

# Safety but No Stability in the “Backyard of Tel Aviv”

A Case Study of Refugees in Towns  
Tel Aviv, Israel

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and Gina Walker

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**Cover photo**

Taken by the authors in 2018 of a mural painted in 2017 by an Eritrean asylum-seeking artist, Afwerki Teame. The mural depicts an African street cleaner behind a car with the license plate of the date of a 2017 “Deposit Law” that takes 20% of all asylum-seekers’ pay that they can only access after leaving Israel.

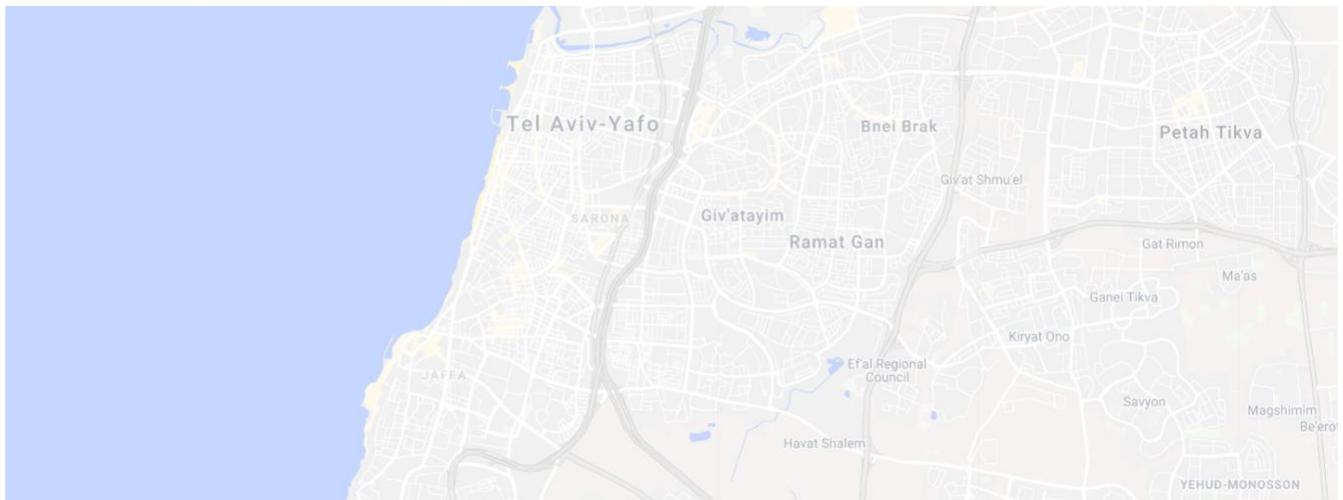
**Acknowledgments**

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# Location



Israel shares a border with Egyptian Sinai, where thousands of sub-Saharan asylum seekers irregularly crossed into the country after facing discrimination and few opportunities in Egypt's cities like Cairo.



Tel Aviv is a medium sized coastal city of around 400,000 residents. The majority of asylum seekers—as well as community activists—live and work in the more ethnically and economically diverse South Tel Aviv. Base map imagery © Google 2019.

# Introduction

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Tel Aviv, Israel's second-largest city, is situated on the Mediterranean coast. It is known as a youthful, international city with a thriving nightlife. Tel Aviv is also home to just under 20,000 asylum seekers from Eritrea and Sudan, about half of Israel's refugee population.<sup>1</sup> The first Eritrean and Sudanese asylum seekers crossed the Egyptian border into Israel around 2005, and the largest waves of migration from Africa occurred between 2009–2012.

Usually Eritreans and Sudanese who crossed the southern border, were detained by Israeli military, and then were given a bus ticket or were directed to Tel Aviv's central bus station. This bus station is infamous, situated in the crime- and poverty-ridden neighborhood of Neve Sha'anani in the south of the city. The station covers a large area and contains entire floors that are abandoned. It is easy to get lost trying to exit the station or to find a destination.

When asylum seekers found their way out of the bus station, many walked the short distance to Levinsky Park. Israelis associate Levinsky Park with drug addicts, homeless people, and prostitutes; however, the park is used by migrants to connect to other co-nationals and find support. Many non-governmental organizations (NGOs) use the areas surrounding the park to offer services such as housing and employment support to migrants. It is also the site of protests calling for rights for asylum seekers and justice in their home countries; it contains a library for the children of refugees; and it is surrounded by Eritrean and Sudanese coffee shops, restaurants, and stores. The park has become the epicenter of migrant activism.

This case report is based on our experiences in Tel Aviv over the last few years, as an asylum seeker from Darfur (Sudan) (Taj) and a Jewish immigrant who supports refugee rights (Gina).

