



The State Comptroller
and Ombudsman of Israel



State of Israel

SPECIAL REPORT NO. 1

INVESTIGATING COMPLAINTS DURING THE FIRST WAVE OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

SEPTEMBER 2020

THE ISRAEL OMBUDSMAN





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and Ombudsman of Israel



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THIS SPECIAL OMBUDSMAN'S REPORT IS SUBMITTED TO THE KNESSET ACCORDING TO CLAUSE 46(B) OF THE STATE COMPTROLLER LAW, 5718-1958 [CONSOLIDATED VERSION]. THE REPORT PRESENTS THE ACTIVITIES OF THE OFFICE OF THE OMBUDSMAN DURING THE FIRST WAVE OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC, FROM MARCH 15, 2020 TO JUNE 30, 2020. IT INCLUDES A REVIEW OF COMPLAINTS RELATED TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC THAT WERE RECEIVED DURING THIS PERIOD AND DESCRIBES HOW THEY WERE HANDLED.

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OPENING REMARKS FROM THE OMBUDSMAN AND THE HEAD OF THE OFFICE OF THE OMBUDSMAN

THIS SPECIAL OMBUDSMAN'S REPORT IS SUBMITTED TO THE KNESSET UNDER CLAUSE 46(B) OF THE STATE COMPTROLLER LAW, 5718-1958 [CONSOLIDATED VERSION]. THE REPORT REVIEWS THE ACTIVITY OF THE OFFICE OF THE OMBUDSMAN DURING THE FIRST WAVE OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC, FROM MARCH 15, 2020 TO JUNE 30, 2020. THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC, AN UNPRECEDENTED CRISIS, HAS POSED PUBLIC BODIES IN ISRAEL WITH CHALLENGES THEY HAVE NEVER HAD TO COPE WITH BEFORE. A CRISIS PERIOD SUCH AS THIS REQUIRES THE PUBLIC BODIES MORE THAN EVER BEFORE TO PROVIDE EFFICIENT AND EFFECTIVE PUBLIC SERVICE IN ORDER TO ASSIST THE MANY PEOPLE WHO HAVE SUDDENLY FOUND THEMSELVES UNABLE TO PROVIDE FOR THEIR FAMILIES.

AS IN ORDINARY TIMES, DURING THE CRISIS AS WELL THE OFFICE OF THE OMBUDSMAN PROVIDES AN ADDRESS FOR INDIVIDUALS IN THEIR INTERACTIONS WITH THE VARIOUS AUTHORITIES, IN ORDER TO PROTECT THEIR RIGHTS AND ENABLE THEM TO EXERCISE THOSE RIGHTS AND TO RECEIVE ADEQUATE PUBLIC SERVICE. DURING THE PERIOD SUBJECT OF THE REPORT, 4,684 LETTERS OF COMPLAINT WERE RECEIVED, OF WHICH 1,677 LETTERS WERE RELATED TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC. APPROXIMATELY 75% OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC-RELATED COMPLAINTS WERE ABOUT ISSUES DIRECTLY RELATED TO THE SOCIAL SAFETY NET THE STATE PROVIDED THROUGH VARIOUS BENEFITS OR GRANTS.

THE OFFICE WAS VIGILANT IN ENSURING THAT THE DISTRESS AND RIGHTS OF THE INDIVIDUAL WOULD NOT BE ENGULFED BY THE MAYHEM OF THE BATTLE AGAINST THE CORONAVIRUS. THE OFFICE ACTED TO EMPOWER THE VOICE OF THE INDIVIDUAL AND TO ENSURE THAT HE OR SHE WOULD RECEIVE RESPECTFUL AND APPROPRIATE TREATMENT WHEN INTERACTING WITH PUBLIC BODIES.

DURING THE CRISIS THE OFFICE FOUND FLEXIBLE AND CREATIVE WAYS TO DELIVER PROMPT, EFFECTIVE RESPONSES TO WHOEVER CONTACTED THE OFFICE, TO QUICKLY ASSIST THE PUBLIC IN FINDING SOLUTIONS TO THE PROBLEMS RAISED AND TO MAKE THE OFFICE ACCESSIBLE TO THE WIDEST AUDIENCE POSSIBLE. TO THIS END THE OFFICE DEVELOPED UNIQUE MECHANISMS AIMED AT RESOLVING COMPLAINTS. IT MUST BE NOTED THAT THE RAPID RESPONSE TO COMPLAINTS WAS MADE POSSIBLE PRIMARILY THANKS TO CLOSE COOPERATION BETWEEN THE PUBLIC BODIES THAT WERE THE SUBJECTS OF THE COMPLAINTS AND THE OFFICE OF THE OMBUDSMAN. 73.8% OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC-RELATED COMPLAINTS WHICH THE OFFICE WAS AUTHORIZED BY LAW TO INVESTIGATE AND THE INVESTIGATION WHEREOF WAS COMPLETED, WERE RESOLVED SUCCESSFULLY WITHIN THE TIMEFRAME COVERED BY THIS REPORT OR IMMEDIATELY THEREAFTER - DUE TO THE ACTIONS OF THE OFFICE OF THE OMBUDSMAN.

THE OFFICE FOCUSED FIRST AND FOREMOST ON HELPING THOSE INDIVIDUALS WHO CONTACTED US. WHERE APPROPRIATE WE HIGHLIGHTED TO PUBLIC BODIES SYSTEMIC PROBLEMS WHICH WERE BROUGHT TO THE FORE THROUGH OUR INVESTIGATIONS, AND WE WORKED WITH THOSE BODIES TO RECTIFY THE PROBLEMS.

THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC IS A GLOBAL CRISIS. OFFICES OF OMBUDSPERSONS ALL OVER THE WORLD HAVE BEEN DEALING WITH ITS IMPACTS ON THE PUBLIC. THE OFFICE CONTINUALLY KEPT ABREAST OF THE MEASURES TAKEN BY OMBUDS INSTITUTIONS AROUND THE WORLD IN ORDER TO MAKE THEMSELVES ACCESSIBLE TO THOSE POPULATIONS WHICH WERE MOST SEVERELY AFFECTED BY THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC. THE OFFICE ALSO REMAINED UPDATED ON ISSUES WHICH THOSE INSTITUTIONS HAD TO GRAPPLE WITH. THE OFFICE ALSO UPDATED THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY OF OMBUDS INSTITUTIONS ON THE CREATIVE WAYS IN WHICH WE OPERATED DURING THE CRISIS.

ISRAEL IS THE ONLY COUNTRY IN THE WORLD WHERE THE STATE COMPTROLLER SERVES ALSO AS THE OMBUDSMAN. THIS CONCENTRATION OF AUTHORITY YIELDS ADDED VALUE BOTH IN THE AUDITING WORK AND IN THE WORK OF THE OFFICE OF THE OMBUDSMAN. THE OFFICE'S EMPLOYEES GAIN DIRECT EXPOSURE TO THE ACUTE DISTRESS OF INDIVIDUALS AND TO THE PROBLEMS THEY MUST COPE WITH IN THEIR CONTACTS WITH VARIOUS PUBLIC BODIES. THUS, THE OMBUDSMAN'S OFFICE IS WELL-SITUATED FOR IDENTIFYING SYSTEMIC PROBLEMS AND DEFICIENCIES IN PUBLIC BODIES THAT NEED TO BE DEALT WITH OR FIXED. THE OFFICE OF THE OMBUDSMAN SHARES THE VAST INFORMATION IT ACCUMULATES FROM THE INVESTIGATION

OF COMPLAINTS WITH THE AUDIT DIVISIONS IN THE STATE COMPTROLLER'S OFFICE, AND THE DIVISIONS MAKE USE OF THE INFORMATION WHEN DOING STATE AUDIT. HERE TOO, DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC, THE OFFICE PROVIDED INVALUABLE INFORMATION TO THE STATE AUDIT DIVISIONS, WHICH ARE CURRENTLY ENGAGED IN PREPARING AUDIT REPORTS ON VARIOUS TOPICS RELATED TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC.

LIKE THE REST OF THE PUBLIC SECTOR, THE OMBUDSMAN'S OFFICE OPERATED IN EMERGENCY MODE WITH ONLY PART OF ITS NORMAL ROSTER, AND NEEDED TO ADJUST ITS WORK PRACTICES DURING THE CRISIS. DUE TO THE URGENCY OF THE COMPLAINTS AND THE NEED TO PROVIDE QUICK RESOLUTIONS, SOME OF THE EMPLOYEES OF THE OMBUDSMAN'S OFFICE WERE DESIGNATED AS ESSENTIAL WORKERS AND CONTINUED TO PROVIDE SERVICE TO THE PUBLIC THROUGHOUT THE ENTIRE DURATION OF THE CRISIS, EVEN WHEN THE COUNTRY WENT INTO TIGHT LOCKDOWN. THE OFFICE EMPLOYEES DID THEIR LEVEL BEST TO ASSIST THE COMPLAINANTS IN THEIR DISTRESS, AND URGENT COMPLAINTS WERE SOMETIMES HANDLED EVEN ON EVES OF HOLIDAYS AND THE SABBATH. THE OFFICE ALSO RELAXED ITS PROCEDURES FOR FILING A COMPLAINT DURING THE CRISIS, ACCEPTING COMPLAINTS OVER THE PHONE IN CERTAIN CASES.

THE OFFICE ALSO TOOK VARIOUS MEASURES TO INCREASE AWARENESS AMONG THE DISADVANTAGED MEMBERS OF SOCIETY ABOUT THE OPTION TO CONTACT US, INCLUDING GRANTING INTERVIEWS OF OFFICE EMPLOYEES ON THE MEDIA AIMED AT VARIOUS SECTORS AND SEEING TO IT THAT SPEAKERS OF DIFFERENT LANGUAGES WOULD BE

JERUSALEM, ELUL 5780, SEPTEMBER 2020

AVAILABLE TO ASSIST PEOPLE DURING THE LOCKDOWN. IN ADDITION, THE OFFICE MADE CONTACT WITH SOCIAL WELFARE ORGANIZATIONS AND INVITED THEM TO REFER PEOPLE ENCOUNTERING DIFFICULTIES IN EXERCISING THEIR RIGHTS WHEN INTERACTING WITH VARIOUS AUTHORITIES.

