

Chapter VIII

Provision of Services to Evacuees – Assistance with Immediate and Basic Needs

The title font [in the Hebrew version] is designed in the handwriting of **Savyon Chen Kipper**, of blessed memory, who was murdered on October 7. Savyon loved drawing, design, and makeup artistry and was a student of visual communication. Out of her deep love for children, she worked as a kindergarten teacher for five years. Savyon and her partner were murdered at the Nova festival.

Provision of Services to Evacuees – Assistance with Immediate and Basic Needs

Abstract

Background

On October 7, 2023, in the early hours of the morning, the State of Israel awoke to a murderous attack and to scenes of horror and devastation. Consequently, a large portion of the population that evacuated due to these events did so completely by surprise. Many people were evacuated or self-evacuated from their homes without having had time to prepare or to take with them essential belongings, food, or medications; some left with only the clothes on their backs; and others who had come from "the line of fire", from communities along the confrontation lines in the South and North, were uprooted from their homes and arrived without wallets, basic documents, or mobile phones. Accordingly, the evacuee population required immediate assistance in the form of basic supplies and food.

The population evacuated from their homes required a wide range of services, which were to be provided by the local authority that received them (the host authority). Some of these were essential municipal services that, in routine times, they receive from the local authority in which they reside (the evacuated authority); others were services necessitated by the extraordinary circumstances in which they found themselves, intended to help them cope with the upheaval they had experienced and with the challenges of transition and adaptation to the new, temporary reality – one also lacking certainty – in order to safeguard their health, security, and welfare. Some of these services are not within the scope of services that the local authority is responsible for providing in routine times.

Evacuees arrived without basic equipment and under conditions of uncertainty regarding the provision of the essential services and supplies that they required. Many were forced to leave their homes at short notice, and numerous families were unprepared for a prolonged stay away from home. These difficulties were particularly acute among vulnerable populations such as older persons and children. Evacuees experienced shortages of clothing, hygiene products, medications, and everyday necessities, and many required immediate assistance. Aid organizations and communities across the country mobilized to help locate and distribute supplies, and volunteer frameworks were established to provide clothing and basic goods; however, these efforts did not suffice to provide stability and certainty. The principal challenge was the lack of preparedness for an emergency of this scale, and the need to rapidly provide essential services and basic necessities to thousands of people simultaneously. Participants in focus groups conducted by the State Comptroller's Office across the country aptly described their

basic needs and the difficulties they encountered in attempting to maintain their daily routines following evacuation:

"It's the smallest things... this is what residents expect from us – to do everything the state didn't do. I have to arrange transportation to funerals; I had to arrange transportation for every medical appointment; I have to, we are everything. There is no state."

Evacuee from a kibbutz in southern Israel

The response to the population evacuated to hotels includes, first and foremost, assistance with the most basic subsistence needs. Some of these, such as personal laundry and sanitation services, are addressed in the procedures of the Evacuation, Relief and Casualties Authority (ERC Authority); others, such as food, clothing, personal hygiene supplies, and access to digital services, emerged as the immediate, initial needs on the ground, which, according to the definition set out in the ERC Authority doctrine, are "responses that evacuees are unable to provide for themselves under such circumstances." The provision of medical equipment, medications, and other medical needs of evacuees was not the responsibility of local government.

Key Figures

Only NIS 5 per
day per evacuee

Amount of the grant provided by the Ministry of Interior as assistance to local authorities that received a large number of people, in lieu of municipal property tax payments, for each individual for each day of their stay in the host authority. The Ministries of Finance and Interior transferred additional budgets to local authorities through designated channels

Approximately
one month
after the outbreak
of the war

Only in early November 2023 did the Ministry of Finance announce that financial support would be provided for laundry services for the entire evacuee population, via prepaid debit cards

3,000

pre-packaged meals (food trays) per day, funded by a standing donation for evacuees in **Eilat**, from the early days of the war until early December 2023, and double that amount on Fridays. The preparation and distribution of the food trays were handled and managed by the municipal assistance center

By
July 2024

the host local authorities had not yet been reimbursed for expenses incurred in providing basic services and undertaking immediate procurement during the first month of the war

Audit Actions



From December 2023 to July 2024, the Office of the State Comptroller examined the evacuation and reception of evacuees during the Iron Swords War in 14 local authorities that received evacuees within their jurisdictions: the municipalities of **Eilat, Herzliya, Haifa, Tiberias, Jerusalem, Nof HaGalil, Netanya, Ramat Gan, and Tel Aviv–Yafo**; the local council of **Zikhron Ya'akov**; and the regional councils of **Hof HaCarmel, Mateh Yehuda, Emek HaYarden, and Tamar**. This chapter addresses the basic and immediate services provided by host local authorities to evacuees and to self-evacuees received within their jurisdictions.

Key Findings



Provision of Basic Services – In the host local authorities examined, immediate basic services – such as food, clothing, and personal hygiene supplies – were generally provided to evacuees, and laundry services were made available. However, it emerges that a substantial portion of these goods and services was supplied through donations and by civil society volunteers, with the assistance and facilitation of the host authorities, rather than by government bodies.



