



מוקד סיוע לעובדים זרים. ע"ר  
Hotline for Migrant Workers



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY – DECEMBER 12, 2012

**A new study, mapping for the first time the detention conditions and psychological and physical health of children of work migrants and asylum seekers, shows that:**

### **83% of children and parents showed post-traumatic symptoms**

**The research shows that children are arrested during early morning-time, while still in their beds, some are separated from their families, some are detained without proper conditions and without access to medical and welfare services and education. Many children were subjected to previous traumas and some endured torture in camps in Sinai. These traumas are made worse by the traumatic arrest experience and time spent in detention facilities.**

**"End Child Detention" coalition calls on the state of Israel to adopt alternatives to detention, such alternatives that do not cause irreversible damage and are being implemented in many western states today.**

Child detention has become the default choice in dealing with children without a legal status in Israel, despite the fact that the international Convention on the Rights of the Child states that child detention is the last course of action and should only be applied after exhausting all other, less harmful, options. **Nevertheless, during this year alone over 200 children of work migrants and asylum seekers were detained.** These children are detained either in order to be expelled from Israel, or are put in confinement facilities for long periods of time, because of a lack of a definite immigration policy. The children are usually held in one of two facilities: Yahalom facility in Ben Gurion airport, where children of work migrants are detained prior to expulsion, or Saharonim detention facility, where children of asylum seekers are detained.

**Studies from across the globe have shown that the psychological consequences of detention can be devastating for children and may jeopardize their development. However, detention conditions and their consequences on these children have not been examined yet in Israel.** The State Comptroller of Israel has criticized the lack of documentation of the mental and physical condition of work migrants' and asylum seekers' children's detained or imprisoned in Israel. These children make an especially vulnerable group, one living with a constant fear of expulsion, a feeling of alienation and a limited access to medical and welfare services. Many of these children have also endured previous traumas, and some of them are children of asylum seekers that suffered abuse in torture camps in Sinai and are now incarcerated again in Israel.

**The study is the first to map out the detention and incarceration conditions of these children and their parents, and examines also their psychological and physical condition.** The study, conducted by Rotem Ilan of "End Child Detention" coalition with the advisory of Prof. Michelle Sloan and Ph.D student Yael Me'ir, was conducted of 66 children, adolescents and their parents, both asylum seekers and work migrants, who were detained in the past or are detained presently. When possible, the study included the parents, since the parents distress in those conditions affects their children. Of the children held in detention, 42 were held with their families and 24 were underage minors held by themselves. The children's average age is 10.6 years. Children above the age of 12 filled the study's questionnaires by themselves while parents of children younger than 12 filled out the questionnaires for them. The study is based solely upon the children's and parents' answers.

**Time of detention:** the questionnaires analysis shows that the children participating in the study were detained for periods of time ranging between three days to two years. 25.8% of them were held for less than a week, 32.3% for a period between a week and a month, 21% for a period between a month and six months, 9.7% for a period between six months and a year and 11.3% of the children were detained for period between one and two years.

**Detention procedure:** the study examined the way the detentions were conducted. For example, it shows that **78% of work migrants' and asylum seekers' children arrests took place in the early morning, with the children still asleep in their beds.** 11% of detentions took place during day-time, while the children attended school or pre-school, and 11% took place during night-time.

**The study also shows that there was not a social-worker present in all of the arrests conducted, and also that an arrest warrant was not presented to the families, although it is required by law.** In 44.44% of arrests immigration inspectors broke through the door before entering. All participants in the study, work migrants' children and asylum seekers' children alike, testified that during their arrest there was an average presence of ten inspectors wearing uniform. 62.12% of participants have also claimed the presence of either soldiers or border policemen during the arrests. 71.21% did not understand what the inspectors say, but only 45.45% were given translation assistance.