## A Note on Terminology

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The legal definition of **refugee**<sup>2</sup> is not applied to most Sudanese and Eritreans living in Tel Aviv, yet many believe that there are thousands of genuine refugees who meet the definition laid out by the 1951 Refugee Convention and are waiting for a response to their request to be considered for refugee status. In this report, we refer to refugees using the term used by community allies, but the majority of Eritreans and Sudanese are characterized as asylum seekers.

**Integration** is a complex term with a wide variety of interpretations. For the Israeli host society, refugee integration involves refugees knowing Hebrew, working in the Israeli labor market, and studying in the Israeli education system. There is no expectation that refugees will abandon the cultural practices of

<sup>1</sup> See UNHCR 2017, November, UNHCR's position on the status of Eritrean and Sudanese nationals defined as "infiltrators" by Israel. <http://www.refworld.org/docid/5a5889584.html>.

<sup>2</sup> The 1951 Refugee Convention defines a refugee as "someone who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion." See <https://www.unhcr.org/what-is-a-refugee.html>.

their home countries to become Israeli. Eritreans and Sudanese view integration in terms of legal status: having the same civil rights and access to social services as Israeli citizens. Eritreans and Sudanese seek to maintain their home country languages, traditions, and culture, while participating in Israeli public life. They do not expect to be naturalized as Israeli citizens, yet they are willing to respect the Israeli culture and contribute to society.

## The Authors' Positions in Tel Aviv and Experiences Researching this Case

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### **Gina**

I am an MA student, originally from London, studying Global Migration and Policy at Tel Aviv University. In summer 2014, I first met asylum seekers in Tel Aviv when I volunteered as an English teacher. When I returned to Israel in summer 2015, I taught English to teenage girls from Eritrea. In June 2016, having completed my BA at University College London, I immigrated to Israel under the Law of Return and obtained Israeli citizenship upon arrival, an easy process given that I am Jewish.

Since then, I have remained active as a volunteer with NGOs that serve asylum seekers in a range of capacities, including filling in Refugee Status Determination (RSD) forms, babysitting, conducting digital marketing, and assisting with research. My Sudanese and Eritrean friends and I joke about, rather than ignore, the reality that my immigration to Israel was encouraged and warmly received, whereas they fled for their lives across the Egyptian border only to be met by intense discrimination. I am strongly affected by my position in Tel Aviv, including my love for my friends from this community; my advocacy work for the rights of all asylum seekers in Israel; and my experiences researching and assessing the needs of asylum-seeking women in order to build programs for their benefit. I wish to counter the Israeli government's narrative that the Sudanese and Eritreans living in Israel "infiltrated" the country in search of economic opportunities by offering my perspective, based on my studies and personal experiences.

### **Taj**

I am an asylum seeker from Darfur and have been living in Israel since February 2008. The war in Darfur broke out in 2003, and Sudanese government forces and Janjaweed militia attacked my village. I stayed in an internally displaced persons (IDP) camp in Darfur with my family until the end of 2004, when I fled to Khartoum. I have been an activist since 2005, when I started a students' union in Khartoum. As a Darfuri activist against the Sudanese government, I was arrested and released twice, with the condition that every week I sign a pledge saying that I would remain in Khartoum and not join rebel forces. Afraid of torture or indefinite imprisonment, I

fled to Egypt in 2007. I tried to apply for asylum with UNHCR in Egypt; however, UNHCR had not been able to provide protection to refugees since 2005, following a demonstration by refugees at Mustafa Mahmoud Square. Afraid of being deported back to Sudan, in 2008 I traveled to Israel in the hopes of receiving protection, having fled genocide. However, after more than ten years, I have not been recognized as a refugee.

Since arriving in Israel in February 2008, I have been campaigning for the rights of asylum seekers and against the regime in Sudan. In early 2009, I took a course about human rights, refugee rights, and social struggle. We were given tools to become change agents within our communities. Since then, I have been involved as a leader of the asylum-seeking community. I have led workshops teaching my fellow asylum seekers how to become leaders in all aspects of our struggle. Through this work, I have witnessed the implementation of policies and the deterioration of the situation of asylum seekers here in Israel. I have been involved with a variety of NGOs, including Mesila, Bnei Darfur, and Amnesty Israel.

I received a BA in government and politics from the Israeli University IDC (Interdisciplinary Center) in 2014 and an MA from Tel Aviv University in political science and communication in 2016. Since then, I co-founded and am the director of the African Students Organization, an NGO that helps African students enter higher education in Israel. Through activism and my studies, I have made many friends in Israel, and I feel integrated in Israeli society.