Differential Provision of Food Services to Evacuees from Different Authorities – During the initial weeks of the war, disparities were observed in the number of meals provided to evacuees staying together in the same hotels, depending on their communities of origin: the hotels provided two meals, while some evacuee communities received a third meal through donations. Even after government resources were allocated, people were still in need of donations – a situation that is not appropriate in an emergency and that further heightened feelings of dependency among evacuees. Self-evacuees were generally required to pay for their own meals, except during the initial days, when their rights had not yet been clarified. In some cases, the provision of only two meals did not meet evacuees' needs and imposed an additional burden on them. This was particularly true for self-evacuees.



Lack of Distinction between Evacuees and Self-Evacuees – It was found that only at the end of November 2023 – approximately three years after the audit report on "Preparedness to Defend the Home Front against the Threat of Missiles and Rockets (Physical Protection, Warnings, and Population Evacuation) – Follow-Up Audit", and during the Swords of Iron War – did the National Emergency Management Authority

(NEMA) publish the "National Policy for Addressing the Phenomenon of Self-Evacuation During Emergencies (War)". Needless to say, the publication of this policy at this stage was too late and not relevant to many of the required responses. By this time, more than a month and a half after the outbreak of the war, most basic service needs of self-evacuees had already either been met prior to the publication of the policy or had not been met at all.

 **Clothing and Personal Hygiene Supplies** – In all the local authorities examined – the municipalities of **Eilat, Herzliya, Haifa, Tiberias, Jerusalem, Nof HaGalil, Netanya, Ramat Gan**, and **Tel Aviv–Yafo**; the local council of **Zikhron Ya'akov**; and the regional councils of **Hof HaCarmel, Mateh Yehuda, Emek HaYarden**, and **Tamar** – it was found that clothing and personal hygiene supplies were provided to evacuees through donations, at times facilitated by the host local authorities. The **Eilat** Municipality, for example, reported that it had allocated a room for the collection of donated clothing for evacuees and subsequently opened a designated space for clothing distribution. The **Hof HaCarmel** Regional Council reported that clothing and personal hygiene supplies were delivered directly to evacuees through donations.

 **Laundry Services** – In the initial days of the war, host local authorities did not provide laundry services for the evacuees, who relied on assistance from civil society volunteers. In some cases, the response was partial and inadequate. The municipalities of **Eilat, Herzliya, Haifa, Ramat Gan**, and **Tel Aviv–Yafo**; the local council of **Zikhron Ya'akov**; and the regional councils of **Hof HaCarmel, Mateh Yehuda**, and **Tamar** reported that laundry services were provided through volunteers and by the hotels. After the initial days, host local authorities mobilized and procured washing machines, dryers, and other equipment, or distributed vouchers to evacuees for use at private laundries. Only in early November 2023, did the Ministry of Finance announce that financial support would be provided for laundry services to the entire evacuee population via prepaid debit cards. The delay in this reimbursement created a significant service gap, left evacuees helpless, and created unnecessary tensions among them.

 **Digital Accessibility** – It was found that in hotels accommodating evacuees in the **Tamar** Regional Council, there were significant disparities in internet access between the public areas of the hotels and the guest rooms. The council reported that infrastructure and bandwidth constraints impaired the ability of evacuees to study and work remotely.

 **Reimbursement of Host Local Authorities** – It was found that, during the first month of the war, host local authorities did not receive reimbursement for their expenditures on the procurement of basic supplies for evacuees and for bereaved families, despite the fact that only a limited number of local authorities (approximately 14 authorities that received the vast majority of evacuees from the South) were involved, and notwithstanding the submission of flexible reimbursement requests aligned with their actual expenditures.

In addition, the grant provided by the Ministry of Interior as assistance to local authorities that received a large number of people, in lieu of municipal property tax payments, amounted to NIS 5 per person per day.

This grant was negligible relative to actual expenditure and was based solely on the calculation of municipal expenses – that is, routine expenditures of the local authority for its residents, including waste removal, routine maintenance, and personnel for ongoing operations – and did not include expenditure for welfare and education. It should be stressed that this grant did not cover expenses incurred by local authorities during the first two weeks of receiving evacuees, including expenditure for accommodation, food, transportation of evacuees, the establishment of aid centers, and the operation of emergency command centers around the clock, seven days a week, for the benefit of evacuees, as well as other irregular requirements. The Ministries of Finance and Interior transferred additional budgets to local authorities through designated channels.



Initial Assistance Provided by Host Local Authorities – It was found that host local authorities provided evacuees with initial assistance immediately, driven by an understanding of the urgency of the situation and the necessity arising from the irregular circumstances of individuals who had fled their homes and required urgent services, without examining issues of liability, and even before government decisions on the matter had been adopted.