THE OFFICE'S EMPLOYEES INITIATED OTHER STEPS TO REACH OUT TO GROUPS WITHIN THE POPULATION WHO HAVE BEEN SEVERELY AFFECTED. FOR EXAMPLE, THE OFFICE'S PERSONNEL CONTACTED ELDERLY HOLOCAUST SURVIVORS WHO WERE FAMILIAR TO THE OFFICE THROUGH PAST COMPLAINTS THEY HAD FILED, IN ORDER TO INQUIRE ABOUT THEIR HEALTH AND GENERAL WELL-BEING AND OFFER HELP IF NEEDED DUE TO THE CRISIS. ONE CANNOT OVERSTATE THE EMOTIONAL RESPONSES OF THESE HOLOCAUST SURVIVORS WHO, EVEN IF THEY WERE NOT IN NEED OF ANY SPECIFIC ASSISTANCE, WERE EXTREMELY APPRECIATIVE OF THE VERY FACT THAT SOMEONE TOOK AN INTEREST IN THEIR SITUATION.

AT THE SAME TIME, THE OFFICE IS WORKING TO STRENGTHEN THE STATUS OF THE PEOPLE IN CHARGE OF DEALING WITH COMPLAINTS IN ALL OF THE BODIES IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR, IN ORDER FOR THEM TO BE ABLE TO INTEGRATE NORMS OF HIGH-QUALITY, EFFICIENT SERVICE, ON A PAR WITH THAT PROVIDED BY DEMOCRATIC COUNTRIES AROUND THE WORLD.

THE MANY EMOTIONAL THANK-YOU LETTERS WE RECEIVE ARE INDICATIVE OF THE IMPORTANT ROLE THE OMBUDSMAN'S OFFICE PLAYS, ESPECIALLY IN TIMES OF CRISIS, IN

SAFEGUARDING THE RIGHTS OF EACH AND EVERY INDIVIDUAL, AND OF THE OFFICE'S CONTRIBUTION TOWARD A HIGH-QUALITY, EFFICIENT CIVIL SERVICE.

THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC DEMONSTRATES THE PIVOTAL ROLE SOCIAL NETWORKS PLAY AS A MEANS FOR EXCHANGING INFORMATION ON THE PUBLIC SERVICES PROVIDED IN THE STATE OF ISRAEL. AS NOTED IN THIS REPORT, SOCIAL MEDIA HAS FULFILLED AN IMPORTANT ROLE IN INCREASING AWARENESS OF THE OFFICE TO POPULATIONS THAT WERE IN NEED OF AID DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC, AND MANY OF THE COMPLAINANTS STATED THAT THEY HAD HEARD ABOUT THE OFFICE ON SOCIAL MEDIA NETWORKS.

THE OFFICE OF THE OMBUDSMAN WILL CONTINUE WORKING TO MAKE ITS SERVICE ACCESSIBLE TO AS WIDE AN AUDIENCE AS POSSIBLE, AND WE ARE HOPEFUL THAT MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC WILL CONTINUE TO SEEK OUR HELP IN CASES OF UNFULFILLED RIGHTS, WHERE THEY HAVE BEEN DENIED PROPER SERVICE FROM A PUBLIC INSTITUTION IN LINE WITH THE NORMS EXPECTED FROM SUCH A BODY IN THE STATE OF ISRAEL.



MATANYAHU ENGLMAN
THE ISRAEL STATE
COMPTROLLER
AND OMBUDSMAN



DR. ESTHER BEN-HAIM, ADV.
HEAD OF THE
OFFICE OF THE
OMBUDSMAN

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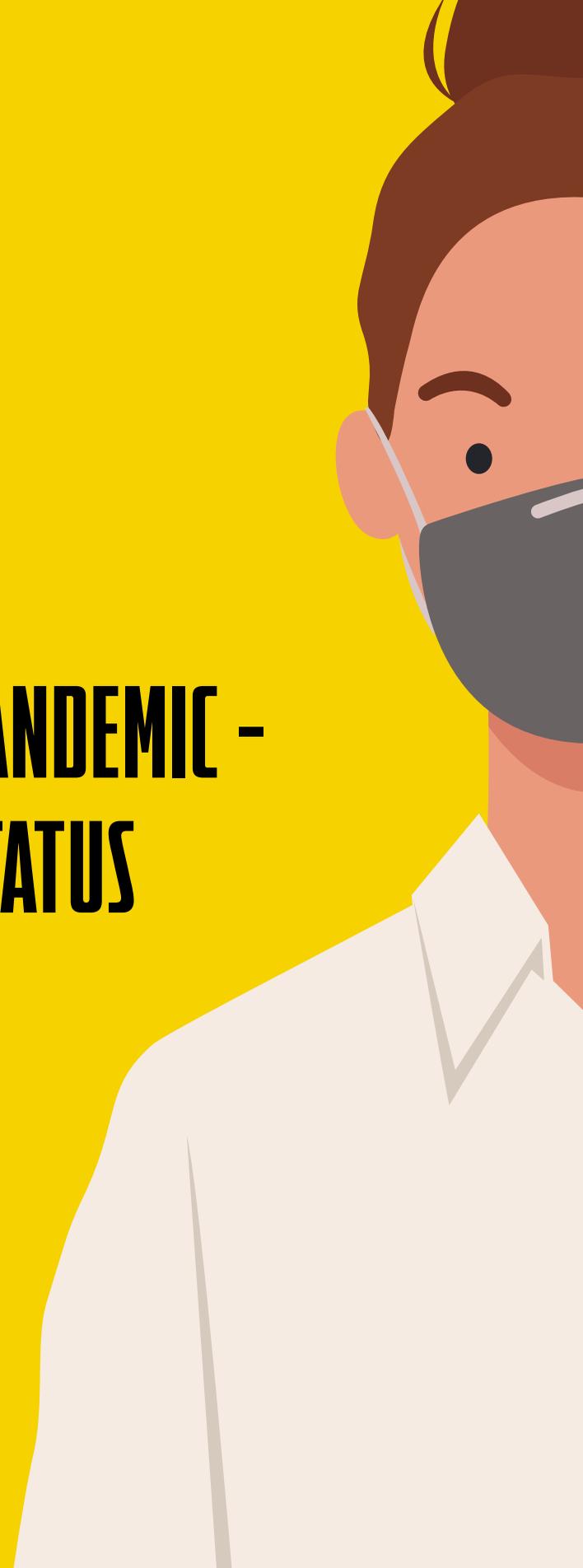
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GLOSSARY

1.

THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC - PRELIMINARY STATUS



THIS SPECIAL REPORT, WHICH HAS BEEN PREPARED ACCORDING TO CLAUSE 46(B) OF THE STATE COMPTROLLER LAW, 5718-1958 [CONSOLIDATED VERSION], DESCRIBES HOW THE OFFICE OF THE OMBUDSMAN HANDLED COMPLAINTS RELATED TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC WHICH WERE RECEIVED DURING THE FIRST WAVE OF THE PANDEMIC FROM MARCH 15, 2020 TO JUNE 30, 2020 (THE REPORT PERIOD). THE REPORT PRESENTS DATA ON THE COMPLAINTS RECEIVED AT THE OFFICE WITHIN THE REPORT PERIOD AND AN ANALYSIS OF THE COMPLAINTS ACCORDING TO VARIOUS PARAMETERS: THE BODIES SUBJECT OF THE COMPLAINTS, THE COMPLAINANTS' CHARACTERISTICS, THE COMPLAINT TOPICS, THE INVESTIGATION RESULTS, THE WAYS THE COMPLAINTS WERE RECEIVED, ETC.

THE NEXT CHAPTER OF THE REPORT DESCRIBES SELECTED COMPLAINTS RELATED TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC WHICH THE OFFICE OF THE OMBUDSMAN INVESTIGATED, WITH REFERENCE TO THE PRIMARY PUBLIC BODIES CALLED UPON TO PROVIDE THE PUBLIC WITH SERVICE DURING THE CRISIS: THE NATIONAL INSURANCE INSTITUTE, THE ISRAEL EMPLOYMENT SERVICE, THE ISRAEL TAX AUTHORITY, THE MINISTRY OF HEALTH, MAGEN DAVID ADOM (THE "RED STAR OF DAVID", ISRAEL'S NATIONAL SERVICE IN MEDICAL EMERGENCIES AND DISASTERS), THE HEALTH FUNDS AND OTHER BODIES WITHIN THE PUBLIC HEALTH SYSTEM, THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND THE EDUCATION AND SOCIAL WELFARE SERVICES IN THE LOCAL AUTHORITIES. THIS CHAPTER WILL ALSO PRESENT COMPLAINTS RELATED TO PUBLIC HOUSING, COMPLAINTS REGARDING ENTERING AND EXITING ISRAEL, COMPLAINTS FROM INMATES ON THE ISRAEL PRISON SERVICE AND COMPLAINTS AGAINST THE ISRAEL POSTAL COMPANY LTD.

THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC AND THE OFFICE OF THE OMBUDSMAN

A VIRUS OUTBREAK OCCURRED IN CHINA IN LATE DECEMBER 2019 (SARS-COV-2), WHICH CAUSES THE COVID-19 DISEASE (CORONAVIRUS). BY MID-FEBRUARY 2020 THE VIRUS HAD SPREAD TO MANY COUNTRIES AND IN FEBRUARY 27, 2020 THE FIRST CASE WAS DIAGNOSED IN ISRAEL. THE WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION DECLARED A GLOBAL PANDEMIC ON MARCH 11, 2020. IN EARLY MARCH 2020 THE GOVERNMENT OF ISRAEL DECIDED TO IMPOSE A SET OF RESTRICTIONS ON THE PUBLIC IN ISRAEL AND ON THOSE SEEKING ENTRY INTO THE COUNTRY: BORDER CROSSINGS WERE CLOSED TO FOREIGN NATIONALS, ISRAELI RESIDENTS RETURNING FROM ABROAD WERE REQUIRED TO SELF-ISOLATE, LARGE-SCALE EVENTS AND GATHERINGS WERE FORBIDDEN AND SO FORTH. IN MID-MARCH 2020 THE RESTRICTIONS WERE TIGHTENED: THE SCHOOL SYSTEM WAS

COMPLETELY SHUT DOWN WITH THE EXCEPTION OF A FEW SPECIAL CASES; THE PUBLIC SECTOR STARTED WORKING IN A SCALED-DOWN EMERGENCY MODE; EMERGENCY REGULATIONS WERE ENACTED¹, LIMITING THE CIRCUMSTANCES UNDER WHICH INDIVIDUALS WERE PERMITTED TO LEAVE THEIR HOMES AND GO TO PUBLIC PLACES; AND PUBLIC TRANSPORT WAS REDUCED TO A MINIMUM. ENTERTAINMENT VENUES AND COMMERCIAL CENTERS WERE ALSO CLOSED AND SOCIAL DISTANCING OF A MINIMUM OF TWO METERS WAS IMPOSED IN PUBLIC PLACES AND AT THE WORKPLACE. ON APRIL 12, 2020, FACE MASKS BECAME MANDATORY IN PUBLIC AREAS.

THE RESTRICTIONS IMPOSED ON THE PUBLIC IN ISRAEL LED TO AN ALMOST COMPLETE SHUTDOWN OF THE ECONOMY, WITH THE EXCEPTION OF THOSE WORKPLACES DEFINED AS ESSENTIAL. THIS SITUATION LASTED FOR MANY WEEKS. HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS OF EMPLOYEES WERE SENT ON FURLOUGH OR DISMISSED FROM THEIR PLACES OF EMPLOYMENT, BUSINESSES WERE CLOSED, AND TENS OF THOUSANDS WERE PLACED IN ISOLATION IN THEIR HOMES OR IN FACILITIES SPECIALLY ASSIGNED BY THE STATE. THESE MEASURES HAD A DRAMATIC, MULTIFACETED EFFECT ON BROAD SWATHES OF THE POPULATION.

THE INCREASE IN THE NUMBER OF CITIZENS DIAGNOSED WITH CORONAVIRUS, THE SCALING DOWN OF THE ECONOMIC ACTIVITY AND THE DISRUPTION TO EVERYDAY LIFE AND LIVELIHOODS OF SO MANY PEOPLE POSED HITHERTO-UNKNOWN CHALLENGES FOR THE BODIES ENTRUSTED WITH PROVIDING PUBLIC SERVICE. THE STATE INSTITUTIONS AND THE LOCAL AUTHORITIES HAD TO PROVIDE THEIR POPULATIONS WITH IMMEDIATE, WIDE-SPREAD AID IN A VARIETY OF AREAS: UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS TO HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS OF WORKERS WHOSE EMPLOYMENT HAD BEEN DISCONTINUED; GRANTS TO BUSINESS OWNERS THAT WERE FORCED TO SHUT DOWN OR WHOSE BUSINESSES SUFFERED UNDER THE LOCKDOWN; SCREENING TESTS TO DETECT THE VIRUS; PROVISION OF HEALTH AND WELFARE SERVICES TO THE GENERAL PUBLIC, INCLUDING SENIOR CITIZENS AND PEOPLE IN ISOLATION; SETTING UP A REMOTE LEARNING APPARATUS, ETC.

THE SCOPE OF ACITIVITY REQUIRED OF THE PUBLIC SECTOR DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC, THE REDUCTION IN MANPOWER IN THE PUBLIC BODIES AND THE OTHER RESTRICTIONS - ALL CONVERGED TO CAUSE DELAYS AND PROBLEMS IN DELIVERY OF SERVICE TO THE PUBLIC.

THE OFFICE OF THE OMBUDSMAN, WHICH DURING NORMAL TIMES IS CHARGED WITH PROVIDING AID TO PEOPLE IN THEIR INTERACTIONS WITH VARIOUS PUBLIC AUTHORITIES, MOBILIZED DURING THE LOCKDOWN TO ASSIST WHOEVER WAS ENCOUNTERING DIFFICULTIES IN GETTING RESPONSES FROM A PUBLIC BODY.



**Urgent
complaints were
at times accepted
and dealt with
even on holiday
and Sabbath eves
when the Office is
closed**

[1] FOR EXAMPLE, EMERGENCY REGULATIONS (NEW CORONAVIRUS - RESTRICTING ACTIVITY), 5780-2020

THE OFFICE OF THE OMBUDSMAN, LIKE THE REST OF THE BODIES IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR, WAS OPERATING IN EMERGENCY MODE AND WITH ONLY PART OF ITS NORMAL ROSTER. UNDER THESE CIRCUMSTANCES, IN ORDER TO WORK MORE EFFICIENTLY, TO SUPPORT THOSE DEPARTMENTS IN THE OMBUDSMAN'S OFFICE THAT DEAL WITH COMPLAINTS RELATING TO THOSE BODIES AGAINST WHICH THE LARGEST NUMBER OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC-RELATED COMPLAINTS HAD BEEN RECEIVED, AND TO RESPOND RAPIDLY AND EFFECTIVELY TO THE COMPLAINANTS - ESPECIALLY DURING THE DAYS WHEN MANY SUCH COMPLAINTS WERE SUBMITTED - THE OFFICE MADE ADJUSTMENTS AND CHANGES IN ITS WORKING PROCEDURES, IN ITS INVESTIGATION OF THE COMPLAINTS AND IN ITS CONTACTS WITH THE BODIES SUBJECT OF THE COMPLAINTS. EMPLOYEES WERE ALSO REASSIGNED AMONG THE OFFICE'S VARIOUS SUB-DIVISIONS. THE BRANCH OFFICES OF THE OMBUDSMAN'S OFFICE WHICH RECEIVE THE PUBLIC WERE CLOSED TO THE PUBLIC DURING THE LOCKDOWN, AND THE WORKERS IN THOSE OFFICES RENDERED ASSISTANCE TO THE VARIOUS DEPARTMENTS IN INVESTIGATING THE COMPLAINTS. THE OFFICE EMPLOYEES DID THEIR LEVEL BEST TO ASSIST THE COMPLAINANTS IN THEIR DISTRESS, AND URGENT COMPLAINTS WERE SOMETIMES HANDLED EVEN ON HOLIDAY AND SABBATH EVES WHEN THE OFFICES WERE CLOSED.

FURTHERMORE, TO PROVIDE SPEEDY RELIEF FOR COMPLAINANTS, THE OFFICE OF THE OMBUDSMAN ACCEPTED COMPLAINTS SUBMITTED OVER THE PHONE, EVEN THOUGH AS A RULE A COMPLAINT TO THE OFFICE NEEDS TO BE SUBMITTED IN WRITING, AND EVEN THOUGH UNDER NORMAL CIRCUMSTANCES TELEPHONE COMPLAINTS ARE ALLOWED ONLY IN SPECIAL CASES. THE OFFICE ALSO MAINTAINED CLOSE CONTACT BY PHONE WITH COMPLAINANTS WHO WERE IN NEED OF URGENT RELIEF UNTIL THEY RECEIVED THE REMEDY THEY WERE SEEKING. EXAMPLES OF ALL OF THESE WILL BE PRESENTED LATER ON IN THIS REPORT.

BESIDES BEING A TOOL USED TO ASSIST COMPLAINANTS WITH RECEIVING THE REQUESTED REMEDIES, TELEPHONIC COMMUNICATION WAS ALSO USED TO PROVIDE MANY INDIVIDUALS WITH INFORMATION REGARDING THE OPTIONS OPEN TO THEM FOR EXERCISING THEIR RIGHTS IN FULL AND TO PROVIDE A LISTENING EAR FOR PEOPLE TO AIR THEIR GRIEVANCES. IN SEVERE CASES, WHEN NECESSARY, SOCIAL WORKERS EMPLOYED IN THE OMBUDSMAN'S OFFICE SPOKE WITH THE COMPLAINANTS AS WELL, TO PROVIDE THEM WITH APPROPRIATE ASSISTANCE AND GUIDANCE.



The Ombudsman places critical importance on the development of efficient, effective mechanisms for handling complaints from the public against public bodies, particularly in times of crisis

IN THOSE CASES WHERE THE OMBUDSMAN'S OFFICE WAS UNABLE TO INVESTIGATE A COMPLAINT (FOR EXAMPLE, WHEN THE COMPLAINT WAS ABOUT AN ENTITY NOT WITHIN THE JURISDICTION OF THE OFFICE), THE EMPLOYEES MADE BEST EFFORTS TO HELP THE APPLICANTS IN EXERCISING THEIR RIGHTS THROUGH OTHER MEANS - FOR EXAMPLE, BY REFERRING THE COMPLAINANT TO ANOTHER, MORE RELEVANT INSTITUTION, AND BY PROVIDING SUPPORT, GUIDANCE AND ASSISTANCE.

TO PROVIDE TIMELY RESPONSES TO COMPLAINANTS, WITHOUT DISRUPTING THE HEAVY, ROUTINE WORKLOAD OF THE PUBLIC BODIES SUBJECT OF THE COMPLAINTS, THE OFFICE MAINTAINED REGULAR, CLOSE VERBAL CONTACT WITH SENIOR OFFICIALS AND WITH PERSONS CHARGED WITH PROVIDING CUSTOMER SERVICE AT THOSE ORGANIZATIONS. GUIDELINES FOR RAPID, EFFICIENT INVESTIGATION OF COMPLAINTS WERE WORKED OUT, BASED ON DAILY TELEPHONE CONTACT WITH THE RELEVANT PERSONNEL IN THE RESPECTIVE PUBLIC BODIES. THIS METHOD DRASTICALLY SHORTENED THE INVESTIGATION LEAD TIME.

