



State Comptroller Report | February 2023

Israel Defense Forces

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# **Attending to Lone Soldiers Throughout Their Military Service and After Discharge – Follow-up Audit**





# Attending to Lone Soldiers Throughout Their Military Service and After Discharge – Follow-up Audit

## Background

Lone soldiers enlisting in the IDF, including those from abroad, even though they are not required to enlist, seek to promote the security of the state and its residents and serve in various positions, including combat roles. According to IDF's orders, lone soldiers include lone soldiers lacking family support.

During their military service, lone soldiers are attended to by the Manpower Directorate, TASH (service conditions) staff, and unit commanders. Following discharge, the Ministry of Defense helps lone soldiers integrate into civil society in education, vocational training, and employment through the Discharged Soldiers Guidance Division and the Discharged Soldiers Absorption Fund<sup>1</sup>.

1 The Department for Discharged Soldiers functions under the Absorption of Discharged Soldiers Law, 1944 and Ministry of Defense's directives.



## Key Figures

**6,613**

the number of lone soldiers serving in the IDF in December 2021. 48% of them were lone soldiers lacking family support

**87%**

lone soldiers' rate who stayed in Israel out of the total lone soldiers not born in Israel discharged between 2017 and 2020

**40%,  
46%**

satisfaction<sup>2</sup> level with assistance provided to lone soldiers by the IDF (40%) and by the Ministry of Defense following discharge (46%)

**65%,  
58%**

answers rate in which financial difficulties were cited as the reason for dissatisfaction<sup>3</sup> with the IDF assistance (65%) and with the Ministry of Defense assistance following discharge (58%)

**55%**

lone soldiers' rate not familiar with the Lone Soldiers Center operated by the Manpower Directorate

**38%**

lone soldiers' rate whose military salary covered less than 50% of their living expenses

**3.9%,  
11%**

increase rate in the IDF assistance scope for rent and housing maintenance expenses in 2017–2022 (3.9%), compared with the average increase in rent expenses according to the Central Bureau of Statistics in the same period (11%)

**only  
NIS 54**


addition to combat lone soldiers' monthly salary (monthly stipend not included) (a rise from NIS 1,082 in 2017 to NIS 1,136 in 2022); an addition of NIS 50 to the monthly salary of lone soldiers in combat support roles; and an addition of NIS 45 to the monthly salary of lone soldiers in non-combat roles

<sup>2</sup> The term refers to the number of respondents who indicated a high or very high level of satisfaction in a questionnaire distributed by the State Comptroller Office as part of the follow-up audit.

<sup>3</sup> According to answers to the questionnaire circulated by the State Comptroller Office as part of the follow-up audit.




## Audit Actions

 From October 2021 to May 2022, the State Comptroller's Office conducted a follow-up over the rectification of deficiencies noted in the previous audit (follow-up audit). Supplementary audits were conducted until October 2022. The follow-up audit, examined: the IDF's assistance to lone soldiers during their military service; the Ministry of Defense's assistance to lone soldiers after discharge; regulation of assistance provided by NGOs during lone soldiers' military service and after discharge and the establishment of an inter-ministerial strategic plan for integrating discharged lone soldiers into Israeli society. The audit was conducted at the Manpower Directorate (IDF), the Discharged Soldiers Guidance Division, the Discharged Soldiers Absorption Fund (Ministry of Defense), and the Yahad organization<sup>4</sup>.

The follow-up audit included the State Comptroller Office's questionnaires circulated amongst discharged lone soldiers: (a) A questionnaire examining the assistance provided to the soldiers **during their military** service. 578 discharged soldiers thoroughly answered this questionnaire. (b) A questionnaire examining the assistance provided to the soldiers **following discharge**. 685 discharged soldiers responded to most of the questions in this questionnaire.