**For more details on the methods used for this report, please continue to the Appendix.**

## Background: Israeli Refugee Policy

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Israel was founded as a homeland for the Jewish people under the principles of Zionism in 1948. The creation of Israel led to mass displacement within the country and across borders. Under the law of return, [Jewish people are automatically eligible for Israeli citizenship upon arrival](#), and they are offered a [range of incentives, including financial assistance, to immigrate](#). This is known as *aliya*, which means “ascension” in Hebrew. However, moving to Israel is restricted for non-Jews from all countries, and there is no clear immigration policy for them.

In early 2005, a few hundred African asylum seekers crossed illegally into Israel from Sinai. Initially, Israel did not know how to handle their irregular arrival, especially since Sudan is considered an enemy state. As a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention, Israel upheld its protection obligations. However, the state had no clear refugee policy in place. Today, most asylum seekers originate from Eritrea and Sudan, and the current population is estimated to be around 37,000.<sup>3</sup> The current Israeli government

<sup>3</sup> See UNHCR, 2017.

labels Eritrean and Sudanese asylum seekers as “infiltrators” who entered Israel seeking economic opportunities rather than protection from genocide and political persecution.<sup>4</sup>

Israel’s asylum system is in early stages of development. Until 2009, UNHCR, not the Israeli government, administered Refugee Status Determination (RSD).<sup>5</sup> Now, the government handles this process, with a very low rate of refugee recognition: since 2009, only 12 individuals have been granted refugee status, less than 1% of those who made RSD claims.<sup>6</sup> In comparison, in Europe in 2017, the refugee recognition rate was 92.5% for Eritrean asylum seekers and 60.7% for Sudanese asylum seekers.<sup>7</sup>

Eritrean and Sudanese asylum seekers in Israel have been placed under temporary collective arrangements since 2009.<sup>8</sup> This group protection prevents deportation. However, they are not granted any other rights.<sup>9</sup> Anyone from these two countries who crossed the Israeli border from Egypt was automatically granted a three-month “conditional release” visa.<sup>10</sup> This visa restricted most people who entered between 2009 and 2013 from applying for refugee status.<sup>11</sup> With the exception of a few hundred Darfurians who were given residency on humanitarian grounds, governmental policies hindered integration and encouraged asylum seekers to leave the country.

In 2009, the [government announced](#) the first of a string of policies aimed at encouraging asylum seekers to leave Israel. The “Gedera-Hadera” policy restricted Eritreans and Sudanese from living within the central region of Israel (including Tel Aviv), [leading to many imprisonments](#). In 2013 the Holot detention center was opened for single male asylum seekers holding conditional release visas, as a means to deter future migration across Israel’s southern border.<sup>12</sup> The Israeli government also runs a voluntary return program, under which Eritreans and Sudanese are offered USD 3,500 to depart Israel to a “safe third country” (generally Uganda or Rwanda).<sup>13</sup> Between 2013 and 2017, some 3,969 Eritreans and Sudanese left Israel under this program.<sup>14</sup> In May 2017, the Israeli government introduced a new policy seeking to encourage asylum seekers to leave Israel. Under [the Deposit Law](#), 20% of the salary of Eritreans and Sudanese is placed into a fund they can supposedly access when leaving Israel voluntarily. Furthermore, employers of asylum seekers must [pay additional tax](#) and also deduct 16% from their salaries and store it in a pension fund employees can only access when departing from Israel. In this way, the policy aims to make it less desirable for Israeli employers to hire Eritrean and Sudanese workers.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> The process by which asylum seekers attain formal refugee status.

<sup>6</sup> UNHCR, 2017.

<sup>7</sup> Eurostat data available at <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/programs/data-hub/charts/asylum-recognition-rates-euefta-country-2008-2017>.

<sup>8</sup> See G. Sabar & E. Tsurkov, 2015, Israel’s policies toward asylum-seekers: 2002-2014, Istituto Affari Internazionali. <https://www.osce.org/networks/newmedtrackII/165436?download=true>.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Sabar & Tsurkov, 2015.

<sup>13</sup> M. Fennig, 2018, Beyond voluntary return: A critical ethnographic study of refugees who departed Israel “voluntarily.” International Social Work, 0020872818808560.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

In October 2017, the [government tried to deport](#) single male Eritreans and Sudanese who had not applied for refugee status to a third country, widely known yet not formally declared to be Uganda or Rwanda. Asylum seekers meeting this criteria were offered the choice of deportation or indefinite detention, leading to widespread fear and uncertainty, until [it was announced](#) in April 2018 that the deportation plan had been cancelled.

