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Children of asylum seekers in the Municipal Education system in Tel Aviv-Yafo: Segregation and its social and educational consequences

Position Paper

“Legitimizing segregation in education based on the children’s country of origin and legal status is unprecedented in the West and we will not lend it a hand. The children have done no wrong by coming to Israel.”

(Beer Sheva District Court ruling, *Atosh Majed Manjan vs. the Municipality of Eilat*)

The city of Tel Aviv-Yafo is home to approximately 19,000 asylum seekers, who mainly come from Eritrea and Sudan. Of them around 7,000 are children under 18, the majority of whom were born in Israel. This is the largest community of asylum seekers in Israel, living mainly in the underprivileged neighborhoods of South Tel Aviv (Neve Sha’anana, Hatikva, Shapira, Kiryat Shalom, Florentine, Ha’argazim and Yad Eliyahu). While the State of Israel denies this community long-term legal status, public healthcare, social security, and while asylum seekers are excluded from almost all social services, the Municipality of Tel Aviv has done a great deal to address their humanitarian and social needs. There is one significant area, however, in which Tel-Aviv lags far behind other municipalities in Israel: in integrating and including children of asylum seekers in its education system. In Tel Aviv, the majority of children of asylum seekers are segregated and separated from students who are Israeli citizens.

The segregation of children of asylum seekers in the city's education system starts as soon as they enter municipal preschools at the age of 3. Most of them will continue to study in segregated establishments - designated preschools and schools - throughout their schooling. In some cases, local schools in their own neighborhoods will only accept children who are Israeli citizens.

Such policy and practice of segregation – systematically separating between children of asylum seekers and children who are Israeli citizens - is considered illegal discrimination

under Israeli law. It violates the children's right to equality in education¹ and is prohibited under Israel's Basic Law: Human Dignity and Liberty, by power of court rulings, [The Pupil's Rights Law](#) and the [Law on Prohibition of Discrimination in Products, Services and Access to Public Places and Places of Entertainment](#), and under the [UN Convention on The Rights of a Child](#), which Israel has signed and ratified.

The policy and practice of segregation in Tel Aviv affects the students' ability to overcome developmental and academic gaps caused by spending their early years in children warehouses.² Segregation also increases the children's (and their parents') feelings of alienation from Israeli society. It puts the students at risk of dropping out of school and adopting risky behaviors. In addition, segregation encourages racism. In Tel Aviv in 2020, the segregated schools attended by children of asylum seekers [have been subject to ongoing hate crimes and racist attacks](#).

Such policy and practice of segregation cannot be the answer for the educational needs and future of these children, who were mostly born in Israel and are likely to live here for the rest of their lives.

Other children in Tel Aviv-Yafo are also affected. They are deprived of the chance to study with and befriend children from different backgrounds, and thus miss the opportunity to develop their tolerance, critical thinking and be better equipped for life in a socially cohesive and diverse environment.

Segregation in Tel Aviv – facts and figures

As of 2019, around 7,000 children of asylum seekers reside in Tel Aviv-Yafo – around 13% of all children in the city. The majority of them attend 65 preschools, as well as four elementary schools: Keshet, Gvanim, HaYarden and Bialik-Rogozin. Only children of asylum seekers attend these schools. There are no students who are Israeli citizens.

1. **Gvanim and Keshet Schools** (2 Shevach St., Tel-Aviv) are two adjacent elementary schools, which are both considered "growing" establishments (that is, every school year

¹ See the following court rulings (in Hebrew)" H CJ5373/08 [Abu Lebada vs The Minister of Education](#) (6.2.11), HCJ [Tabake Justice for Immigrants from Ethiopia vs The Minister of Education](#) (31.8.10), petition 29883-07-11 [Atosh Majed Manjan vs Municipality of Eilat](#) (2.8.2012)

² Many children of asylum seekers begin kindergarten lagging, on average, two or even three years behind Israeli citizens' children of the same age. This results in severe difficulties in many areas, such as motor skills, game ability, language skills and emotional and behavioral problems.