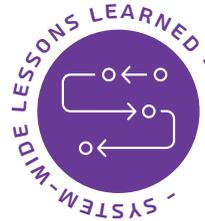
THE COOPERATION BETWEEN THE OMBUDSMAN'S OFFICE AND THE BODIES SUBJECT OF THE COMPLAINTS YIELDED QUICK SOLUTIONS AND REDUCED THE TURNAROUND TIME FROM THE MOMENT THE COMPLAINT ARRIVED AT THE OFFICE UNTIL THE FULL RESOLUTION OF THE COMPLAINANT'S PROBLEM. IN MANY CASES, THE COMPLAINTS WERE RESOLVED WITHIN A FEW DAYS, AND IN SOME CASES ON THE SAME DAY THE COMPLAINT WAS SUBMITTED.

DURING THE PERIOD SUBJECT OF THIS REPORT, THE OFFICE OF THE OMBUDSMAN CONTINUED TO EMPLOY THE VARIOUS INVESTIGATIVE TOOLS USED DURING ROUTINE TIMES, INCLUDING THE "UNDERCOVER CLIENT" METHOD, WHEREBY AN OFFICE EMPLOYEE ARRIVES AT THE OFFICES OF THE BODY SUBJECT OF THE COMPLAINT OR CALLS THEIR CALL CENTER TO OBTAIN THE SERVICE THE COMPLAINANT CLAIMED WAS WITHHELD FROM HIM OR HER OR WHICH HE OR SHE HAD DIFFICULTY OBTAINING. THIS METHOD IS USED IN ORDER TO VERIFY AT FIRST HAND WHETHER INDEED THERE IS A FLAW IN THE WAY THE SERVICE IS PROVIDED. ANOTHER TOOL THE OFFICE USES TO CHECK UP ON THE FUNCTIONING OF PUBLIC BODIES IS ON-SITE VISITS².



If, in the course of investigating a complaint, a systemic flaw is found in the functioning of the public the rectification of which potentially would benefit many, the Office will draw the attention of the institution to the flaw and point out the need to fix it without delay

[2] FOR A DESCRIPTION OF THE OFFICE'S TOOL KIT FOR INVESTIGATING COMPLAINTS, PLEASE SEE ISRAEL OMBUDSMAN ANNUAL REPORT 46 (2020), PAGES 21-28.



IF, IN THE COURSE OF INVESTIGATING A COMPLAINT, A SYSTEMIC FLAW IS FOUND IN THE FUNCTIONING OF THE PUBLIC BODY THE RECTIFICATION OF WHICH POTENTIALLY WOULD BENEFIT MANY, THE OMBUDSMAN'S OFFICE WILL DRAW THE ATTENTION OF THE BODY IN QUESTION TO THE FLAW AND POINT OUT THE NEED TO FIX IT WITHOUT DELAY. IN THIS MANNER, THE OFFICE HELPS PUBLIC SECTOR BODIES TO ADDRESS AND RECTIFY PROBLEMS IN REAL TIME AND ALSO TO IMPLEMENT LESSONS LEARNED DURING THE CRISIS MODE IN WHICH THEY WERE OPERATING

THE OMBUDSMAN PLACES CRITICAL IMPORTANCE ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF EFFICIENT, EFFECTIVE MECHANISMS FOR HANDLING COMPLAINTS FROM THE PUBLIC AGAINST PUBLIC BODIES, PARTICULARLY IN TIMES OF CRISIS. IN THIS REGARD, THE OMBUDSMAN CONSIDERS IT IMPORTANT TO STRENGTHEN THE STATUS OF THOSE INDIVIDUALS CHARGED WITH HANDLING PUBLIC COMPLAINTS IN THE PUBLIC BODIES, WHO SERVE AS INTERNAL INSPECTORS OF THE LEVEL OF SERVICE PROVIDED BY THE BODY AND WHO ACT TO IMPROVE IT.

THE OFFICE COOPERATES WITH THE PERSONS IN CHARGE OF HANDLING PUBLIC COMPLAINTS IN THE VARIOUS PUBLIC BODIES. THE OMBUDSMAN BELIEVES THAT EMPOWERING THOSE OFFICIALS RESPONSIBLE FOR DEALING WITH COMPLAINTS OF THE PUBLIC AND STRENGTHENING THE PUBLIC COMPLAINT INVESTIGATION ARRANGEMENTS WITHIN THE CIVIL SERVICE, WILL YIELD MORE EFFICIENT RESPONSES AND MORE RAPID RECTIFICATION OF THE DEFICIENCIES AND PROBLEMS IN THE SERVICE PROVIDED TO THE CITIZENS DURING BOTH NORMAL TIMES AND EMERGENCIES.

IT SHOULD BE NOTED THAT THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC AFFORDS THE PUBLIC BODIES AN OPPORTUNITY TO EXAMINE THEIR READINESS FOR EMERGENCIES AND ALSO TO EXPLORE WAYS TO STREAMLINE WORK PROCESSES UNDER NORMAL CIRCUMSTANCES. FOR EXAMPLE, AS WE WILL SEE LATER ON IN THIS REPORT, TRANSFERRING TO THE USE OF DIGITAL TOOLS³, PROVIDING BUILT-IN, AUTOMATED RESPONSES AND OFFERING ONLINE RESPONSES TO COMPLAINTS ENHANCED THE ABILITY OF PUBLIC BODIES TO DEAL WITH THE TORRENT OF COMPLAINTS THEY RECEIVED. IT IS WORTH EXAMINING THE DEGREE OF EFFICIENCY OF THESE METHODS NOT ONLY IN TIMES OF CRISIS, BUT ALSO UNDER NORMAL CONDITIONS.

[3] SUCH AS THE USE OF A DIGITAL ROBOT.

ON THE OTHER HAND, PUBLIC BODIES MUST ALSO CONSIDER THE NEED TO MAKE THEIR SERVICES AS ACCESSIBLE AS POSSIBLE TO POPULATIONS WHICH, FOR VARIOUS REASONS, ARE UNACCUSTOMED TO USING ONLINE FACILITIES.

BESIDES THE VERBAL CONTACT WITH THE BODIES SUBJECT OF THE COMPLAINTS, THE OFFICE OF THE OMBUDSMAN IS IN CLOSE AND REGULAR CONTACT WITH THE AUDIT DEPARTMENTS IN THE STATE COMPTROLLER'S OFFICE, SHARING FINDINGS WITH THEM AS WELL AS THE INSIGHTS GAINED FROM INVESTIGATING THE COMPLAINTS. THESE INSIGHTS ARE HELPFUL TO THE AUDIT DEPARTMENTS IN THEIR CONDUCTING OF SYSTEMIC AUDITS RELATING TO VARIOUS ASPECTS OF THE AUTHORITIES' HANDLING OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC.

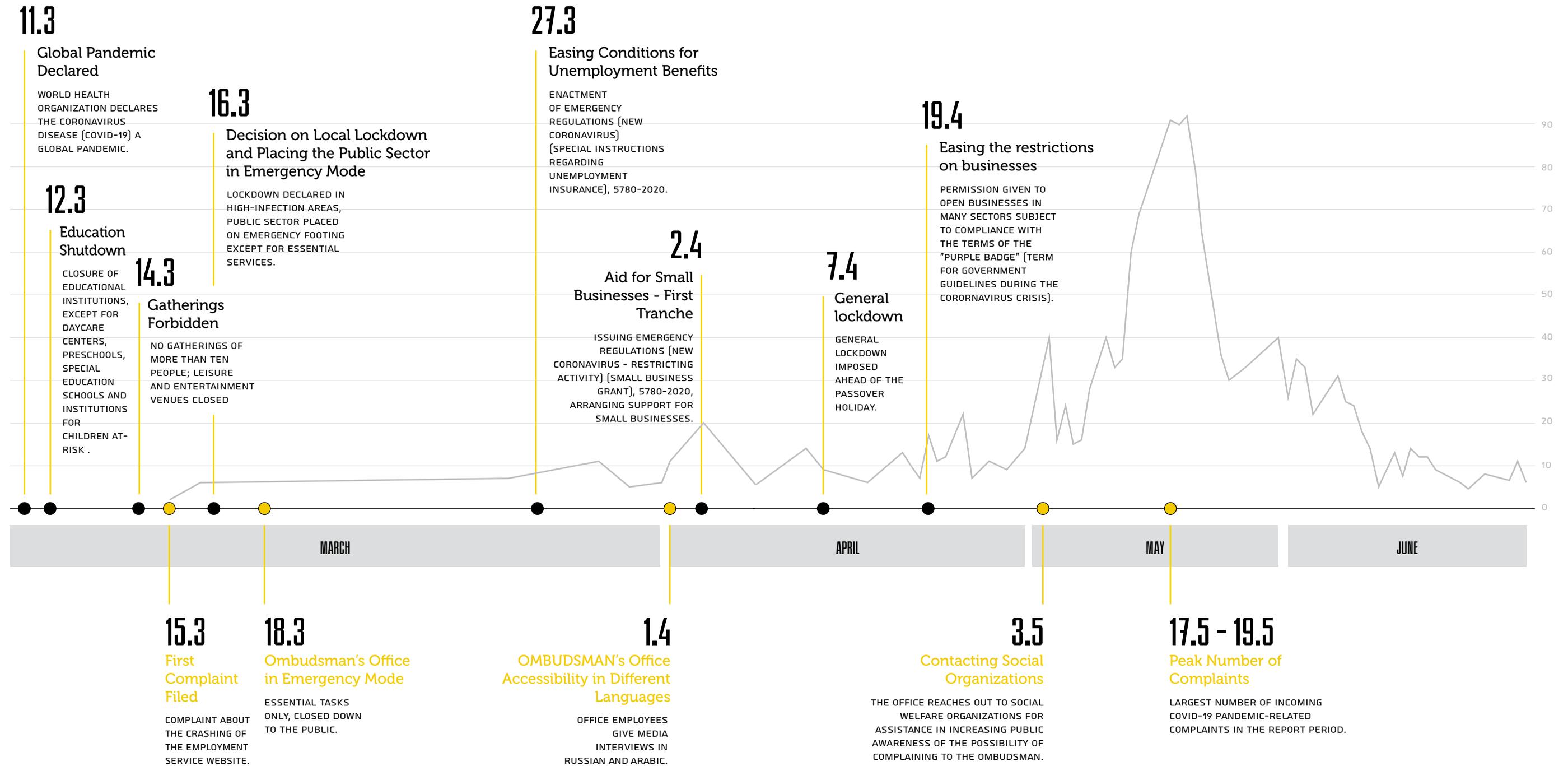


MAJOR EVENTS DURING THE FIRST WAVE

WITH REFERENCE TO A CHART SHOWING THE NUMBER OF COMPLAINTS RECEIVED AT THE OFFICE

● EVENTS RELATED TO THE ENTIRE ECONOMY

● EVENTS RELATED TO THE OFFICE OF THE OMBUDSMAN



MAKING THE OFFICE OF THE OMBUDSMAN ACCESSIBLE TO THE GENERAL PUBLIC DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

