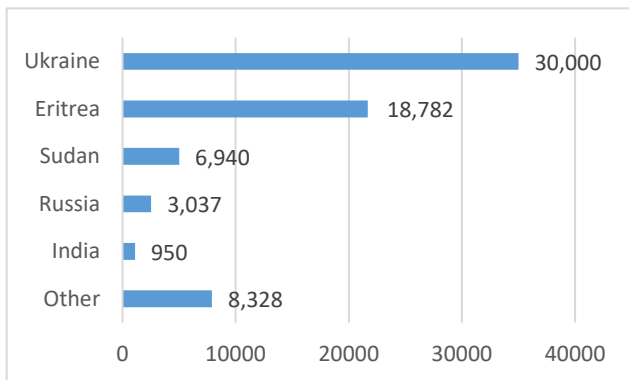
March 2023

Israel is a State Party to the [1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees](#) and its [1967 Protocol](#), but has yet to adopt a national refugee legislation. Over the last 15 years some 80,000 persons have sought asylum in the country, while less than one percent were granted refugee status or other forms of protection.

While those with refugee status enjoy basic rights on almost equal footing to nationals, [asylum-seekers and particularly those from Eritrea and Sudan have few rights beyond a general policy of non-deportation](#), despite their long stay in Israel. Consequently, most of their essential social, economic and psychosocial needs remain unmet.

UNHCR's main focus in Israel is to [promote and support qualitative improvements to the national asylum system and the treatment of people of concern](#), in accordance with international refugee and human rights law.

## PEOPLE OF CONCERN (as of 31 December 2022)



**Total: 68,037** (plus an estimated 8,500 children)

According to Ministry of Interior data shared with UNHCR Israel, as of 31 December 2022, there were 384 pending Ukrainian asylum cases with the Ministry of Interior. **UNHCR estimates (in the absence of official government data) that there are around 30,000 Ukrainians in need of international protection in Israel**, including around 15,000 Ukrainians who were present in Israel prior to the war as well as arrivals since the war began. These 30,000 Ukrainians are included in the 'Others of Concern' category.

The **remaining 11,601 others of concern largely consist of Eritreans and Sudanese** who have not applied for asylum, or who applied but were refused; in both cases, individuals were reported to remain in the country under non-refoulement protection.

## Numbers by status

- **Refugees:** 581
- **Humanitarian status:** 646
- **Asylum-seekers:** 25,174
- **Stateless persons:** 35
- **Others of concern:** 41,601

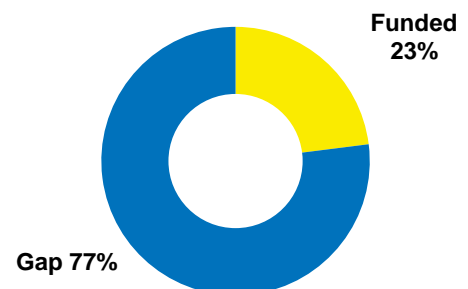
## UNHCR PRESENCE IN ISRAEL

**Staff:** 22 national staff  
 3 Affiliate Workforce  
 2 international staff

**Offices:** 1 office in Tel Aviv

## FUNDING (as of 29 September 2022)

**\$7.5 million** requested for 2022



## Working with Partners

The Government of Israel is **UNHCR's key partner in ensuring the protection of refugees and asylum-seekers** in accordance with international standards. UNHCR works with various government ministries, particularly the Ministries of Interior, Justice, Foreign Affairs, Welfare, Education and Health. UNHCR has also established constructive working relations and mutual cooperation with relevant parliamentary committees, resident diplomatic missions and other national stakeholders. UNHCR is also increasing engagement with municipalities hosting asylum-seekers, particularly those in peripheral areas of Israel hosting smaller satellite communities of asylum-seekers.