The municipalities of **Eilat, Herzliya, Haifa, Tiberias, Jerusalem, Nof HaGalil, Netanya, Ramat Gan, and Tel Aviv–Yafo**; the local council of **Zikhron Ya'akov**; and the regional councils of **Hof HaCarmel, Mateh Yehuda, Emek HaYarden, and Tamar** – alongside the spirit of volunteerism in Israeli society – mobilized to receive evacuees and made efforts to meet their needs immediately and to provide them with services and support.

Reinforcement of Personnel – Host local authorities recruited numerous members of staff to reinforce the reception system, primarily welfare personnel, social workers, and psychologists. In addition, the employees of the host authorities, at all levels, worked tirelessly and outside regular hours during the initial weeks of the war, in order to receive evacuees and meet their needs.

Provision of Services by the Host Local Authorities Without Distinction between Evacuees and Self-Evacuees – In most of the services provided, the host local authorities examined did not distinguish between evacuees and self-evacuees, and also extended services to individuals who were not recognized as eligible under government decisions.

Establishment of Logistical Centers for Managing the Provision of Supplies to Evacuees – The municipalities of **Eilat, Haifa, Netanya, Ramat Gan, and Tel Aviv–Yafo**; the local council of **Zikhron Ya'akov**; and the **Tamar** Regional Council established logistical centers to manage the provision of supplies to evacuees. Such centers are highly necessary – they enhance and streamline the handling of evacuees, and no other emergency agencies provide such a service.

Key Recommendations



It is recommended that the Ministry of Interior explicitly define the basic services to be provided to populations in need due to their inability to remain in their homes as a result of emergency conditions in the home front. The Ministry should address the circumstances of evacuation and the manner of reception, define the various population groups, determine the scope of services, and examine how to ensure that such services are provided during emergencies.



It is recommended that local authorities formalize in advance their channels of cooperation with civil society organizations during emergencies. This would enhance certainty and synergy and lead to the optimal and orderly allocation of overall resources, thereby meeting immediate needs.



It is recommended that the Ministries of Interior and Finance, as well as the Ministry of Tourism, in accordance with its responsibilities, to the extent that such responsibilities are assigned to it, ensure during emergencies the provision of three meals per day to all those requiring this basic service. In any event, efforts should be made to ensure that the services provided in practice to all those staying in the same accommodation facility are uniform.



The Ministry of Interior, in cooperation with NEMA and the Home Front Command, should regulate through procedures the provision of immediate food supplies to evacuees and self-evacuees during emergencies.



It is recommended that the Ministries of Interior and Finance examine how to ensure a needs-based reception package.



The Ministries of Interior and Finance should incorporate payment arrangements for laundry services into evacuee reception procedures and, accordingly, regulate these arrangements with the relevant parties, including local authorities and reception facilities. It is further recommended that local authorities make preparation in advance to provide solutions for laundry services for residents who are compelled to evacuate their homes, whether from within or outside their jurisdiction.



The Ministries of Interior and Finance should examine the need to reimburse host local authorities for food and basic supplies provided as an initial response, including to self-evacuees during the early days when evacuee rights had not yet been clarified. With regard to reimbursement for services provided to evacuees, these ministries should consider establishing a mechanism for reimbursing local authorities during emergencies, such as the provision of an immediate advance payment, in order to remove cash-flow constraints faced by host local authorities due to interim financing. This is particularly necessary for authorities that received a large number of people and whose financial position is not robust.



It is recommended that the Ministries of Interior and Finance examine ways to increase the autonomy granted to host local authorities during emergencies, enabling them to act immediately to provide essential and immediate services.

Summary

Although it was already clear from the first days that evacuation would not be to the planned local reception facilities but rather to hotels and other accommodation facilities, and although a large proportion of evacuees arrived with nothing – without basic supplies and amid uncertainty regarding the provision of essential services and equipment – NEMA, including through the IDF (the Home Front Command, which deployed teams to hotels), and the Ministry of Interior did not provide an optimal response to the various aspects involved; to the provision of basic services in the initial days, and to issues concerning prolonged stays in hotels, including food, laundry services, clothing, personal hygiene supplies, and digital accessibility.

Due to the Ministry of Interior's failure to activate the ERC system, the responsibility for the treatment of evacuees and the provision of services to them, amid the chaos that characterized the initial days of reception and thereafter, fell to local authorities and the many volunteers. In the absence of prior preparedness by another government body to coordinate the response and create a unified framework for the provision of basic services to evacuees, the distress of evacuees and self-evacuees was considerable. Statements by some participants in focus groups reflected feelings of frustration and helplessness.

Thus, the role of the host local authority in emergencies is significant. Its capacity to transition rapidly and in an orderly manner from routine to emergency conditions, and to prepare within a very short time to establish and maintain functional continuity – both for its own residents and for populations received within its jurisdiction – is greater than that of government bodies. In light of the above, it is recommended that the Ministries of Interior and Finance examine ways to increase the autonomy granted to host local authorities during emergencies, enabling them to act immediately to provide essential and basic services.