## Key Findings





 **IDF's Assistance to Fulfill Ongoing Needs of Lone Soldiers Without Housing** – by the previous audit, the IDF was aware that most lone soldiers were struggling financially. Still, since 2010, the Manpower Directorate had not examined lone soldiers' subsistence needs. By the follow-up audit **this deficiency was rectified to a small extent:** the IDF conducted staff work on the ongoing needs, but it had not led to significant improvements in lone soldiers' financial situation: in January 2022, there was a 50% increase in monthly subsistence payment given to all IDF's soldiers, and lone soldiers were provided with temporary financial assistance during the Covid-19 pandemic. However, since the previous audit, in 2017–2022, the monthly salary of combat lone soldiers (monthly subsistence payment not included) increased by NIS 54 only, from NIS 1,082 to NIS 1,136. In addition, by answers to the questionnaire, only 5% of the respondents' military salary (including monthly subsistence payment) covered


<sup>4</sup> Yahad – United for Israel's Soldiers, is a non-profit organization whose purpose is to promote the wellbeing of IDF's soldiers. Yahad was established as a merger between the LIBI Fund and the Association for the Welfare of Israeli Soldiers.



all their expenses, and 38% of respondents' military salary covered less than 50% of their monthly living expenses. This was also reflected in lone soldiers' level of satisfaction with the IDF assistance – only 40% (the satisfaction level in the previous audit was 43%).

 **IDF's Housing Assistance** – the previous audit noted that despite the gaps, known to the IDF, between lone soldiers' housing needs and the IDF solutions, the Manpower Directorate did not conduct thorough staff works on these gaps, nor did it consider the budget needed to finance housing solutions fulfilling their personal needs adequately. By the follow-up audit, **the deficiency was rectified to a small extent:** in 2018, the Manpower Directorate conducted staff work on the housing problem and formed three projects to improve housing conditions: founding a Soldier House in Rishon le Zion, building accommodations for soldiers as part of the Ofek Rahav project and providing combat soldiers with a room of their own as part of the Bayit Ham(affable home) project. By the audit completion, the above projects have not provided housing solutions to all lone soldiers adequately meeting their personal needs. Except for adding ten Bayit Ham flats, the first two projects were not completed, and the Ofek Rahav project is expected to be completed only in 2028. Most lone soldiers (57% of them) live in rented flats, and according to questionnaire answers, 44% had difficulties paying for rent and house maintenance. The State Comptroller Office found that the housing assistance value provided by the IDF eroded (an increase of 3.9% in the scope of assistance, from NIS 1,300 in 2017 to NIS 1,351 in 2022) vis-a-vis the average increase of 11% in monthly rent, according to the Central Bureau of Statistics, (from NIS 1,300 in 2017 to NIS 1,443 in 2022).

 **Discharge Preparation Courses** – the previous audit noted that in 2014–2016, an average of 46% of the lone soldiers who were invited to discharge preparation courses attended them. By the follow-up audit, **the deficiency was rectified to a small extent:** in 2021, 4.5 years following the previous audit completion, the IDF founded an administration designated, among other things, to increase the rate of lone soldiers' participation in discharge preparation courses. Moreover, the IDF established the Lone Soldiers Center to supervise and monitor course participation. Nevertheless, lone soldiers' participation decreased from 59% in 2016 to 42% in 2021. According to questionnaire answers, the main reasons for not attending the courses were: not receiving invitations (31%) or being unaware of them (23%), indicating deficient participants' notifications. According to the head of the administration, the courses took place only in Rehovot, making it difficult for soldiers living in different regions of Israel to attend them.

 **The Connection Between the IDF and Non-profit and NGOs Assistance to Lone Soldiers** – the previous audit noted that non-profit organizations and NGOs had assisted lone soldiers directly – providing them with housing assistance and advising them about communication with IDF's entities and civil entities. Thus, the IDF's November 2016 directive, by which all donations for the IDF will be accepted through the Yahad organization, cannot be applied sweepingly to all ways of granting a benefit or benefit of



economic value given to lone soldiers. By the follow-up audit, **the deficiency was rectified to a small extent:** despite the Manpower Directorate regulating the activities of the various NGOs through the Yahad organization and the publication of a list composed of 40 NGOs approved by the Manpower Directorate, the questionnaire answers indicated that 22 (out of 31) of the NGOs that assisted lone soldiers were not included in the list.



#### **Discharged Lone Soldiers' Level of Satisfaction with the Ministry of Defense Assistance**

– by the questionnaire, 46% of the discharged lone soldiers were satisfied<sup>5</sup>, and 23% indicated that they were hardly satisfied with the Ministry of Defense assistance, mainly due to economic difficulties and bureaucracy. In terms of consultation and guidance provided by the Ministry of Defense, 25% of the respondents to the questionnaire indicated that there was no connection between them and the district office<sup>6</sup>. 65% of them were not even aware of the possibility of contacting the district office. Moreover, by the questionnaire answers, only 53% of the respondents who the district offices attended to were satisfied with the assistance provided to them.