THE OFFICE HAS MANY DIFFERENT METHODS OF OPERATION, BOTH UNDER NORMAL CIRCUMSTANCES AND IN EMERGENCIES, FOR INCREASING PUBLIC AWARENESS OF ITS EXISTENCE AND OF ITS AVAILABILITY TO INDIVIDUALS FOR HELP IN REALIZING THEIR RIGHTS.

FROM THE BEGINNING OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC, EMPLOYEES OF THE OMBUDSMAN'S OFFICE WHO ARE FLUENT IN OTHER LANGUAGES, WERE INTERVIEWED IN LOCAL MEDIA TO BRING THE EXISTENCE OF THE OFFICE TO THE NOTICE OF THOSE MEMBERS OF SOCIETY WHO EXPERIENCE DIFFICULTIES IN DEALING WITH THE AUTHORITIES DUE TO THE LANGUAGE BARRIER. AND INDEED, SUBSEQUENT TO THESE INTERVIEWS, THE OFFICE RECEIVED COMPLAINTS FROM NON-HEBREW SPEAKERS. EVEN THOUGH DURING THE CRISIS THE BRANCH OFFICES WHICH USUALLY RECEIVE THE PUBLIC WERE CLOSED TO THE PUBLIC AND MANY EMPLOYEES WERE WORKING FROM HOME, THE OMBUDSMAN'S OFFICE MADE SURE THAT MULTI-LINGUAL EMPLOYEES WOULD REMAIN "ON-CALL" TO ACCEPT COMPLAINTS FROM NON-HEBREW SPEAKERS.

IN ADDITION, THE OFFICE INITIATED CONTACT WITH AND OFFERED HELP TO SOME 50 SOCIAL RIGHTS ORGANIZATIONS ENGAGED IN ASSISTING SENIOR CITIZENS, PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES, AND SPECIAL EDUCATION STUDENTS TO EXERCISE THEIR RIGHTS; IN ADVANCEMENT OF WORKING WOMEN; AND IN PROMOTING WOMEN'S EMPLOYMENT IN THE ARAB SECTOR. THIS WAS DONE IN AN EFFORT TO REACH THESE POPULATIONS, WHO MAY NOT BE FAMILIAR WITH THE OMBUDSMAN OR AWARE OF THE POSSIBILITY OF OBTAINING ASSISTANCE FROM THE OFFICE.

IN IT'S MESSAGE, THE OFFICE STATED THE FOLLOWING:

"ONE OF THE OMBUDSMAN'S MAIN GOALS IS TO INCREASE ACCESSIBILITY TO THE OFFICE AND RAISE AWARENESS OF ITS ACTIVITIES FOR THE BENEFIT OF SOCIETY AT LARGE AND FOR POPULATIONS IN NEED OF A HELPING HAND IN PARTICULAR. TO THIS END, THE OFFICE MAINTAINS CONTACTS WITH VARIOUS SOCIAL NON-PROFITS WHICH LEND ASSISTANCE TO VARIOUS POPULATIONS. OUR GOAL IS TO ASSIST THOSE WHO ARE UNAWARE OF THE OMBUDSMAN'S OFFICE, OR WHO HAVE DIFFICULTIES CONTACTING THE OFFICE THROUGH WRITTEN COMPLAINTS VIA THE REGULAR CHANNELS.

IN VIEW OF THE CHALLENGING TIMES WE ARE EXPERIENCING, WE INVITE YOU TO FORWARD TO US COMPLAINTS YOU RECEIVE, REGARDING BOTH ISSUES ARISING FROM THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC AND ANY OTHER ISSUES".

THIS MESSAGE TO THE SOCIAL ORGANIZATIONS REFLECTS THE OMBUDSMAN'S VISION TO INCREASE THE OFFICE'S ACCESSIBILITY TO POPULATIONS WHO MAY NOT BE FAMILIAR WITH IT, AND IN PARTICULAR TO POPULATIONS WHO ENCOUNTER DIFFICULTY IN CONTACTING THE OFFICE.

THESE MEASURES TAKEN BY THE OFFICE ARE PART OF THE ROLE THE OMBUDSMAN HAS DEDICATED HIMSELF TO - ENABLING EVERY INDIVIDUAL TO EXERCISE HIS OR HER RIGHTS AND TO RECEIVE PROPER PUBLIC SERVICE.

THE EMOTIONAL THANK-YOU LETTERS RECEIVED IN THE OFFICE TESTIFY TO THE QUALITY OF SERVICE DELIVERED TO THE PEOPLE WHO CONTACTED THE OFFICE AND TO THE OFFICE'S UNSTINTING AVAILABILITY TO THE PUBLIC EVEN DURING A CRISIS:



“

My son followed your instructions and his departure has already been approved. He has just crossed the border, thank you very much, let's hope for nothing but good health and good news!!!!



“

... I wanted to thank you from the bottom of my heart and to inform you that for me you have been an emissary of good - absolutely a Godsend. You received my complaint regarding unemployment. You considered how you could help me and provided all of the correct, helpful information I didn't hear at any other office that was supposed to attend to this matter and to make the materials accessible to me. Thanks to you and to this amazing institution you are working in, this month I will be provided, God willing, with peace of mind and financial security after I have been awarded unemployment benefits exactly during this difficult period before the 10th of the month. I will be able (yes, this is exactly where I was standing a month ago) to calmly buy bread and milk, not through a loan but because of my rights as a citizen who pays about NIS 1000 every month to the National Insurance Institute. Thanks again to you and to this whole beautiful place called the Office of the State Comptroller and Ombudsman".




Thank you very much! When I received my unemployment due to the Coronavirus furlough, I noticed the calculation was wrong. I contacted the National Insurance Institute several times through their website - but there was no answer. When I told my friend about it she told me that before Passover she too had a problem and that she contacted the State Comptroller and Ombudsman. She received a response in just a few days. I heard this and I decided to try this method too! And it worked!! I filed a complaint through the Complaints website of the Office of the State Comptroller and Ombudsman in which I detailed my problem with the National Insurance Institute. And lo and behold - less than a week later - the missing money was in my bank account!!! Since then I've been telling everyone - that it simply works! I hope I'm not causing you to be flooded with complaints. So - to the Office of the State Comptroller and Ombudsman - thank you very much!! You have been faithful emissaries!"

THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC IS NOT BEHIND US YET. THESE DAYS THE STATE OF ISRAEL IS GRAPPLING WITH A SECOND WAVE OF INFECTIONS. UNDER THESE CIRCUMSTANCES, THE OFFICE'S MISSION OF HELPING PEOPLE WHO HAVE SUFFERED DUE TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC IS NOT OVER. THE OFFICE IS CONTINUING TO RECEIVE AND INVESTIGATE VARIOUS COMPLAINTS RELATED TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC AND TO HELP COMPLAINANTS ON A BROAD RANGE OF ISSUES RELATED TO THE CRISIS. FURTHERMORE, THE OFFICE CONTINUES TO REFLECT TO THE PUBLIC BODIES AND POINT OUT ANY DEFICIENCIES DISCOVERED WHEN INVESTIGATING COMPLAINTS, IN ORDER TO ENABLE THE BODIES TO QUICKLY CORRECT THE SYSTEM, THEREBY RENDERING ASSISTANCE TO THE PUBLIC AT LARGE.

COVID-19 PANDEMIC - A COMPARATIVE INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC IS A GLOBAL CRISIS REQUIRING ALL COUNTRIES TO BE PREPARED FROM BOTH THE HEALTH STANDPOINT AND THE ECONOMIC STANDPOINT. AS IS THE CASE IN ISRAEL, OMBUDSPERSONS AND THEIR INSTITUTIONS WORLDWIDE HAVE ORGANIZED THEMSELVES SPECIFICALLY TO BE ABLE TO WORK THROUGH THE CORONAVIRUS PERIOD UNDER UNFAMILIAR CONDITIONS, RECOGNIZING THEIR IMPORTANT ROLE OF ASSISTING THE PUBLIC

IN THEIR DISTRESS AND GUARANTEEING THE RIGHTS OF GROUPS WITHIN THE POPULATION EXPERIENCING DISCRIMINATION. EMPHASIS IS ALSO PLACED ON GUARANTEEING THE RIGHTS OF POPULATIONS IN NEED OF ADVANCEMENT, WHICH INCLUDES PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES.