# The Urban Impact

North and Central Tel Aviv are completely different from South Tel Aviv in terms of population, cleanliness, types of businesses, and level of development (See Map 1). The South Tel Aviv neighborhoods where asylum seekers reside, including HaTikva, Shapira, and Neve Sha'anani, are low-income areas with high crime rates.<sup>15</sup> In these neighborhoods, historically populated by immigrant communities of a low socioeconomic status, certain locals have accused Eritreans and Sudanese of theft, rape, and illegal drug usage, and generally display negative attitudes towards the presence of so-called “infiltrators.” [Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu toured South Tel Aviv in August 2017](#) and [vowed to “give back”](#) the neighborhoods to Israelis. He was accompanied by

**Map 1: Tel Aviv's Neighborhoods**



North and Central Tel Aviv in purple, South Tel Aviv in green. The green area includes Levinsky Park and the central bus station, both of which are hubs for newly arrived and settled migrants. Map by authors. Base map imagery © Google 2019.

Culture Minister Miri Regev, who claimed that Israeli veterans in South Tel Aviv have become “[refugees in their own country](#).” Mainstream political discourse and media in Israel present Israeli residents as innocent victims of an influx of criminals, i.e., asylum seekers.<sup>16</sup> This has caused many locals to feel insecure in their own neighborhoods, and many Israelis are afraid of going to certain parts of South Tel Aviv, especially around the central bus station and Levinsky Park. As an immigrant and a woman, I am often advised not to go such places, and had I not volunteered at NGOs that help asylum seekers, it is unlikely I would ever have visited these neighborhoods. Such advice makes me wonder about the

<sup>15</sup> Sabar & Tsurkov, 2015.

<sup>16</sup> See for example: <http://www.israelhayom.com/2017/12/18/in-puzzling-move-israel-grants-sudanese-infiltrators-residency-status/>;

<http://www.israelnationalnews.com/News/News.aspx/157649>;

<http://www.israelnationalnews.com/News/News.aspx/247642>;

<https://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-5290799,00.html>;

<https://en.mida.org.il/2018/02/26/women-south-tel-aviv-speakout-infiltrators-destroyed-lives/>;

<https://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3508142,00.html>;

<http://www.israelnationalnews.com/News/News.aspx/247505>.

safety of women asylum seekers who live there and whose children go to school there. Refugee children play in parks littered with used needles. They are growing up in unclean and neglected areas.

In reality, South Tel Aviv is far more dynamic and livelier than its reputation amongst Israelis would suggest. The refugee neighborhoods are hubs for cultural life, religious and community institutions, and creativity. Community centers provide cultural services and social activities to their ethnic clients and coordinate with other centers. Numerous volunteers, including community members, local Israelis, and visitors from abroad, support education programs such as language courses and help children with homework. Numerous Sudanese community centers, including the Fur Center, Wadi Hawar Center, Masalit Center, and the Hajar Tama Center, are headquartered in South Tel Aviv, with branches around Israel. The Eritrean Women's Community Center assists women with the gender- and nationality-specific struggles they face. Asylum seekers have also established NGOs that cooperate with Israeli NGOs, offering a wide range of services, including legal support, workers' rights advocacy and training, psychosocial support, medical care, education, childcare, empowerment workshops, and leadership training.

**Figure 1: A South Tel Aviv Baptism**



Eritreans on their way to a park after a baptism ceremony in church. South Tel Aviv, 2018.

Used with permission from [Jonathan Small Photography](#).