the school grows by one new age group up to the 6th grade). Keshet caters for 900 students in 1st-5th grade and Gvanim caters for more than 500 students in 1st-3rd grade. The schools are located in an industrial area (Hamasher Street). Children of asylum seekers from five neighborhoods in South Tel Aviv (Neve Sha'anun, Hatikva, Shapira, Kiryat Shalom, Florentine, Ha'argazim and Yad Eliyahu) are enrolled in the schools. The children who are Israeli citizens and live in these neighborhoods attend local schools in the vicinity of their homes (such as Nofim in Kiryat Shalom, The Growing School in Shapira, Droyanov in Florentine), while children of asylum seekers who live in the same neighborhoods are forced to commute to Gvanim and Keshet schools, far from their homes. Since asylum seekers in Israel are not allowed to get a driver's license and have to commute only by foot or by public transportation, many children, as young as 6 and 7, walk to and from school along busy main roads. Absurdly, the students of Keshet and Gvanim are not taking part in the Long School Day program, which specifically caters for underprivileged children, because the schools are located outside the areas entitled for the program. Keshet and Gvanim are a clear case of illegal segregation in the Tel Aviv municipal school system.

2. **HaYarden School** (21 Moshia St., Tel-Aviv) is an elementary school (1st-5th grade) catering for 500 pupils, all of them children of asylum seekers and work migrants. The school is located in Hatikva neighborhood. Children who are Israeli citizens and live in this neighborhood attend HaGalil elementary school. When HaGalil needs to make up numbers in order to open an additional class in a certain school year, it enrolls local children of asylum seekers – the rest are automatically registered in HaYarden. Thus, Hatikva school children are separated and segregated.
3. **Bialik Rogozin Campus** (49 Ha'Aliya St., Tel-Aviv) is an elementary school and a high school catering for over 1,000 pupils (1st-12th grade), all local children of asylum seekers and work migrants. Although the students in this school all live locally, and Bialik Rogozin is not a segregated school in the same way the other three schools are, its students are completely separated from other children in Tel Aviv and the school itself has also been targeted for hate crimes and racist abuse. Such separation fuels feelings of alienation and mistrust among the students, which are compounded by Israel's overall policy on asylum seekers - a policy that aims to stop them from making Israel and Israeli society their home.

Children of asylum seekers in all four schools need to be integrated and included in the municipal school system.

4. **Municipal preschools** - All but one municipal preschool attended by children of asylum seekers and work migrants are segregated: the children are separated from their Israeli peers and the groups do not mix. The education staff in these preschools report that they have received little to no support attending the children's unique needs, with no extra teachers or teachers' aids, and without the support of occupational therapists, speech therapists or language mediators to help the children and their parents catch up with the standards and requirements of a municipal preschool after spending their first years in "[Children-warehouses](#)".³ Last year (2019-2020), the Tel Aviv municipality transported children of asylum seekers and work migrants to preschools in north Tel Aviv, as the preschools in the southern neighborhoods lacked the necessary space. Even then, however, the segregation policy was maintained and the children were kept in separate groups from the local children. Some preschool campuses in north Tel Aviv had five preschool classes for Israeli citizens' children and another separate for children of asylum seekers.

The policy and practice of segregation in Tel-Aviv-Yafo's education system has no excuse. Tel Aviv should follow other municipalities that used to segregate children but no longer do, such as Eilat and Petach Tikva.

[Education specialists](#) agree that the only way to advance children of asylum seekers is to integrate them into and include them in schools in the city. A new [plan for integration, inclusion and advancement of asylum seekers' children](#), by ASSAF - *Aid Organization for Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Israel* and the Garden Library offer the following recommendations

1. **Integration and inclusion of children of asylum seekers** – Tel Aviv-Yafo municipality must act to end segregation in its educational institutions and gradually integrate children of asylum seekers in institutions attended by their Israeli peers, prioritizing children in 1st and 2nd grades. This must be accompanied by pedagogical support for educational staff and students, as well as language and culture mediation and community activities to strengthen communication between the schools and the children's parents.
2. **Immediate pedagogical support for all schools and preschools attended by children of asylum seekers** - Tel Aviv-Yafo municipality must act

³ For more details on the unsupervised nurseries and the affects they have on children's development and they continue on to municipal pre-school, see [Children of asylum seekers in Israel: mapping of key educational issues and needs](#)



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immediately to reinforce the educational institutions catering for children of asylum seekers, whether segregated or not. This must include designated training and support for educational staff throughout the school year, language mediators and additional educational staff, specifically for lessons where Hebrew language learning is central.

For additional information:

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