THE OFFICE OF THE ISRAEL OMBUDSMAN RECOGNIZES THE IMPORTANCE OF LEARNING FROM PEER OMBUDS INSTITUTIONS ELSEWHERE AROUND THE WORLD, ALL THE MORE SO DURING TIMES LIKE THESE WHEN ALL OF THE OMBUDSPERSONS ARE COPING WITH SIMILAR CHALLENGES. THE OFFICE KEEPS ABREAST OF MEASURES TAKEN DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC BY OMBUDSPERSONS WORLDWIDE AND UPDATES OMBUDSPERSON INSTITUTIONS AROUND THE WORLD OF THE SPECIAL MEASURES BEING TAKEN HERE AT THE MOMENT.

LATELY, OMBUDS INSTITUTIONS WORLDWIDE HAVE BEEN ADAPTING THEIR WORK METHODS TO THE CHANGING RULES ARISING FROM THE NEED FOR SOCIAL DISTANCING. ADDITIONALLY, THESE OMBUDSPERSON INSTITUTIONS HAVE PLACED EMPHASIS ON PROTECTING DISADVANTAGED POPULATIONS, SUCH AS PEOPLE WITH HANDICAPS, SENIOR CITIZENS, PRISON INMATES AND ASYLUM-SEEKERS, AND THEY HAVE PROACTIVELY TAKEN STEPS TO THIS END IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE AUTHORITY GIVEN TO THEM BY LAW. IN THIS CONTEXT, IT IS WORTH MENTIONING THAT SOME OMBUDSPERSONS HAVE BROAD AUTHORITY, IN ADDITION TO INVESTIGATING COMPLAINTS, INCLUDING THE AUTHORITY TO INITIATE INVESTIGATION OF POINT ISSUES AND THE AUTHORITY TO COMMENT ON LEGISLATION IN THEIR RESPECTIVE COUNTRIES.

FOLLOWING ARE EXAMPLES OF MEASURES TAKEN AND COMPLAINTS INVESTIGATED BY OMBUDS INSTITUTIONS AROUND THE WORLD DURING THE FIRST WAVE OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC:

Ombudspersons and their Institutions - Coping with the Changing Reality

LIKE THE OFFICE OF THE OMBUDSMAN IN ISRAEL, THE OMBUDS INSTITUTIONS AROUND THE WORLD HAVE HAD TO ADAPT THE WAY THEY WORK AND THE WAY THEY RECEIVE COMPLAINTS TO THE CHANGING REALITY, IN WHICH RECEIVING THE PUBLIC FACE-TO-FACE IS NOT POSSIBLE. SOME OF THE INSTITUTIONS DEALT WITH THIS ISSUE CREATIVELY. FOR EXAMPLE, THE OFFICE OF THE SERBIAN OMBUDSMAN ADDED PHONE LINES TO PROVIDE TELEPHONE RESPONSES TO



These Ombudsperson institutions have placed emphasis on protecting disadvantaged populations, such as people with handicaps, senior citizens, prison inmates and asylum-seekers, and they have proactively taken steps to this end

THE INCREASED NUMBER OF COMPLAINTS. CALLERS WERE EVEN GIVEN THE OPTION OF OBTAINING PSYCHOLOGICAL HELP OVER [THE PHONE](#); THE PUBLIC PROTECTOR OF SOUTH AFRICA SET UP A STEERING COMMITTEE COMPRISING TEN SENIOR RESEARCHERS TO DEAL WITH ALL THE ISSUES RELATED TO THE [CORONAVIRUS](#); AND THE OMBUDSPERSON OF THE PROVINCE OF ONTARIO IN CANADA OPENED HOTLINES FOR PRISON INMATES AND DETAINEES, AND ALSO SET UP A RAPID-RESPONSE TASK FORCE TO PROVIDE QUICK SOLUTIONS IN [EMERGENCIES](#).

Investigating Complaints Related to the COVID-19 Pandemic

EVEN AS THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC INTENSIFIED, THE OFFICES OF OMBUDSPERSONS AROUND THE WORLD PRESSED ON WITH INVESTIGATING COMPLAINTS AND PROVIDING PERSONALIZED ASSISTANCE TO THOSE THAT CONTACTED THEM. THE ISSUES DEALT WITH BY OMBUDSPERSONS AROUND THE WORLD DURING THE CRISIS PERIOD WERE MANY AND DIVERSE: FAILURE TO DELIVER MASKS AND OTHER PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT, FAILURE TO RELAX THE TERMS FOR SMALL BUSINESS LOANS ([SOUTH KOREA](#)); DIFFICULTIES IN TRANSFERRING CHILDREN BETWEEN PARENTS WITH SHARED CUSTODY DURING THE LOCKDOWN AND FAILURE TO CONNECT QUARANTINED SENIOR CITIZENS' HOMES TO ELECTRICITY ([SERBIA](#)); INEQUALITY IN RESTRICTION OF THE FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT AND INABILITY TO VISIT DOCTORS ([SLOVENIA](#)); INSISTENCE ON PENALTY PAYMENTS AND INTEREST FOR DELAY DUE TO NON-PAYMENT OF PROPERTY TAX DURING THE [LOCKDOWN](#), RESTRICTIONS ON VISITS TO CHILDREN NOT LIVING AT HOME ([ONTARIO, CANADA](#)) AND NON-PAYMENT OF SPECIAL GRANTS ([SOUTH AFRICA](#)).



Proactive Examinations and On-site Inspections

DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC SOME OMBUDSPERSON INSTITUTIONS VISITED LOCATIONS WHERE UNDERPRIVILEGED POPULATIONS LIVE IN ORDER TO ENSURE THAT THE GOVERNMENT WAS NOT DEPRIVING THE RESIDENTS OF THEIR RIGHTS. FOR EXAMPLE, THE OFFICE OF THE COMMISSIONER OF ADMINISTRATION AND PROTECTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS (OMBUDSMAN) IN CYPRUS TOURED AN [ASYLUM-SEEKERS' SHELTER](#); THE PARLIAMENTARY OMBUDSMAN'S OFFICE IN FINLAND INSPECTED [ASSISTED LIVING CENTERS](#); THE PUBLIC PROTECTOR'S INSTITUTION IN SOUTH AFRICA EXAMINED THE ISSUE OF [FOOD DISTRIBUTION](#) DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC.

Opinions on Legislation

AS OPPOSED TO THE ISRAEL OMBUDSMAN, SOME OMBUDSPERSONS ARE LEGALLY AUTHORIZED TO OPINE ON LEGISLATION TO THE GOVERNMENT AUTHORITIES. DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC, SEVERAL OMBUDSPERSONS GAVE THEIR COMMENTS TO THE EXECUTIVE AND LEGISLATIVE BRANCHES IN THEIR RESPECTIVE COUNTRIES ON PENDING LEGISLATION FOR COPING WITH THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC. FOR EXAMPLE, THE CROATIAN OMBUDSMAN SUGGESTED AMENDMENTS TO A GOVERNMENT BILL ENABLING THE GOVERNMENT TO TRACK THE MOVEMENTS OF ITS CITIZENS IN VIOLATION OF THEIR PRIVACY AND [FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT](#); THE OMBUDSMAN IN GEORGIA⁴ CALLED ON THE GOVERNMENT TO ALLOW PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES A BETTER SOLUTION IN THE ECONOMIC EMERGENCY PLAN IT WAS [PREPARING](#); AND THE OMBUDSPERSON IN CANADA'S PROVINCE OF BRITISH COLUMBIA PUT THE PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT ON NOTICE THAT DECREES ISSUED BY THE MINISTER OF PUBLIC SAFETY OVERSTEPPED THE AUTHORITY VESTED IN HIM UNDER THE LAW AND WERE DISPROPORTIONAL. FOLLOWING THIS NOTIFICATION, ONE OF THE DECREES WAS CANCELED AND THE OTHER WAS [AMENDED](#).

THE ISRAEL OMBUDSMAN IS CONTINUING TO LEARN FROM THE CUMULATIVE EXPERIENCE OF HIS PEERS AROUND THE WORLD REGARDING THE INVESTIGATION OF COMPLAINTS, PROVISION OF OPTIMUM RESPONSES TO COMPLAINANTS AND ASSISTING DISADVANTAGED POPULATION GROUPS IN REALIZING THEIR RIGHTS, PARTICULARLY IN TIMES OF CRISIS. THE OFFICE WILL BE SHARING LESSONS LEARNED FROM OTHER OMBUDSPERSONS WORLDWIDE WITH LOCAL OMBUDSPERSONS AND PERSONS CHARGED WITH DEALING WITH PUBLIC COMPLAINTS IN ISRAEL, SO THAT OUR INSTITUTIONS CAN BENEFIT FROM THESE LESSONS AND ENHANCE THEIR HANDLING OF COMPLAINTS DURING A CRISIS.

[4] The Public Defender (Ombudsman) of Georgia.

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**DATA ON COVID-19
PANDEMIC-RELATED
COMPLAINTS**



THIS CHAPTER WILL PRESENT VARIOUS DATA AND CROSS-SECTIONS CONCERNING THE COMPLAINTS WHICH WERE RECEIVED BY THE OMBUDSMAN DURING THE REPORT PERIOD⁵ (MARCH 15, 2020 TO JUNE 30, 2020), ILLUSTRATED WITH GRAPHS.