UNHCR **maintains strong links with local civil society organisations and community-based associations**. At present, UNHCR has funding-based partnership arrangements with nine NGOs involved in implementing projects in the areas of health (Physicians for Human Rights Israel, Israel Aids Task Force), child protection and education (Mesila - Aid and Information Centre for Migrant Workers and Refugees), psychosocial counselling and support (ASSAF - Aid Organization for Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Israel), community outreach and vocational training (African Refugee Development Center), workers' rights (Kav LaOved), legal assistance and representation (HIAS Israel, Hotline for Refugees and Migrants, Tel Aviv University Refugee Rights Clinic).

## COVID-19

People of concern to UNHCR—particularly the 27,000 asylum-seekers from Eritrea and Sudan who have remained in a precarious social and legal context for more than a decade—have been acutely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Recent surveys indicate a significant rise in financial and psychological distress arising from loss of income, lack of opportunities and social isolation.

The government has taken commendable measures towards the **inclusion of refugees and asylum-seekers into national COVID-19 preparedness and response** with respect to testing and vaccinations, and has provided support to relief programmes for the most vulnerable. UNHCR and partners have undertaken efforts to supplement these programmes, whether through protection services, psychosocial counselling, cash assistance, or outreach and awareness-raising activities.

## Main UNHCR Activities

### Protection

- UNHCR **promotes and monitors respect for refugee rights and the standards of treatment of asylum-seekers**, particularly regarding access to asylum procedures and fair adjudication of their claims, access to basic services, freedom of movement and security of residence.
- UNHCR continues to engage with Israeli government counterparts towards **strengthening the national asylum system**. While some reforms have been introduced, many areas remain for improvement. UNHCR has continued to monitor and observe government Refugee Status Determination (RSD) interviews and meet with authorities to provide guidance on individual asylum cases and training on various RSD-related issues.
- UNHCR plans and implements various **capacity-building and professional development programmes** for a wide-range of stakeholders, including government officials, judges, adjudicators, legal practitioners, learning institutes, community-based organisations, and the media.
- UNHCR has established a network of **Refugee Outreach Volunteers (ROVs)** in five locations around Israel, in an effort to support asylum-seeking communities in smaller towns and cities to better access services and support in their local areas while developing a strong voice at the local level.

## Gender-Based Violence (GBV)

- It is estimated that among the refugee and asylum-seeker population in Israel, there are around 4,000 survivors of torture, GBV and enslavement at the hands of traffickers in the Sinai region over the period 2004 - 2012. Israel has officially recognised a small number of such survivors as victims of human trafficking and provided them with rehabilitation services. Israel has a procedure for recognition of victims of human trafficking through which survivors of human trafficking have access to a range of social and other services.
- UNHCR works within a multi-stakeholder partnership framework to **ensure GBV prevention, risk mitigation and response intervention for survivors**. In addition to UNHCR-funded services provided by Tel-Aviv based partners, UNHCR has focused on building networks and capacity for GBV response in peripheral areas, particularly through municipalities and the network of social workers assigned by the Ministry of Welfare to help integrate asylum-seekers into existing programmes for GBV survivors. UNHCR also coordinates a **multi-stakeholder GBV forum** which meets regularly for coordination and collaboration on GBV issues.
- Asylum-seekers engaging in the sale or exchange of sex are of particular concern. UNHCR is actively advocating for increased partner capacity to provide dedicated support to affected individuals and is working with the Ministry of Justice to ensure a newly allocated budget for GBV that includes provision of services for this extremely vulnerable group.

## Livelihoods and Inclusion

- Advocacy for **improving livelihoods through economic inclusion and participation** has been a key component of UNHCR's strategy for achieving protection and solutions for people of concern. The repeal of the Deposit Law in 2020—which required employers to deposit part of the salary of refugees in a separate bank account—and the subsequent reimbursement of over 95 per cent of withheld funds (approx. \$64.4 M) was a significant positive development.
- Asylum-seekers are generally employed in low-skilled, manual jobs at the bottom of the pay scale. UNHCR supports vocational training programmes to help them upgrade their skills or acquire new ones. In 2022, some 4,711 asylum seekers participated in over 100 different learning programmes.
- **Access to health services:** Asylum-seekers currently have no access to the national health system. Efforts by the Ministry of Health during 2022 to expand national health insurance to asylum seekers have so far produced no concrete results.
- UNHCR supports the **Israeli AIDS Task Force** with funding for testing and awareness-raising activities throughout Israel.