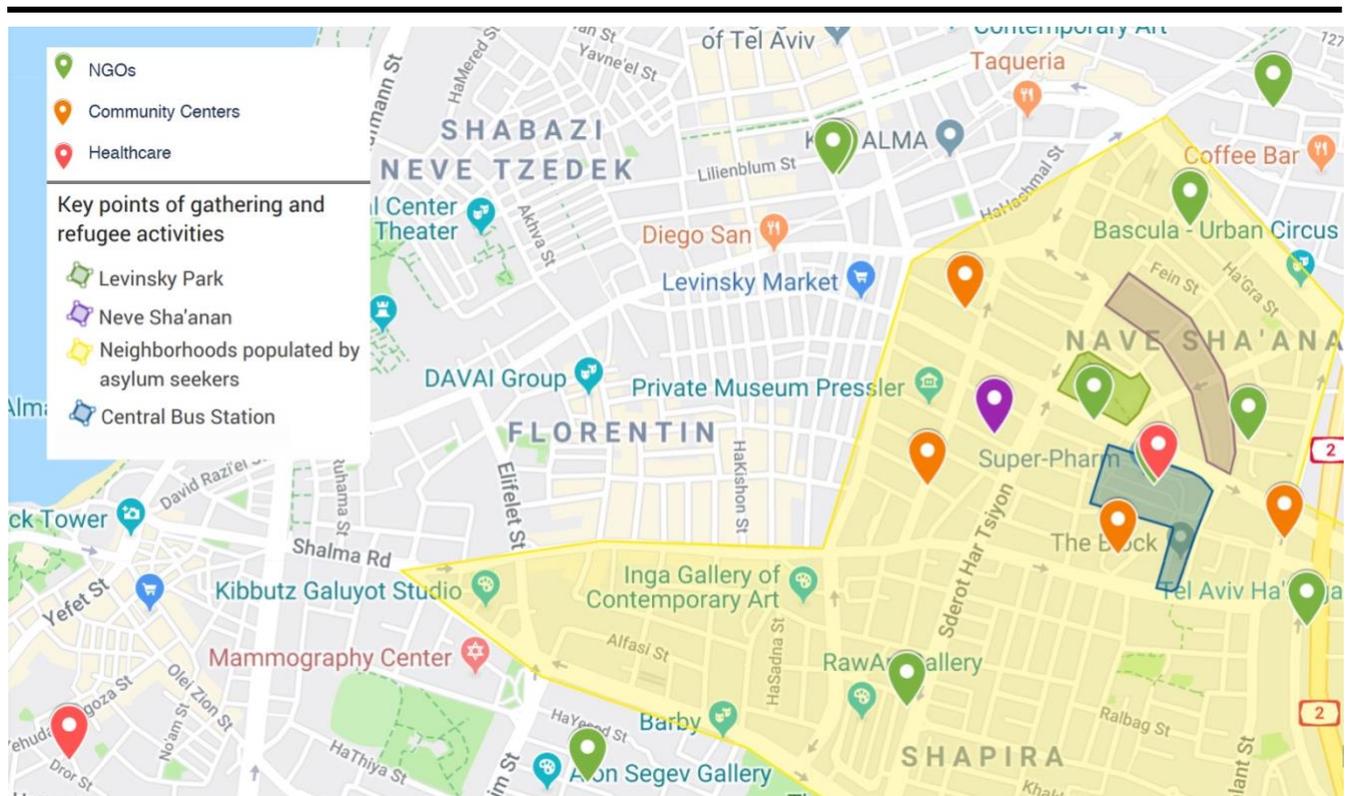
Community centers are very busy on the weekends, with celebrations for birthdays and weddings, social activities such as concerts, and commemorations for loved ones in memorials and funerals (See Map 2). These events take place on streets surrounding Levinsky Park, which are also the site of celebrations and community meetings. Community meetings have a variety of purposes. For example, between 2012–2014, many Eritreans were held hostage and tortured for ransom by smugglers in Sinai, so Eritreans in Israel gathered in Levinsky Park to collect money to free these victims. There are Eritrean churches serving the Orthodox Christian community, and on weekends Eritreans attend services wearing traditional clothes (see figures 1 and 2). A gospel singer from one of these churches described how the church acts as a community center at which people raise funds to help those in

need. The churches also perform baptisms, weddings, and funerals similar to the way community members did in their home country. Neve Sha'anán Street, located between the central bus station and Levinsky Park, is home to many refugee-run restaurants that serve traditional Eritrean and Sudanese dishes. Such restaurants mostly serve their own communities, and it is rare that menus are available in Hebrew or English.

An Eritrean asylum-seeking artist, Afwerki Teame, has responded artistically to the 2017 Deposit Law that takes 20% of asylum-seekers<sup>17</sup> salaries and places it in a fund that they can supposedly access upon leaving Israel. In his painting (See cover image of report), Teame depicts an African street cleaner. The number plate of the car is 01/05/2017, the date on which the law was introduced. The painting shows that, on one hand, asylum seekers are integrated in the Tel Aviv labor market, but on the other hand, they are living in an environment encouraging them to leave the country.

Tel Aviv is a relatively secular and international city; however, public transportation and most services close on the Sabbath and holidays. Teame includes an image of a religious Jewish man in the painting, a commentary about the non-Jewish minority whose culture and traditions vary from the majority of the residents of the city.

**Map 2: South Tel Aviv Points of Interest for Asylum Seeker Integration**



Map by author. Base map imagery © Google 2019.

<sup>17</sup> This law applies only to individuals who have not received refugee status.