**Detention conditions:** despite being detained in facilities designated for adults, the participants' answers show that the necessary adjustments to minor's detention and especially children's detention were not made. 66.67% of participants said they were not given toys or games, 40.32% said they were not given permission for a daily stroll in the yard and 72% said there were not any playground facilities in the yard. The study also showed that 40% of mothers detained did not receive diapers for their children.

**The study shows that the children's access to education, medical and welfare facilities varied between the two detention facilities, but in both of them at least one factor was not accessible properly.** In Yahalom facility children did not receive education at all, and 62.5% did not meet with a social-worker. Mothers who did meet with a social worker claimed that the social- worker only spoke to them and not with their child. 22.22% reported they have not received the medical attention they required.

In Saharonim facility there was given an educational framework for 65% of children participating in the study, but most children were not familiar with the Hebrew language, in which the activity was conducted. 39% of detainees in Saharonim did not meet with a social-worker. 44.44% required medical attention, but 66.66% reported not receiving sufficient care or any at all. In Saharonim 18.52% of asylum seekers' children were separated from their families for the entire detention period, while 63.64% of them were held in a room with other adults (over ten persons in average were held in one room).

**Medical condition:** the study shows that about half the asylum seekers' children have suffered a traumatic experience prior to their arrest. For example, 27% of children were held before detained in torture camps in Sinai, 26% were abducted, 21% had a near death experience and 26% suffered a loss of a family member as a result on an attack. Furthermore, 51% of children were separated from a family member, 33% suffered from lack of food and water and 29% became homeless.

**From questions examining their mental health today, an acute psychological distress was recorded among a high percentage of parents and younger children.** Most children under the age of 12 have shown psychological difficulties, severe emotional distress and behavior problems. Parents who were detained with their children also displayed high levels of known distress symptoms:46% of them have reported suicidal thoughts. 50% reported panic, 46% reported anxiety and 43% reported depression.

**In fact, in 83% of the responses from children over the age of 12 and their parents showed signs of post-trauma from high to severe levels.** Among other recognizable symptoms respondents reported difficult in sleeping at night (54%), re-experiencing difficult memories and experiences (68%), physiological symptoms such as heart palpitations, difficulty in breathing and excessive sweating (42%).

It should be noted that it is not possible to identify the source of the post-trauma – whether earlier traumas, the detention itself, or a combination of the two. **However, it can be seen that the longer the period for which the child was incarcerated, the**

**greater their psychological distress.** The study found that the more days the child was in prison, the greater the number of social problems they demonstrated.

**According to Me'ir and Professor Sloan from Tel Aviv University:** “The findings highlight extremely worrying statistics regarding the development and emotional and psychological condition of children of migrants and asylum seekers who were arrested and detained. These serious outcomes are consistent with studies from other parts of the world and show that arrest and detention cause enormous damage to physical and mental health of children. The results highlight the urgent need to find alternatives to detention and imprisonment, and to prevent physical and mental damage to the children, at any cost.”

**Dr. Graciela Carmon, a pediatric psychiatrist and Co-Chairperson of Physicians for Human Rights – Israel:** “The study strengthens the fact that prison is no place for children. A cage of gold is still a cage, and improving conditions is not an adequate response. Making more toys available doesn't hide the fact that these children are locked up behind bars. The children's safety can only be assured if we adopt humane alternatives, as in other western countries.”

**Israel is home to approximately 5,000 minors without status, who are likely to find themselves in prison more humane solutions are not adopted. The 'End Child Detention' coalition, composed of the Hotline for Migrant Workers, ACRI, 'Israeli Children' and Physicians for Human Rights, is working towards this goal.**

We believe that when it comes to children, adopting alternatives to detention is the only response to the reality and to the legal situation. The irreversible damage caused by imprisonment is disproportionate, and not necessary for the purpose of monitoring status-less families prior to their deportation or resolution of their status. For this reason many other countries, also experiencing similar phenomenon of migration, develop alternatives that will both ensure a more positive environment for the child and their family, but still enable supervision by the authorities.