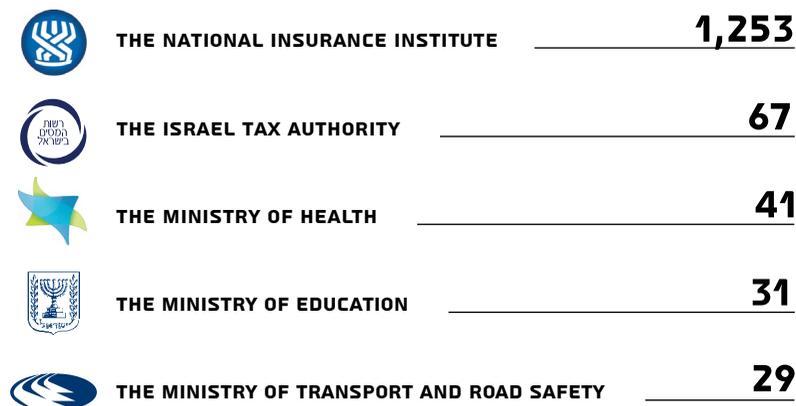
NUMBER OF LETTERS OF COMPLAINT RECEIVED

DURING THE REPORT PERIOD 4,684 LETTERS OF COMPLAINT WERE RECEIVED BY THE OMBUDSMAN. APPROXIMATELY 36% OF THE COMPLAINT LETTERS (1,677) WERE ABOUT ISSUES RELATED TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC. DURING THE REPORT PERIOD, THERE WAS A 16% INCREASE IN THE TOTAL NUMBER OF COMPLAINTS RECEIVED COMPARED WITH THE PARALLEL PERIOD LAST YEAR.

OVER ONE-THIRD OF THE COMPLAINT LETTERS RECEIVED DURING THE REPORT PERIOD WERE ABOUT COVID-19 PANDEMIC-RELATED ISSUES. THERE IS NO DOUBT THAT THE REALITY OF PRESSING ECONOMIC HARDSHIP, COUPLED WITH DIFFICULTY IN OBTAINING SERVICES FROM THE PUBLIC SERVICE BODIES DUE TO THE PROTRACTED CLOSURE OF OFFICES THAT RECEIVE THE PUBLIC, WAS THE IMPETUS FOR THE MANY COMPLAINTS FILED DURING THIS PERIOD.

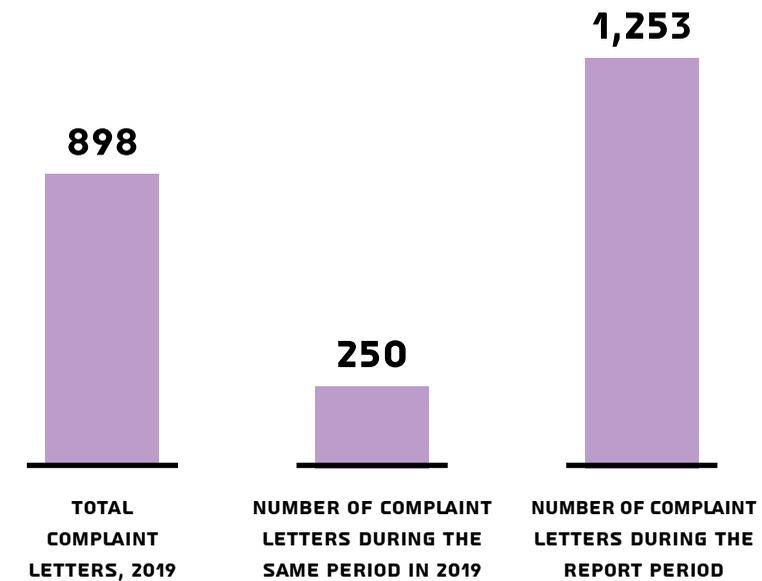
THIS IS CORROBORATED BY THE FACT THAT 1,253 OF THE 4,684 COMPLAINT LETTERS RECEIVED AT THE OFFICE DURING THE REPORT PERIOD WERE AGAINST THE NATIONAL INSURANCE INSTITUTE ON COVID-19 PANDEMIC-RELATED ISSUES.

The five public bodies against which the largest number of complaint letters were submitted during the report period



[5] THIS REPORT MAKES USE OF VARIOUS TERMS (COMPLAINT, COMPLAINT LETTER, BODY SUBJECT OF THE COMPLAINT, JUSTIFIED COMPLAINT ETC.). AN APPENDIX TO THIS DOCUMENT PRESENTS [A GLOSSARY](#), WHICH DEFINES THESE TERMS.

Number of complaint letters on the National Insurance Institute related to the COVID-19 Pandemic, which were submitted during the Report period, compared to the same period last year and compared to all of 2019



FROM THE ABOVE DATA ONE CAN SEE THAT THE LION'S SHARE OF THE COMPLAINT LETTERS RELATING TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC CONCERNED THE NATIONAL INSURANCE INSTITUTE. MOREOVER, THE NUMBER OF COMPLAINT LETTERS RECEIVED ABOUT THE NATIONAL INSURANCE INSTITUTE DURING THE REPORT PERIOD WAS 500% GREATER THAN THE NUMBER OF COMPLAINT LETTERS ABOUT THE NATIONAL INSURANCE INSTITUTE DURING THE SAME PERIOD IN 2019 AND APPROXIMATELY 40% GREATER THAN ALL OF THE COMPLAINT LETTERS RECEIVED ABOUT THE INSTITUTE IN THE YEAR 2019.

THE LARGE NUMBER OF COMPLAINTS AGAINST THE NATIONAL INSURANCE INSTITUTE DEMONSTRATES THAT THE PUBLIC IN ISRAEL, WHICH WAS IN GREATER NEED OF THE INSTITUTE'S SERVICES DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC THAN UNDER NORMAL CIRCUMSTANCES, DID NOT RECEIVE THE SERVICE THEY EXPECTED.

HOWEVER ONE MUST NOT FORGET THAT IN A NORMAL YEAR THE NATIONAL INSURANCE INSTITUTE DEALS WITH APPROXIMATELY 200,000 UNEMPLOYMENT

BENEFIT CLAIMS ANNUALLY, WHILE DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC THE NUMBER OF CLAIMS EXCEEDED ONE MILLION (1,000,000) IN A PERIOD OF JUST A FEW MONTHS.

THE DATA ALSO SHOW THAT RESPECTING OTHER BODIES WHOSE SPHERE OF ACTIVITY IS DIRECTLY RELATED TO THE SOCIAL SAFETY NET, SUCH AS THE EMPLOYMENT SERVICE AND THE TAX AUTHORITY, THE OMBUDSMAN'S OFFICE RECEIVED RELATIVELY FEW COMPLAINTS RELATED TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC - THIS DESPITE THE FACT THAT 1.165 MILLION JOB SEEKERS REGISTERED WITH THE EMPLOYMENT SERVICE BY THE END OF MAY 2020, AND DESPITE SOME 900,000 REQUESTS THAT WERE SUBMITTED BY MID-JUNE 2020 TO THE TAX AUTHORITY BY SELF-EMPLOYED PEOPLE SEEKING GRANTS ISSUED IN STAGES.

SUBJECTS OF THE COMPLAINTS

Main Issues in COVID-19 Pandemic-related complaints



THESE DATA INDICATE THAT THE COMPLAINTS RELATED TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC WERE FOCUSED MAINLY ON ISSUES RELATED TO THE SOCIAL SAFETY NET, INCLUDING BENEFITS THE STATE PROVIDED TO HELP COPE WITH THE CRISIS.

* EXCLUDING COMPLAINTS ABOUT BENEFITS IN WHICH FAULTY SERVICE ISSUES ALSO AROSE

** GRANTS FROM THE TAX AUTHORITY, INCLUDING SUPPORT GRANTS TO SELF-EMPLOYED PEOPLE, REIMBURSEMENTS FROM VARIOUS PUBLIC BODIES AND AUTHORITIES, ETC.

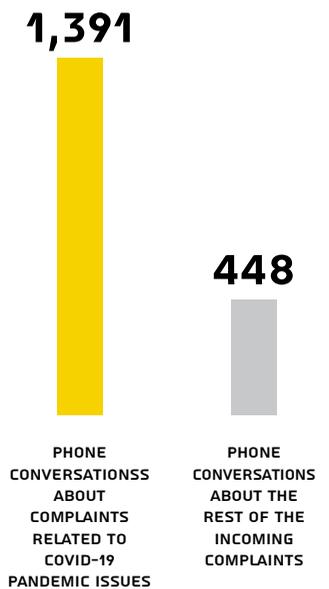
MEANS OF INVESTIGATING COMPLAINTS - TELEPHONIC INQUIRIES

AS DESCRIBED ABOVE, IN ORDER TO PROVIDE COMPLAINANTS WITH QUICK REMEDIES AND IN VIEW OF THE URGENCY OF THE COMPLAINTS, THE OFFICE ALSO ACCEPTED COMPLAINTS SUBMITTED OVER THE PHONE DURING THE REPORT PERIOD. SIMILARLY, THE OFFICE EMPLOYEES HELD MANY PHONE CONVERSATIONS WITH COMPLAINANTS TO INQUIRE ABOUT THEIR COMPLAINTS AND TO PROVIDE THEM WITH INFORMATION OR TO HELP THEM.

TO PROVIDE RAPID RESPONSES TO URGENT COVID-19 PANDEMIC-RELATED COMPLAINTS, GUIDELINES FOR RAPID, EFFICIENT INVESTIGATION OF COMPLAINTS WERE ESTABLISHED, BASED ON DAILY TELEPHONE CONTACT WITH THE RELEVANT PERSONNEL IN THE RESPECTIVE ORGANIZATIONS.

THIS ADJUSTMENT IN THE METHOD OF INVESTIGATING THE COMPLAINTS WAS EXEMPLIFIED IN THE NUMBER OF TELEPHONE CONVERSATIONS THE OFFICE'S EMPLOYEES HELD DURING THE REPORT PERIOD: **1,736** PHONE CALLS WERE HELD WITH COMPLAINANTS CONCERNING COVID-19 PANDEMIC-RELATED COMPLAINTS, COMPARED WITH **1,665** PHONE CALLS WITH COMPLAINANTS CONCERNING COMPLAINTS UNRELATED TO THE PANDEMIC. THIS WAS THE CASE DESPITE THE FACT THAT THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC-RELATED COMPLAINT LETTERS TOTALED 36% OF ALL THE COMPLAINT LETTERS RECEIVED DURING THE REPORT PERIOD.

