



Office of the State Comptroller
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Ministry of Finance

State Assistance to Holocaust Survivors Follow-up Audit

Abstract

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Background

The Holocaust Survivors Rights Authority (hereinafter: the Authority), a department in the Ministry of Finance, is the State of Israel's central authority responsible for assisting the population of Holocaust survivors and victims of persecution. It manages a national registry of Holocaust survivors and victims of persecution who are entitled to benefits from the State of Israel, and the names of some survivors who are receiving a pension from entities abroad. The majority of the Authority's budget is transferred directly to the survivors as a pension, a portion is transferred to various nongovernment organizations that are providing services and benefits to Holocaust survivors, and a portion is allocated to social programs being operated by aid organizations and local authority welfare offices.

Key figures

ILS 5.57 billion

the Authority's budget for Holocaust survivors' rights for 2019

136,000 Holocaust survivors

are living in Israel in December 2019

56,000 victims of persecution

whether anti-Semitic or racist, during WW II¹ who are living in Israel in December 2019

70%

of the Holocaust survivors and victims of persecution who are receiving an annual benefit, need supplementary income in order to live in dignity (51,175 people)

85 years

average age of a Holocaust survivor

1,300

Holocaust survivors pass away each month

ILS 3,996


the average monthly pension to a Holocaust survivor

100

disabled veterans of the war against the Nazis (who are not also recognized as Holocaust survivors) – the last of the remaining veterans in Israel in December 2019



¹ Administrative decision of the Minister of Finance, whereby Iraqi immigrants who were victims of the Farhud pogrom in 1941 and Jews from Algeria and Morocco who had lived under anti-Semitic laws will be entitled to an annual grant of benefits and to an exemption from paying the deductible when purchasing medicines included in the national healthcare basket.

Audit actions

 In 2017, the Office of the State Comptroller published an audit report about assistance to Holocaust survivors (hereinafter: the previous audit, the previous report). The current report presents findings of the follow-up on rectification of the main deficiencies reported in the previous report. From January to March 2020, the Office of the State Comptroller examined the actions of the Ministry of Finance, the Budget Department, the Holocaust Survivors Rights Authority (the Authority), the Ministry of Welfare and Social Services (Ministry of Welfare), the Ministry of Construction and Housing (the Ministry of Housing), the Ministry of Social Equality, the National Insurance Institute (NII), the Ministry of Aliya and Integration (Ministry of Integration), and the Foundation for the Welfare of Holocaust Survivors in Israel (the Welfare Foundation), to rectify the main deficiencies specified in the previous report.

Key findings






-  **Survivors who need supplementary income in order to live** – the previous audit found that more than 51,000 of all survivors who are entitled to an annual grant by virtue of section 4 of the Holocaust Survivors Benefits Law, 5767 – 2007 are receiving a stipend from the NII pursuant to the Assurance of Income Law, 5741 – 1980. The Ministry of Finance and the Authority have not yet found a solution that would improve their financial status. During the years that elapsed since the previous audit, the ratio of those needing an income supplement who belong to this group of survivors has risen from 67% in 2017 to more than 70% in 2019. The follow-up found that this deficiency was not only not rectified, but rather escalated.
-  **Performance of a comprehensive survey to map survivors' needs** – the previous audit found that the Authority had not performed a comprehensive survey to assess their physical, emotional and financial state and needs of the entire population of Holocaust survivors –for the purpose of enabling them to fully exercise the rights granted to survivors by all service-providers. The follow-up audit found that this deficiency has been partially rectified – A special budget totaling about ILS 13 million has been allocated for surveying the group of survivors who could potentially fully exercise rights being provided by the Authority (plus about ILS 4 million for recruiting manpower for the Authority). However, the survey included only about 22% of Holocaust survivors and victims of persecution.

-  **Making apartments accessible to survivors** – the previous audit found that the Company for Location and Restitution of Holocaust Victims' Assets² had discontinued its budgetary support of non-government organizations for the purpose of modifying survivors' apartments to make them accessible according to their changing needs. The follow-up found that the Authority, the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Welfare and the Ministry of Housing in the general program (for people with impaired mobility³) are not granting budgetary support to improve accessibility in the survivors' apartments. This deficiency was not rectified, and activities by non-government organizations to provide accessibility to Holocaust survivors' apartments have been significantly reduced.
-  **Granting additional hours of nursing care to disabled veterans of the war against the Nazis** – the previous audit found that disabled veterans of the war against the Nazis are not entitled to additional hours of nursing care. The follow-up found that this deficiency was not rectified. The Ministry of Finance and the Authority failed to take action to grant additional hours of nursing care to the 100 remaining war veterans – disabled veterans of the war against the Nazis (who are not Holocaust survivors). According to the Authority's assessment, the cost of providing the additional hours of nursing care is about ILS 2.4 million per annum.
-  **Mapping and identifying survivors who are confined to their homes** – the previous report recommended that the Authority should map the population of survivors who are confined to their homes, assess their numbers in the coming years and offer special programs that will enable providing all of their needs, alongside with examining possibilities for helping to dispel their loneliness. Although the variety of programs assisting survivors who are confined to their homes has expanded and the Ministry of Welfare's budget has increased, the locating and mapping of the survivors needing assistance have not yet been completed.
-  **Activity of the inter-ministerial team to provide assistance to survivors** – the follow-up audit found that the inter-ministerial team⁴ that was formed for the purpose of integrating the government's actions relating to the provision of assistance to Holocaust survivors is not convening meetings regularly and there is some uncertainty about its continuing functioning.