#### **IDF's Assistance Through the Lone Soldiers Center**

– by the questionnaire answers, more than half of the respondents were not familiar with the Center (55%) established in March 2020, and the level of satisfaction with the assistance it provided was low – only 50% of the respondents indicated they were satisfied with it. The soldiers dissatisfied with the assistance stated that the staff had no adequate tools, knowledge, and powers to assist lone soldiers and that the center was overburdened. Furthermore, some respondents complained about the treatment manner at the Center.



#### **Additional Assistance Needed During Military Service**

– by an analysis of the questionnaire answers, 61% of the respondents indicated that during their military service, they needed assistance from the IDF in other areas for which they did not receive a response. The main assistance areas were financial assistance (32%), consideration and empathy on the part of military officials such as the commanders (20%), emotional support (19%), and preparation for civilian life (8%).



#### **Additional Assistance Needed Following Discharge**

– by an analysis of the questionnaire answers, almost half of the respondents (47%) indicated that as discharged lone soldiers, they needed additional assistance that was not included in the Ministry of Defense assistance, and especially with the following areas<sup>7</sup>: financial support

5 It should be noted that 31% of the respondents indicated a medium level of satisfaction with the assistance they were given.

6 Lone soldiers are entitled to personal consultation and guidance through the four district offices of the Foundation and Unit for Discharge Soldiers: the Central and Tel-Aviv district office, the Northern and Haifa district office, the Jerusalem district office and the Southern and Beer-Sheva district office.

7 Some of the respondents indicated more than one kind of assistance, thus there are additional kinds of assistance that add up to more than 12%.



(50% of respondents), tuition assistance (19% of respondents) and transition to civilian life (19% of respondents).



**Ministry of Defense Housing Assistance** – the previous audit noted that the Ministry of Defense fully funded discharged lone soldiers' stay at a Soldiers' House for three months from discharge day and that only 15% of them seized the opportunity. The Soldiers' House benefit was perceived as irrelevant, not meeting the needs of discharged lone soldiers. The follow-up audit raised that **the deficiency was fully rectified:** following the Absorption of Discharged Soldiers Law (amendment 19), 2017, in 2021, the Ministry of Defense assisted 3,195 discharged lone soldiers (99% of the average number of lone soldiers who were discharged between 2020 and 2021) and provided them up to NIS 1,000 per month for monthly rent during their first year as civilians. In addition, discharged lone soldiers, who did not get the above benefit, were given one-time assistance of about NIS 5,000 from the second year of discharge to the fifth year. This grant was given to them according to the budget transferred to the Unit from the Administrator General Office.

**IDF's Activities to Improve Solutions Offered to Lone Soldiers** – the follow-up audit noted that since the previous audit, the IDF had conducted staff work and took the following steps: in 2019, the Manpower Directorate conducted staff work focusing on this population and provided a complete response to its needs; in July 2021 the Manpower Directorate approved the staff work on the response to the conditions of service for conscripts and approved it; in March 2020 the Mofet Unit at the Manpower Directorate started operating the Lone Soldiers Center to optimize the solutions offered to lone soldiers.

**Ministry of Defense Tuition Assistance** – the follow-up audit noted that the number of discharged lone soldiers who received tuition assistance increased by 34% (from 1,468 to 1,973) between 2018 and 2021 and that there is a high level of satisfaction (71%) with this assistance. It was further raised that in 2021, 59% of discharged lone soldiers (1,973 out of 3,327) received tuition assistance (for all academic tracks). In 2021 the overall support provided by the Ministry of Defense was NIS 24.6 million.

**An Inter-Ministerial Strategic Plan for Integration of Discharged Lone Soldiers into Israeli Society** – the previous audit noted that there was no inter-ministerial strategic plan defining the state's targets to integrate discharged lone soldiers lacking family support and to maintain contact with them after they go back to their country of origin. **The follow-up audit raised that the deficiency was rectified to a large extent:** upon the follow-up audit completion, the Ministry of Defense and other relevant ministries had not completed their staff work to advance an inter-ministerial strategic plan for integrating discharged lone soldiers. Nevertheless, in the follow-up audit, Discharged Soldiers Guidance Division and the Discharged Soldiers Absorption Fund





established a professional forum dedicated to assisting discharged soldiers and collaborating with relevant ministries and authorities. By June 2022, the forum convened three times and set some targets to advance assistance provided to discharged soldiers, including attending to special populations such as lone soldiers.