## Cash Assistance

- In 2021, **UNHCR Israel continued its cash assistance programme (budgeted at \$1 M) to mitigate the effects of COVID-19** for the most vulnerable populations of concern, namely women engaged in the sale and exchange of sex, survivors of domestic abuse, torture and trafficking survivors, LGBTIQ+ individuals, persons with chronic illnesses, and victims of child abuse. A total of 2,750 persons (1,550 female and 1,200 male) benefited from the programme in 2021.

## Child Protection and Education

- **Education in Israel is compulsory and free of charge for children aged 3 - 17 years**, regardless of nationality or legal status. UNHCR works with relevant authorities at the national and municipal levels to **ensure the inclusion of asylum-seeking children** (some 8,500 individuals) into the existing national system for child welfare and protection, as the current system—particularly in Tel Aviv—is characterised by separate schools for asylum-seekers and other foreign children. UNHCR is actively seeking opportunities to improve inclusion of asylum-seekers into national education systems in order to provide authorities with a range of options and tools to achieve full educational inclusion. UNHCR hosts a regular **Education Forum** in Tel Aviv, with participation of the principals of the main asylum-seeker hosting schools in the city.



- UNHCR also provides **support across a range of educational levels**, including support for improved conditions in early childhood facilities hosting asylum-seekers and after-school programmes.

- In 2021, UNHCR provided **465 laptops** to support remote learning for refugee and asylum-seeking students affected by COVID-19 school closures who lacked access to computers.

### Durable Solutions

- Achieving durable solutions for long-staying asylum-seekers in Israel—mostly Eritreans and Sudanese—remains a fundamental challenge. UNHCR has been **implementing a small resettlement programme** in recent years, prioritising the most vulnerable individuals and families (survivors of torture or GBV, serious medical cases, those suffering from severe trauma, LGBTIQ+ individuals) who require specialized treatment unavailable to them in Israel.
- In 2022, **a total of 163 refugees departed Israel for resettlement**, mostly to Canada and the US, and a further 310 refugees were submitted for resettlement.
- UNHCR also supports access to **complementary pathways**, mostly through the Canadian private sponsorship programme, family reunification and humanitarian visas. In 2022, 594 asylum seeker families (comprising 1,661 persons including family members) were issued UNHCR refugee letters to support their Canadian private sponsorship applications.

### Community Empowerment

- Despite ongoing challenges, **the asylum-seeking community has shown great resilience throughout the COVID-19 pandemic**. To support them, UNHCR has been carrying out online and in-person participatory assessments with different groups and communities to both assess the immediate needs, and to create a broad network for disseminating relevant and updated information about the crisis.
- Further, the Office is putting resources into **strengthening community-based organisations** to support and encourage them to be more involved in participatory needs assessment and programme design, as well as referrals for counselling services, cash-based interventions (CBI) and resettlement.
- UNHCR conducts regular **outreach missions** to peripheral areas that have fewer targeted services and support for asylum-seekers. These missions are also an opportunity to organize training sessions

for social workers, teachers and other municipal officials to improve cross-cultural communication and better understanding of the special situation of asylum-seekers in their communities.

- The **Refugee Outreach Volunteer programme** which UNHCR Israel launched at the end of 2020 is making an important contribution for increased two-way dialogue and communication between UNHCR and its people of concern. Most significantly, the programme is helping to foster working relationships between asylum-seekers, local host communities and key service providers in their local municipalities as well as strengthening asylum-seeker voices and visibility in their local areas. Following a successful initial pilot phase implemented across four cities (Haifa, Rehovot, Petah Tikva and Eilat), the office is now working to expand the programme to more areas of the country.

## Donors

**UNHCR Israel is grateful for the support of:**

[United States of America](#) | [UN Programme on HIV/AIDS](#)

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