

Israel Fact Sheet

May 2024



Welcome the stranger.
Protect the refugee.

Introduction

There are approximately 40,000 asylum seekers in Israel (including 8,000 children who were born in Israel or came at a very young age), the majority having fled genocide in Sudan and forced military conscription in Eritrea. Asylum seekers within Israel's borders experience difficult conditions that limit access to protection and make it difficult to lead a stable life. The Israeli government continues to struggle to implement a humane response, instead focusing primarily on deterrence and pressuring people to leave.

Fewer than 1% of asylum applications are approved.

Although some refugees have been in the country for years and speak Hebrew fluently, few prospects for local integration, immigration status, and access to basic rights exist. After Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, more than 30,000 Ukrainians came to Israel. These arrivals receive renewable tourist visas, but often struggle to find work and support themselves. Around 200,000-250,000 Israelis were displaced by the October 7, 2023, terrorist attacks and the ongoing military operations that followed.

HIAS works to provide life-saving support to those displaced in Israel, and critical information to non-citizen communities and displaced families.

HIAS Programs and Focus

HIAS protects and supports refugees so they can build new lives and reunite with family members in safety and freedom. In Israel, we play a critical role in helping refugees secure legal status, the first step toward regaining control and stability in their lives. HIAS also assists refugees with access to social rights and services, facilitates resettlement, and works closely with the private sector to provide pro bono legal support for refugees. In addition, we advocate for a fair asylum system and offer higher education support to Jewish immigrants coming to Israel.

Legal Protection

Without legal status, refugees are forced to live on the margins of society, sometimes for generations, without access to healthcare, education, dignified work, or safe shelter. HIAS Israel supports asylum seekers



A representative from HIAS (L), talks with Michal (R) during a gathering of refugee women in Jerusalem, December 24, 2023. (Amnon Gutman for HIAS)

with various legal proceedings and before courts and tribunals, including those challenging deportation and detention orders; appealing rejections of asylum claims; filing humanitarian requests; and accompanying clients to Refugee Status Determination interviews and other hearings. As the only NGO offering legal representation to asylum seekers with urgent family law issues, HIAS lawyers assist with domestic violence cases, child support, and guardianship cases. We provide legal guidance and accompany clients to government offices or hearings, often helping clients navigate through bureaucratic obstacles.



Legal

We are the only agency in Israel building a network of pro bono lawyers and students to provide legal aid to asylum seekers and refugees.



Emergency Response

We provide protection services and shelter assistance to those affected by the October 7, 2023 terrorist attack.



HIAS volunteers and African asylum seekers gather during a food distribution by HIAS in Tel Aviv, February, 2023. (AG for HIAS)

HIAS' Model of Legal Protection

Our model of legal protection leverages the growing interest from law students and attorneys to help asylum seekers, awarding 30 fellowships each year to emerging legal professionals and collaborating with more than 10 leading commercial law firms who provide pro bono support. These lawyers and law students receive training and mentorship from our seasoned legal staff to provide pro bono legal aid and individual representation to asylum seekers. **HIAS Israel has collaborated with more than 250 attorneys and law students and has assisted thousands of clients since the inception of the program in 2014.** HIAS is the only agency in Israel dedicated to building a network of pro bono lawyers and students who can provide legal aid to asylum seekers and refugees.

Emergency Response

HIAS acted swiftly when thousands of Ukrainians started to arrive in Israel after the onset of full-scale war in 2022. We are supporting Ukrainian refugees in their search to find meaningful work by holding job fairs, providing training, and connecting them with employers. HIAS also undertakes strategic litigation for critical cases that impact the refugee community at large, such as our current petitions to provide access to health insurance.

Immediately after the October 7, 2023, terrorist attack, HIAS and partners began providing emergency protection services and shelter assistance and then expanded its response to include cash assistance, food and household items, and psychosocial

support services. Vulnerable remote communities that were forcibly displaced from the attacks in the South, including Eritreans who had sought asylum in Israel before the crisis, are especially at risk.

Strengthening Israel's Civil Society

HIAS trains and provides consultation for the staff and volunteers of partner NGOs, as well as Israel's civil society. In the past year, we trained over 100 volunteers to accompany asylum seekers to asylum interviews and on providing paralegal assistance.

Scholarship Program

For the last three decades, HIAS Israel has run a scholarship program for students who have immigrated to Israel. The HIAS Scholarship Program has awarded funds for higher education tuition to students based on academic achievement, financial need, and community service. Each year, approximately 45 students are awarded a HIAS scholarship.

HIAS in Africa and Eurasia

HIAS advocates for the protection of refugees, asylum seekers, other displaced populations, and local host communities in Africa and Eurasia. As part of a comprehensive regional response to meet the urgent needs of these populations, HIAS' programming in the region is focused on protection, gender-based violence prevention and response, mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS), and economic integration and community engagement.

HIAS currently has programs in three countries in Africa (Chad, Kenya, and South Africa) and six countries in Eurasia (Greece, Israel, Moldova, Poland, Romania, and Ukraine). Across the region, HIAS partners with a wide range of government agencies (U.S. Department of State Bureau of Democracy Human Rights and Labor, U.S. Department of State Bureau for Populations, Refugees and Migration), UN entities (UNHCR, World Health Organization), the private sector (Moderna), and other non-governmental organizations and local partners.

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