# Taj's Experience as a Darfuri Asylum Seeker

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In February 2008, a group of Sudanese asylum seekers and I escaped from human traffickers who were holding us hostage in Sinai and crossed the border. We were immediately taken by Israeli Defense Force soldiers guarding the border to a military base, where we spent one night. The next day, a Saturday, we were put on a bus to Beer Sheva, the closest city to the base. In Beer Sheva, we asked where the UN office was and were directed to Tel Aviv.

After two hours in a minibus, we reached South Tel Aviv and went to Levinsky Park, where we met fellow Darfuris. One family welcomed me into their home. They told me I had to apply for asylum as soon as possible, otherwise I could be arrested. The next day, I went to the UNHCR office and applied for asylum. I was granted a visa for a six-month stay in Israel and was told that my asylum claim was on hold until an interview could determine my eligibility for protection under the 1951 Refugee Convention, to which Israel is a signatory. A week later, I found a manual labor job at Maccabiah Hotel in Ramat Gan, a suburb of Tel Aviv. After I received my first paycheck a month and a half later, I left the family I was staying with and rented an apartment with another Darfuri asylum seeker on Salame Street in South Tel Aviv.

I resumed my activism, starting as a translator and community organizer, working with Israelis to spread information about new migration policies. For example, in 2008, asylum seekers were not allowed to open bank accounts, so I worked with Darfuri and Israeli activists to distribute flyers explaining the situation to people in central Tel Aviv and wrote letters to banks asking them to allow us to open accounts. This unofficial group of activists would meet either in Levinsky Park or on Neve Sha'anun Street. Since late 2009, asylum seekers have been able to open bank accounts. I also actively campaign against the Sudanese regime and the treatment of Darfuris in Sudan. Working long hours and volunteering meant I did not have time to explore the city or integrate with the local population. I only left the Neve Sha'anun neighborhood when I went to work or to renew my visa.

In my experience, asylum seekers in South Tel Aviv face three sets of obstacles to integration. First, the lack of a clear legal status causes constant anxiety about arrest, deportation, or harassment by authorities. We are in legal limbo; the government allowed us into the country but then did not clarify our status and has yet to review our asylum claims. This lack of status is used to accuse us of being economic migrants taking over South Tel Aviv and has broken the spirit of thousands of asylum seekers.

A second set of obstacles is spatial: most asylum seekers are concentrated in South Tel Aviv, as it is only there that we can pay rent in cash and still have enough money each month for food and utilities. This prevents asylum seekers from mixing with middle- and upper-class Israelis, and allows stereotypes about us to go unchallenged, as Israelis in other parts of the city never encounter asylum seekers in their day-to-day lives. The third obstacle is national policies targeting Eritreans and Sudanese that make them feel unwelcome and unwanted.

These obstacles have led some to leave for third countries under the government's "voluntary" repatriation scheme. People who go to Rwanda and Uganda are likely to remain in poverty. People who

travel on to Europe face perilous journeys with smugglers. Some make it to Europe and receive refugee status there, others end up in the hands of the Islamic State in Libya, while some do not survive the journey across the Mediterranean. A small number of asylum seekers have immigrated to Canada through private sponsorships, or to the United States and Europe through formal refugee resettlement programs or family reunification.

For those who remain in Israel, many are suffering from serious mental health problems as a result of the relentless stress. Some Eritreans and Sudanese spend all of their time in Levinsky Park, psychologically unable to function in the current situation.

## Host Attitudes Towards Migrants

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The unwelcoming national policy does not reflect the attitudes of all Israelis. Since we began to arrive in Israel, there have been many Israelis who have welcomed us and worked with us to guarantee our rights. Many Israeli human rights activists, students, and citizens joined our recent efforts to stop the government's proposal to forcibly deport Sudanese and Eritreans to Rwanda or Uganda.

Figure 2: Eritreans in South Tel Aviv



Eritreans on their way to a park after a baptism ceremony in church. South Tel Aviv, 2018.

Used with permission from [Jonathan Small Photography](#).

For my first few years in Tel Aviv, my Israeli friends were mostly human rights activists and NGO staff members and volunteers. Today I know Israelis from different backgrounds, from students to Holocaust survivors to residents of different Tel Aviv neighborhoods. Ironically, the government push to remove us from Israel motivated many Israelis to campaign for our rights, host us in their houses, and protect us from the government. Many business owners—particularly of restaurants and cafes—hung posters with a quote from the Torah that says: “You shall love the foreigner, for you were foreigners in the land of Egypt.” Israeli activists not only lobbied for an end to the deportation laws, but also for the distribution of asylum seekers around the country—as opposed to concentrating them in a small number of low-income neighbors—and for investment to improve migrant-dense neighborhoods of South Tel Aviv. On this and other occasions, businesses such as hotels and restaurants have stood up to support the rights of asylum seekers all across the city. Employers of asylum seekers often speak out in favor of their employees staying in Israel, not only as essential workers who keep the businesses running, but also as welcome members of society.