2 The company was founded pursuant to the Holocaust Victims' Assets Law (Restitution to Heirs and Endowment for Purposes of Assistance and Commemoration) Law, 5766 – 2006, for the purposes of locating Holocaust victims' assets in Israel, returning them to the legal heirs and, in relation to assets whose heirs were not found, transferring them for purposes of helping needy Holocaust survivors and commemorating the Holocaust.

3 However, the Ministry of Housing is allocating a budget for making apartments accessible for survivors residing in a neighborhood rehabilitation zone in a "track for survivors residing in rehabilitation neighborhoods."

4 The members of the inter-ministerial team: the Holocaust Survivors Rights Authority in the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Labor, Welfare and Social Services, the National Insurance Institute, the Ministry of the Interior, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Social Equality, the Ministry of Aliya and Integration and the Ministry of Construction and Housing (hereinafter: the inter-ministerial team). Later on, a representative of the Welfare Foundation and a representative of the Center for Holocaust Survivors Organizations participated in the meetings.

-  **The website of the Holocaust Survivors Rights Authority** – the website, which is one of the Authority's main tools for conveying information to the population in general and to Holocaust survivors and their families in particular, needs improvement. Although information is being provided, such as "application forms for a widow/er with income or increased income," "loan application" forms, etc., forms are still lacking for submitting claims on-line to receive various rights. Improvements in the accessibility of the information and in clarifying Holocaust survivors' rights are required.
-  **Utilization of a budget of the Ministry of Welfare for the welfare of Holocaust survivors within the framework of the "Program for the Individuals in Need"** – in 2018 and 2019, the Ministry of Welfare utilized only about 30% of the total budget of the "Program for the Needy" (which amounted to about ILS 30 million in those years). This program is designed for carrying out welfare activities for Holocaust survivors who are receiving a supplemental income stipend (this, to differentiate from its full utilization of the "National Program" budget⁵). Due to the partial utilization of the budget of the "Program for the Needy," survivors are unable to receive services that could improve their welfare, including augmentation of the provision of special needs, remote welfare activities and programs for those confined to their homes that could dispel – even if slightly – their sense of loneliness.
-  **Support through the provision of a distress button service** – an essential service of distress buttons for about 9,000 survivors is in danger of being discontinued because of a lack of funding necessary for providing the service. Without appropriate government assistance, the Welfare Foundation will have difficulties continuing the service, which is currently being funded mostly through donations.



Increased survivors' rights – since the previous audit, the rights given to the previously recognized group of survivors were increased and from 2017 to 2019 the Authority and the Ministry of Finance increased the number of people entitled.

Information exchanges between bodies providing service to survivors – the previous audit found that the information exchanges between the NII, the Authority, the Ministry of Housing, the Ministry of Welfare and the Welfare Foundation were inadequate. The follow-up found that information exchanges between the bodies has greatly improved, and several services, such as the addition of hours of nursing care, are now being provided automatically, without having to submit an application.

5 This program operates "Mofet Clubs". This is a program that is operated in clubs outside of the home, which includes: round-trip transportation a light breakfast and various enrichment classes throughout the day and lunch. It also includes augmentation of the provision of special needs. This is an expansion of the variety of services being provided to Holocaust survivors in the community according to their personal needs. It provides help with financing dental treatments, social clubs in the community and "warm homes". 190 such homes provide an intimate social framework for survivors who have a hard time getting to clubs. Additional services include a telephone assistance line and support for programs initiated and operated by local authorities for Holocaust survivors, such as documentation of a life story and testimony theater.

Grant to survivors from the Company for Restitution of Assets – the previous audit found that the then Minister of Justice failed to set rules for continuing the assistance to survivors in need following the closure of the Company for the Location and Restitution of Holocaust Victims' in 2017. The assistance had been financed by use of assets without identified heirs. The follow-up found that, after the Company for Restitution closed, the Authority assumed the provision of the annual grant to survivors in lieu of the company that closed.

Accessibility program for public housing – the previous audit found that the Ministry of Housing failed to design a program for providing accessibility to Holocaust survivors' apartments and recommended that the Authority should assist the Ministry of Housing with the design of special required programs for Holocaust survivors. The follow-up found that the Ministry of Housing designed a program for making apartments accessible for Holocaust survivors who are living in public housing. The Ministry of Housing is lacking an additional budget of about ILS 21 million in order to complete the execution of the program.