## Key Recommendations

- 💡 It is recommended that the Manpower Directorate thoroughly reexamine the solutions it offers in areas where there was a low rate of soldiers' satisfaction – economic difficulties, bureaucracy, and degrading attitudes on the part of IDF officials. Moreover, it is recommended that the IDF consider diverting resources allocated to financing other housing solutions in favor of participation in housing wages of more lone soldiers and of updating the amount of participation in rent according to the increase in rent in the economy so that IDF's assistance to lone soldiers would fulfill their basic needs.
- 💡 It is recommended that the Ministry of Defense optimize the assistance it offers to discharged lone soldiers, find solutions for economic difficulties and reduce the burden of bureaucracy, which makes it harder for them to understand and exercise their rights. Furthermore, it is recommended that the Ministry of Defense initiate contact with all discharged lone soldiers to minimize the rate of discharged lone soldiers (25%–30% of discharged lone soldiers) who are not in touch with the district office and improve their access to information regarding their rights, including the right for tuition assistance and increase the implementation rate of educational assistance among lone discharged soldiers. Thus, advancing their integration into Israeli society.
- 💡 It is recommended that the IDF and the Ministry of Defense improve access to information about the assistance NGOs offer to lone soldiers and discharged lone soldiers. It is further recommended that the Manpower Directorate fully collaborate with the different NGOs, according to the layout agreed upon in 2019. In addition, it is recommended that the Ministry of Defense examine the causes for the low number of discharged lone soldiers who chose to receive mentorship and support and collaborate with the Manpower Directorate to maintain and continue the personal guidance provided to lone soldiers during their service even after discharge, through the associations examined and approved by him.
- 💡 It is recommended that the IDF conducts occasional surveys amongst lone soldiers to understand their needs better and improve the solutions offered to them. It is further recommended that it examine the areas in which soldiers needed assistance that was not given to them and consider providing optimal solutions in these areas, such as financial assistance, emotional support, and guiding commanders about the unique characteristics of the lone soldiers' population and the way they should be treated. In addition, it is recommended that the Ministry of Defense consider solutions for discharged lone soldiers

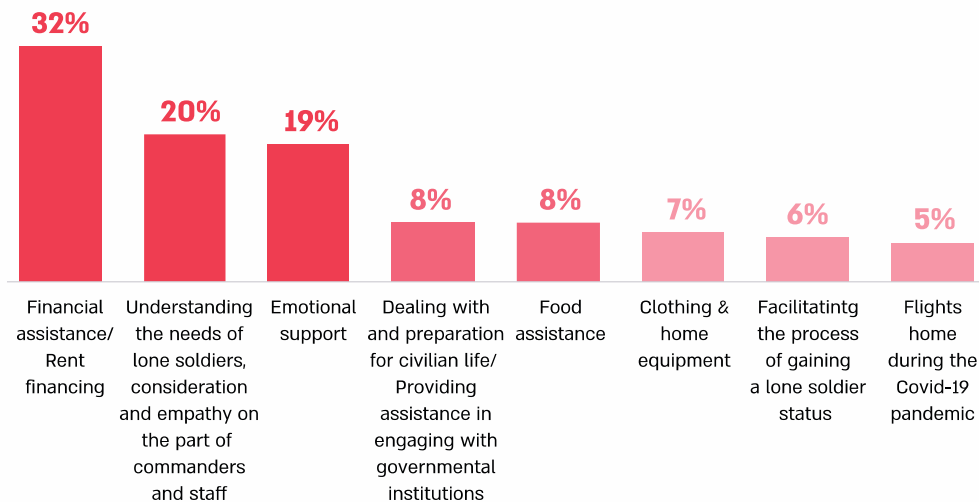


in the areas they indicated as dissatisfactory solutions offered to them, including financial support, preparation for civilian life, and tuition assistance.



It is recommended that the Ministry of Defense ensure that the professional forum it initiated in collaboration with relevant ministries and authorities form an inter-ministerial strategic plan dealing with integrating discharged lone soldiers into society emphasizing the unique characteristics of this population and the kinds of assistance they need.