I now feel comfortable everywhere in Tel Aviv, but like to spend a few evenings a week in Neve Sha’anán, where I meet fellow African asylum seekers, drink beer and coffee, enjoy traditional food from Sudan, Eritrea, and Nigeria, listen to music, and watch football matches. This is the easiest place for us to meet, as we are all familiar with the area and it is a hub of social gatherings as well as of serious community meetings and activism.

## The City’s Response to Refugees

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There are municipal regulations that prevent landlords from sub-dividing apartments; however, there is little enforcement, so many landlords rent out small, sub-divided apartments to asylum seekers, for cash only. Sometime the landlords are caught and fined, yet the practice continues. The overcrowded southern neighborhoods of Tel Aviv are neglected by authorities and less regulated than similar neighborhoods in other Israeli towns. In towns with small populations of asylum seekers, like Herzliya, it is easier for local authorities to keep track of rental patterns and practices.

Municipal activity does not always reflect national policy and attitudes. Tel Aviv municipality has a special division for migrant workers and asylum seekers called [Mesila](#), which provides healthcare services and education for children under 18, as well as welfare services for families and single mothers in poverty, survivors of domestic violence, and substance abusers. The difference between the municipal and national levels became clear during the 2018 municipal election. The “We are the City” party that favors rights for asylum seekers and improving conditions in South Tel Aviv won four seats on the Tel Aviv Council, while the parties against asylum seekers did not win any seats. Despite years of the national government portraying asylum seekers as dangerous criminals, the citizens of Tel Aviv can bring local political change.

# Conclusion

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## The Future of Integration in Tel Aviv

In 2013, the government built a border fence stopping the flow of asylum seekers into Israel from Sinai. Asylum seekers already in Israel lack status and are vulnerable to hostile policies aimed at preventing integration and encouraging departure out of the country. The consensus amongst asylum seekers is that they will never receive refugee status, and they are looking for opportunities to receive protection in other countries, including private refugee sponsorships in Canada and resettlement in the United States and the EU. Some asylum seekers agree to go to Rwanda and Uganda, despite the risks, as they do not see much of a future in Israel.

Most asylum seekers who stay will likely remain in South Tel Aviv, since their lack of status prevents them from renting apartments in other parts of the city and country. There is some movement out of South Tel Aviv, as some are being welcomed to live on *kibbutzim*,<sup>18</sup> and others are being helped by Israeli citizens to rent in other neighborhoods of the city.

Despite the many obstacles to our integration imposed by the government, we remain hopeful that our collaboration with Israeli activists will help us achieve *de facto* economic, cultural, and social integration, even if legal integration remains impossible. The numerous simple acts of support and welcoming show how compassionate Tel Aviv's residents can be, and this opens doors for dialogue and collaboration. For example, the international food festival in Tel Aviv featured traditional cuisine from Sudan and Eritrea, engaging asylum seekers and Israelis in conversation through food.

We believe the most important lesson is that—even in the face of anti-refugee national governments—the power of activism and mobilization not only helps refugees integrate into towns but can also change the political landscape of municipalities.

<sup>18</sup> A *kibbutz* (plural: *kibbutzim*) is a communal settlement. The *kibbutz* movement began before the establishment of the state of Israel, when Jewish immigrants established settlements in which all wealth and resources are pooled and shared, and all profits are reinvested. Today, there are around 250 *kibbutzim* around Israel, in which about 125,000 people live communally. The *kibbutz* movement is strongly linked to Jewish immigration and nation building in Israel. See

<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/kibbutz>;

<http://www.jewishagency.org/first-home-homeland/program/16766>.

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# Appendix: Methods

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## Gina

I have been living in Tel Aviv for two and a half years and have volunteered at NGOs, including the [African Refugees Development Center](#), the [Eritrean Women's Community Center](#), and [Kuchinate](#), a collective for female African refugees. Most recently, I have been interning in the Community Services department of United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the UN Refugee Agency, in Tel Aviv. This personal experience informs my report, as I have become closely acquainted with refugees and understand the types of services they seek. In March 2018, I conducted three interviews with Eritreans, including a male community activist aged 29, a male artist in his thirties, and a gospel singer and father, also in his thirties. I also carried out interviews with female asylum seekers from Eritrea and Sudan. In late 2017, I assisted the African Refugee Development Center with a needs-mapping project, and in 2018, I conducted research about the public health needs of pregnant asylum seekers as part of my MA studies. I've interviewed some 10 Sudanese and Eritrean women living in Israel for various purposes, on top of having numerous informal interactions at NGOs and conversations with friends from the community. I have thus gained insights into refugees' experiences and perceptions of their place in Tel Aviv.

