

## Combating Sex Trafficking in Israel

### Background

Over the past two decades, Israel has worked hard to crack down on the sex trafficking industry. The Knesset Subcommittee on Trafficking in Women and Prostitution was created in 2000, and in the same year, Israel passed its first anti-trafficking law prohibiting the sex trafficking of women. In 2006, the law was amended to include trafficking in persons for purposes of labor, along with organ trafficking and employment in slave-like conditions. The penalties are steep, including up to 16 years imprisonment for the sex trafficking of an adult and up to 20 years imprisonment for the sex trafficking of a minor. In 2012, the US Department of State elevated Israel to a Tier I ranking for its efforts to combat, prosecute, and prevent human trafficking.



#### ► Who are the victims?

Since the 1990s, approximately 25,000 women have been trafficked to be sold for sex in Israel. Most were from Eastern Europe, and to a lesser extent, South America. While the sex trafficking of women from Eastern Europe has significantly decreased thanks to strong anti-trafficking legislation, there is a growing phenomenon of domestic sex trafficking within Israel itself. In addition, since 2011, thousands of Africans—primarily from Eritrea, Sudan, and South Sudan—have entered Israel via the Israeli-Egyptian border. While the flow of Africans entering Israel has virtually ceased following the construction of a border fence, those who have already entered are highly vulnerable to forced labor and sex trafficking.

#### ► What services are available to survivors?

The Israeli government, in coordination with nonprofits, operates two shelters primarily for survivors of sex trafficking. Survivors receive medical treatment, psychiatric and social services, living stipends, and temporary residency and work permits. The government also provides legal aid to survivors of trafficking and actively works to identify victims and refer them to a shelter. For survivors who face risk of hardship or retribution upon returning to their home countries, the government provides legal alternatives to deportation.

### NCJW's Work in Israel

NCJW regularly engages in legislative advocacy to combat sex trafficking in Israel. As part of our coalition work, NCJW signed on to multi-organization letter urging Minister of Justice Tzipi Livni to propose legislation that would ensure community rehabilitation services for trafficked women and sex workers. Additionally, through our Israel Granting Program (IGP), NCJW supports several Israeli nonprofits working to combat sex trafficking and provide services to survivors. Our grantees include:

#### ► Isha L'Isha — Haifa Feminist Center (Funded 2016)

[Isha L'Isha](#) has been working to combat sex trafficking and prostitution for over a decade, incorporating both direct assistance to survivors and advocacy into its holistic approach. Isha L'Isha's work includes:

- Advocating for the passage of a new law mandating services for women seeking to leave prostitution, including health care, shelter, drug or alcohol rehabilitation, and welfare services;
- Providing assistance to survivors of the sex industry, such as bureaucratic assistance, emergency humanitarian funds, and job-training seminars;
- Operating a 24/7 emergency hotline for victims of sex trafficking; and
- Raising awareness among service providers, sex clients, and the general public



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Isha L'Isha is also placing a particular focus on Arab and Ethiopian women, whose needs are often under-addressed.

In the past, NCJW has also funded:

► **Turning the Tables** (Funded 2012-2015)

[Turning the Tables](#) operates a vocational center in Tel Aviv, providing economic and professional tools to survivors of sex trafficking, along with women exiting prostitution. Many of its clients are transgender, a community especially vulnerable to violence and sexual exploitation. Through NCJW funding, Turning the Tables has developed a psychosocial counseling and professional training program, launched a line of home sale events to raise awareness about sex trafficking among the broader public, and opened an art studio for survivors to generate income. In 2015, Turning the Tables will hire another project manager, pilot a project in Haifa, and begin an evaluation process for the expanded program.



► **Hotline for Refugees and Migrants** (Funded 2006-2007)

The [Hotline for Refugees and Migrants \(HRM\)](#) was founded in 1998 as a non-partisan nonprofit to defend the rights of migrant workers in immigration detention. HRM's regular work monitoring detention is what first led to the identification of sex trafficking in Israel, and then later, labor trafficking as well. Since then, HRM has provided extensive assistance to hundreds of survivors of trafficking through far-reaching litigation in the courts and public policy advocacy. In 2006, HRM helped secure state-funded legal aid to victims of trafficking and unaccompanied minors. Today, HRM continues to advocate for the rights of migrants, including female migrant workers caught in slavery-like conditions.



## Resources on Sex Trafficking in Israel

For more information on the status of sex trafficking in Israel, as well as the specific civil society organizations that NCJW funds, please consult the following resources:

- NCJW's work in Israel <https://www.ncjw.org/work/israel/>
- *The Times of Israel*, "Upping the ante against sex traffickers," January 2014, <http://bit.ly/1zOuEKX>  
Written by Shari Eshet, Director of NCJW's Israel Office
- US Department of State "[Trafficking in Persons Report — Israel](#)," June 2014  
*An in-depth report on Israel's work to combat human trafficking and assist survivors*
- *The New York Times* [article](#) on Turning the Tables, January 2013
- Hotline for Refugees and Migrants (HRM) [Human Trafficking Project](#)  
*Basic history of Israel's work to combat human trafficking, and specific information on HRM*
- ATZUM: The [Task Force on Human Trafficking](#)  
*General history of Israel's work to combat sex trafficking, specific information on the ATZUM coalition*

*If you have any questions, or would like to work on combating sex trafficking in your community, please contact Jody Rabhan at [jody@ncjwdc.org](mailto:jody@ncjwdc.org)*