### The Areas in Which Lone Soldiers Needed Assistance not Provided to them



According to the answers to the questionnaire distributed in the course of the follow-up audit and processed by the State Comptroller Office. Some of the respondents indicated more than one area. Thus, the respondents' rates in the chart add up to more than 100%.



## The Extent the Main Deficiencies Noted in the Previous Report were Rectified

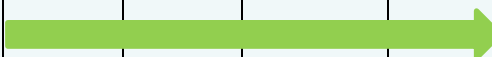
Audit chapter	The Deficiency Noted in the Previous Audit	The Extent of Deficiencies Rectification in the Follow-up Audit			
		Not Rectified	Slightly Rectified	Significantly Rectified	Fully Rectified
Satisfaction of lone soldiers with the assistance provided by the IDF	The satisfaction rate of lone soldiers with the assistance provided by the IDF was low (43%).				
IDF assistance to fulfill ongoing needs of lone soldiers (housing not included)	Since 2010, the Manpower Directorate has not examined the living needs of lone soldiers, although the IDF was aware that most lone soldiers struggle with their financial situation.				
IDF's Housing Assistance	The Manpower Directorate has not thoroughly investigated the gaps between the housing solutions the IDF provides to lone soldiers and the soldiers' housing needs. In addition, the budget needed to fund housing solutions guarantying better housing conditions for lone soldiers, was not considered.				
Discharge Preparation Courses	Between 2014 and 2016, an average of 46% of the lone soldiers who were invited to discharge preparation courses attended them. The Manpower Directorate did not examine the reasons for the low participation rate.				



Audit chapter	The Deficiency Noted in the Previous Audit	The Extent of Deficiencies Rectification in the Follow-up Audit			
		Not Rectified	Slightly Rectified	Significantly Rectified	Fully Rectified
The connection between IDF and NGOs and organizations that assist lone soldiers	IDF's instruction from November 2016 by which all donations are to be received through the Yahad organization cannot be applied to all ways of granting a benefit or benefit of economic value.				
Mentoring lone soldiers during their military service and after discharge	The IDF has not regulated personal mentoring for lone soldiers during their military service and has not published any relevant instruction. Moreover, the mentoring program initiated by the Discharged Soldiers Guidance Division and the Discharged Soldiers Absorption Fund failed, and lone soldiers (both serving and discharged) have received mentorship through local initiatives or NGOs.				
Inter-ministerial strategic plan for integration of discharged lone soldiers into Israeli society	There is no inter-ministerial strategic plan defining the state's targets to integrate discharged lone soldiers lacking family support and maintain contact with them after returning to their country of origin. In addition, there is no follow-up on integrating discharged lone soldiers into Israeli society; they are not kept in touch, and no national agency supervises the situation and ensures that they are adequately integrated into society. Furthermore, no designated database includes information on lone soldiers following discharge.				



Audit chapter	The Deficiency Noted in the Previous Audit	The Extent of Deficiencies Rectification in the Follow-up Audit			
		Not Rectified	Slightly Rectified	Significantly Rectified	Fully Rectified
Ministry of Defense's Housing Assistance	The Ministry of Defense fully funded discharged lone soldiers' stay at a Soldiers' House for three months from discharge day. However, only 15% of them seized the opportunity. The most urgent need of discharged lone soldiers was housing, and the complimentary stay at the Soldiers' House was perceived as irrelevant.				





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## Summary

The State of Israel cherishes the lone soldiers who join the IDF, particularly those who reside overseas and are not required to serve. The Lone Soldiers' commitment to Israel's security is highly appreciated. Attending to the population of lone soldiers is one of Israel's top interests since it might maintain relationships between the State of Israel and the Jewish diaspora, empower populations worthy of advancement and increase the sense of belonging and integration into Israeli society.

The follow-up audit raised that most of the deficiencies noted in the previous audit were rectified to a small extent. It is recommended that the IDF and the Ministry of Defense improve solutions offered to lone soldiers in areas in which they need additional assistance, including financial assistance, consideration and empathy on the part of IDF's officials and mainly the commanders, emotional support, preparation for civilian life and tuition assistance. It should be done to improve lone soldiers' satisfaction level, fulfill their needs more effectively and improve their integration into Israeli society.