## Taj

I based most of my report on my personal experiences over the past eleven years of living in Tel Aviv as an asylum seeker from Darfur, Sudan. In mid-2019, I relocated to Canada under a private refugee sponsorship program, and I now live in Montreal. My knowledge stems from my activism and involvement in NGOs. I am in regular contact with asylum seekers, including my friends, fellow activists, and individuals and families in need of assistance. I have spoken with Sudanese and Eritrean migrants of all ages, genders, and socioeconomic and educational levels. I remain up to date with state policies and practices, given my work as the director of the African Students Organization and as a community leader for Sudanese asylum seekers. In Tel Aviv, I have assisted many research projects. In 2014, I was a research assistant for Professor Kim Yuval's study of the psychosocial situation of Sudanese asylum seekers in Israel. I helped develop the interview protocol and conducted around 120 interviews. This experience informed my knowledge and this report. In 2016, I helped a German student researching posttraumatic symptoms amongst Darfuri asylum seekers in Tel Aviv. I made her interview protocol more culturally appropriate and helped conduct 50 interviews. I have also helped around 150 Eritrean and Sudanese asylum seekers fill out paperwork for private refugee sponsorship in Canada. Applicants must list their occupations and activities over the last 10 years, and in this way I have deepened my understanding of the asylum-seeking population and their family situations.

**Together**, we synthesized our findings through meetings, conversations, and a collaborative writing process.

# About the RIT Project

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The **Refugees in Towns (RIT)** project promotes understanding of the migrant/refugee experience in urban settings. Our goal is to understand and promote refugee integration by drawing on the knowledge and perspective of refugees and locals to develop deeper understanding of the towns in which they live. The project was conceived and is led by Karen Jacobsen. It is based at the Feinstein International Center at Tufts University and funded by the Henry J. Leir Foundation.

## Our goals are twofold

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Our first long-term goal is to build a theory of integration from the ground up by compiling a global database of case studies and reports to help us analyze and understand the process of immigrant/refugee integration. These cases provide a range of local insights about the many different factors that enable or obstruct integration, and the ways in which migrants and hosts co-exist, adapt, and struggle in urban spaces. We draw our cases from towns in resettlement countries, transit countries, and countries of first asylum around the world.

Our second more immediate goal is to support community leaders, aid organizations, and local governments in shaping policy, practice, and interventions. We engage policymakers and community leaders through town visits, workshops, conferences, and participatory research that identifies needs in their communities, encourages dialogue on integration, and shares good practices and lessons learned.

## Why now?

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The United States—among many other refugee-hosting countries—is undergoing a shift in its refugee policy through travel bans and the suspension of parts of its refugee program. Towns across the U.S. are responding in different ways: some resist national policy changes by declaring themselves “sanctuary cities,” while others support travel bans and exclusionary policies. In this period of social and political change, we seek to deepen our understanding of integration and the ways in which refugees, migrants, and their hosts interact. Our RIT project draws on and gives voice to both refugees and hosts in their experiences with integration around the world.

## For more on RIT

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On our website, there are many more case studies and reports from other towns and urban neighborhoods around the world, and we regularly release more reports as our project develops.

[www.refugeesintowns.org](http://www.refugeesintowns.org)

# About the Authors

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**Taj Haroun** is an asylum seeker from the Darfur region in Sudan, who has been living in Tel Aviv for the past 10 years. He has been involved with community-based and Israeli NGOs for many years and is the founder and director of the African Students Organization in Israel that helps African asylum seekers access higher education. He studied a BA in Government at IDC Herzliya and an MA in Political Science and Political Communication at Tel Aviv University.

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**Gina Walker** received her MA in Global Migration & Policy from Tel Aviv University. Born and raised in London, Gina has been involved with the Eritrean and Sudanese refugee community in South Tel Aviv for the last few years. She has volunteered with asylum-seekers, particularly with women and children, in a range of capacities, including teaching English, RSD paperwork, childcare and digital media for NGOs. She received her BA in Language and Culture from University College London.

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Refugees in Towns is a project of the Feinstein International Center. More information on the project, including more case study reports, is available at <https://www.refugeesintowns.org/>

The Feinstein International Center is a research and teaching center based at the Friedman School of Nutrition Science and Policy at Tufts University. Our mission is to promote the use of evidence and learning in operational and policy responses to protect and strengthen the lives, livelihoods, and dignity of people affected by or at risk of humanitarian crises.

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