Utilization of a Ministry of Welfare budget for the benefit of Holocaust survivors within the framework of the "National Program" – The previous audit found that the Ministry of Welfare failed to complete the design of a program that would expand the volume of welfare and social services being provided to Holocaust survivors, and therefore, it did not utilize the "National Program" budget. The follow-up audit found that the Ministry of Welfare utilized the budget allocated to it for the National Program at the rate of approximately ILS 58 million per annum (as opposed to its partial utilization of the Program for the Needy).

Key recommendations








It is recommended that the inter-ministerial team should:

take action to establish a single response unit that will coordinate all rights and all responses being provided to Holocaust survivors and should follow-up on the exercise of their rights;

examine the possibility of increasing the Ministry of Welfare's cooperation with and support of non-government organizations dedicated to Holocaust survivors' welfare, alongside with designing programs to utilize the budget by itself;

anchor and ensure its continuing routine operation in order to ensure continuous handling of matters relating to Holocaust survivors.

-  In cooperation with the Ministry of Finance, the Prime Minister's Office and the Authority: examine the possibility of designing an assistance program to increase the monthly benefits to the group of survivors who are receiving only an annual grant. They should consider the decrease in the total amount of benefits paid to those entitled by about ILS 50 million from 2018 to 2019 (which derives from the natural dwindling of the number of those entitled).
-  It is recommended that the Authority should continue carrying out the rights utilization project until the survey of Holocaust survivors is completed. This includes improving survivors' ability to directly exercise their rights, alongside with training of suitable manpower for this task and involving additional government ministries and non-governmental organizations responsible for filling the additional needs of Holocaust survivors.
-  It is recommended that the Authority, the Welfare Foundation and the NII should cooperate on the preparation of tests to examine the functional condition of Holocaust survivors and of victims of persecution who are entitled to a nursing care benefit. This will assist in identifying those who are eligible to exercise their entitlement rights which are based on their physical condition.
-  It is recommended that the Ministry of the Interior should take action to promote regulations that would grant the maximum discount on municipal tax to the population of Holocaust survivors that the Authority has recognized as individuals in need.
-  It is recommended that the Ministry of Integration should initiate contact with survivors who are entitled to public housing facilities under its responsibility and find out which of them prefer an apartment in public housing and which prefer to continue receiving assistance with rent, respectively to the inventory of apartments that the Ministry can allocate to survivors.

State assistance to Holocaust survivors – key findings of the follow-up audit

| Audit section | Deficiency reported in the previous report | Extent that the deficiency was rectified as found in the follow-up audit | | | |
|--|--|--|--------------------|------------------------|-----------------|
| | | Not rectified | Somewhat rectified | Considerably rectified | Fully rectified |
| Performance of a comprehensive survey and integration of the handling of survivors by the Authority | The Holocaust Survivors Rights Authority did not conduct a comprehensive survey that includes the entire population of Holocaust survivors | → | | | |
| | The Holocaust Survivors Rights Authority is not integrating the handling of survivors | → | | | |
| Benefits being given to Holocaust survivors and to victims of persecution who are living in Israel | The number of entitled survivors should be increased | → | | | |
| | Additional hours of nursing care should be provided to disabled veterans of the war against the Nazis | → | | | |
| | A grant should be provided to survivors in need after the closure of the Company for Asset Restitution | → | | | |
| | The pension to survivors needing an income supplement in order to live should be increased | → | | | |
| Physical adaptation of survivors' residential environment | Apartments for survivors have not been made accessible in Ministry of Housing public housing | → | | | |
| | Apartments for survivors have not been made accessible through the Ministry of Housing's general program | → | | | |
| | Lack of support of nongovernment organizations in lieu of the Company for Restitution | → | | | |
| Provision of psychological care to Holocaust survivors | Inadequate provision of psychological care to Holocaust survivors by the Authority | → | | | |
| Making the Authority's website accessible and providing a voucher to survivors | The Authority's website is not accessible | → | | | |
| | A voucher for survivors is not accessible | → | | | |
| Establishing social infrastructure for Holocaust survivors by utilizing a Ministry of Welfare budget | There are very few programs to help Holocaust survivors who are confined to their homes | → | | | |
| | A basic annual welfare budget and a welfare budget from the National Program are not being utilized | → | | | |
| | Lack of swift organization by the Ministry of Welfare to utilize a new budget | → | | | |



Summary

Many Holocaust survivors took part in establishing the State of Israel; some of them were even economic and political leaders. This population, which is an integral part of the fabric of life in Israel, is diverse and comprised of old and new immigrants. Generations of Israeli governments have worked hard to help Holocaust survivors in Israel and make life easier for them and they are continuing to do so today. However, despite these praiseworthy activities, some of these survivors' needs are still not being adequately met. Time is running out; the number of remaining survivors is dwindling and therefore, it is even more important that the relevant authorities study the deficiencies raised in this report and take action to rectify them for the purpose of improving the assistance being provided to Holocaust survivors, victims of persecution and disabled veterans of the war against the Nazis and helping them to fully exercise their rights. This generation, which survived the Holocaust, is entitled to live out the rest of their lives in dignity and receive the recognition that it deserves.