DURING THE REPORT PERIOD, THE OFFICE EMPLOYEES MADE **1,391** PHONE CALLS TO OFFICIALS IN THE BODIES SUBJECT OF THE COMPLAINTS REGARDING COVID-19 PANDEMIC-RELATED, COMPARED WITH ONLY **448** PHONE CALLS CONCERNING THE REST OF THE COMPLAINTS RECEIVED DURING THE REPORT PERIOD. AS MENTIONED EARLIER, THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC-RELATED COMPLAINT LETTERS TOTALED ONLY 36% OF ALL THE LETTERS OF COMPLAINT RECEIVED BY THE OMBUDSMAN'S OFFICE DURING THE REPORT PERIOD, WHICH IS SIGNIFICANT IN THAT THE NUMBER OF CALLS MADE TO PUBLIC BODIES CONCERNING COVID-19 PANDEMIC-RELATED COMPLAINTS **WAS 5.5 TIMES GREATER THAN THE NUMBER OF CALLS MADE TO BODIES CONCERNING COMPLAINTS UNRELATED TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC**⁶. BY COMPARISON, DURING THE SAME PERIOD LAST YEAR THE OFFICE EMPLOYEES MADE ONLY **397** PHONE CALLS TO BODIES SUBJECT OF THE COMPLAINTS.



[6] DURING THE REPORT PERIOD 4,684 LETTERS OF COMPLAINT WERE RECEIVED, OF WHICH 3,007 LETTERS WERE UNRELATED TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC AND 1,677 WERE ON ISSUES RELATED TO THE PANDEMIC. WHEN WEIGHTING THE COMPLAINT LETTERS WHICH WERE RELATED TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC AND THE COMPLAINT LETTERS WHICH WERE UNRELATED TO IT, THE NUMBER OF PHONE CONVERSATIONS HELD REGARDING PANDEMIC-RELATED COMPLAINT LETTERS WAS 5.5 TIMES GREATER THAN THE NUMBER OF CALLS REGARDING COMPLAINTS UNRELATED TO THE PANDEMIC.

RESULTS OF COMPLAINT INVESTIGATION

73.8% OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC-RELATED COMPLAINTS WHICH THE OFFICE WAS AUTHORIZED BY LAW TO INVESTIGATE AND AS TO WHICH THE INVESTIGATIONS WERE COMPLETED WITHIN THE TIMEFRAME COVERED BY THIS REPORT, WERE FOUND TO BE JUSTIFIED OR WERE BROUGHT TO A RESOLUTION WHILE THE INVESTIGATION WAS UNDERWAY.

Percentage of justified complaints and complaints which were resolved, related to the COVID-19 Pandemic whose investigation ended within the Report period, compared with the percentage in the year 2019



THE DATA CITED ABOVE SHOW THAT THE PERCENTAGE OF COMPLAINTS WHICH WERE CONCLUDED, WHETHER DUE TO THE FACT THAT THE COMPLAINT WAS FOUND JUSTIFIED OR WHETHER BECAUSE THE SUBJECT OF THE COMPLAINT WAS RESOLVED WITHOUT THE NEED FOR A FINDING, WAS 80% HIGHER THAN THE PERCENTAGE OF COMPLAINTS WHOSE INVESTIGATION WAS CONCLUDED FOR THE SAME REASONS IN ALL OF 2019.

IT SHOULD BE NOTED, THAT WHEN INVESTING THE COMPLAINTS DURING THE REPORT PERIOD, THE OMBUDSMAN'S OFFICE FOCUSED ON BRINGING THE COMPLAINANT'S PROBLEM TO A RAPID SOLUTION. THEREFORE, DURING THE REPORT PERIOD, THE PERCENTAGE OF COMPLAINTS CONCLUDING WITH A FINAL RULING AS TO WHETHER OR NOT THE COMPLAINT WAS JUSTIFIED, WAS LOWER THAN THE PERCENTAGE OF SUCH COMPLAINTS DURING NORMAL TIMES - IN 20.4% OF ALL THE COMPLAINTS DURING THE REPORT PERIOD A RULING WAS MADE, COMPARED WITH 35.7% IN 2019. THE PERCENTAGE OF JUSTIFIED COMPLAINTS OUT OF THE TOTAL COMPLAINTS WHERE A DECISION WAS RENDERED ON THE MERITS DURING THE REPORT PERIOD WAS 26.3% COMPARED WITH 35.2% IN THE YEAR 2019. IT MUST BE STRESSED THAT IN CASES WHERE THE COMPLAINT INVESTIGATION UNCOVERED A SYSTEMIC PROBLEM, THE OMBUDSMAN'S OFFICE CONTINUED HANDLING THE ISSUE ALSO DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC.

AS FOR COMPLAINTS AGAINST THE NATIONAL INSURANCE INSTITUTE, WHICH FORMED THE LION'S SHARE OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC-RELATED COMPLAINTS, **81.9%** OF THE COMPLAINTS WHICH THE OFFICE WAS AUTHORIZED BY LAW TO INVESTIGATE AND WHICH WERE CONCLUDED WITHIN THE TIMEFRAME COVERED BY THIS REPORT WERE FOUND TO BE JUSTIFIED OR WERE BROUGHT TO A RESOLUTION WHILE THE INVESTIGATION WAS UNDERWAY, COMPARED WITH **37.5%** IN ALL OF 2019.

IT IS WORTH EMPHASIZING THAT THE PERCENTAGE OF JUSTIFIED COMPLAINTS OUT OF THE TOTAL COMPLAINTS AGAINST THE NATIONAL INSURANCE INSTITUTE AS TO WHICH A FINAL RULING ON THE MERITS WAS RENDERED DURING THE REPORT PERIOD, WAS 30%, COMPARED WITH JUST 18% IN 2019.

BREAKDOWN OF COMPLAINANTS BY CHARACTERISTICS

THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC DID NOT AFFECT EVERYONE EQUALLY. CERTAIN MARKET SECTORS WERE HIT MUCH MORE SEVERELY THAN OTHERS, AS WAS TRUE REGARDING DIFFERENT SECTORS WITHIN THE GENERAL POPULATION. FROM DATA PUBLISHED BY THE MINISTRY OF FINANCE, IT APPEARS THAT THE PERCENTAGE OF TERMINATION OF EMPLOYMENT DUE TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC AMONG WOMEN, OUT OF THE TOTAL NUMBER OF WORKING WOMEN, WAS HIGHER THAN THE PERCENTAGE AMONG WORKING MEN (21% COMPARED WITH 16%). THE MAJORITY OF THE WORKERS WHO LOST THEIR JOBS DUE TO THE CRISIS EARNED LOWER WAGES THAN WORKERS WHOSE EMPLOYMENT WAS NOT TERMINATED (A 38% DIFFERENCE). AS FOR THE UP-TO-NIS 10,000 WAGE BRACKET, 56% OF SUCH WAGE-EARNERS WHOSE EMPLOYMENT WAS TERMINATED DUE TO THE CRISIS WERE WOMEN⁷.

WOMEN'S WAGES IN GENERAL ARE LOWER THAN MEN'S WAGES. LOW-WAGE WORKERS IN THE JOB MARKET WERE HARDER HIT DUE TO THE CRISIS, AND ACCORDINGLY, THE INJURY WAS GREATER TO WOMEN WHOSE WAGES ARE LOW COMPARED WITH MEN.

THE CRISIS-INDUCED HARM TO WOMEN IS ALSO REFLECTED IN THE IDENTITIES OF THE COMPLAINANTS WHO CONTACTED THE OMBUDSMAN DURING THE REPORT PERIOD. AS OPPOSED TO NORMAL TIMES, WHERE OVER THE YEARS THE MAJORITY OF COMPLAINANTS HAVE BEEN MEN, DURING THE CRISIS WOMEN FORMED A CLEAR MAJORITY OF THE COMPLAINANTS.

[7] MINISTRY OF FINANCE, CHIEF ECONOMIST SUB-DIVISION, "CHARACTERISTICS OF FURLOUGHED WORKERS, JUNE 1, 2020".

Breakdown of the Complainants by Gender during the Report period, compared with 2019⁸

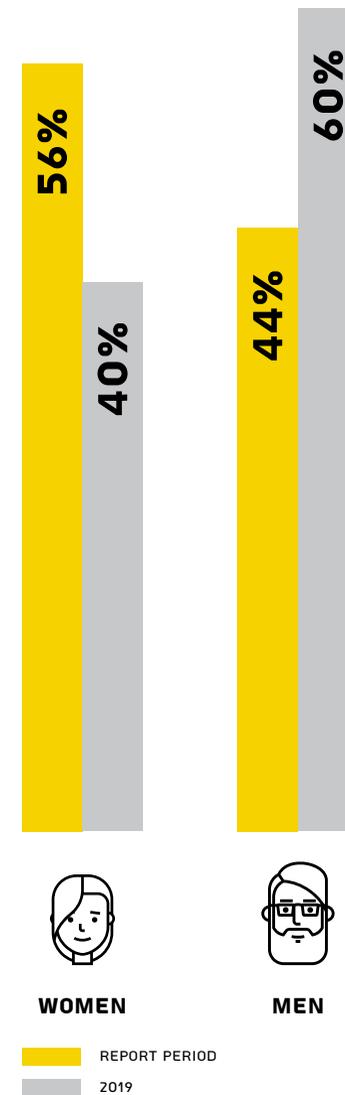
AS CAN BE SEEN FROM THE DATA, THE PERCENTAGE OF COMPLAINTS FROM WOMEN ON CORONAVIRUS-RELATED ISSUES DURING THE REPORT PERIOD WAS GREATER THAN THE PERCENTAGE DURING ORDINARY TIMES (56% COMPARED WITH 44%). DATA FROM RECENT YEARS, INCLUDING DATA FROM 2019, INDICATE A REVERSED TREND: A LOWER PROPORTION OF WOMEN COMPLAINANTS COMPARED WITH MEN (40% COMPARED WITH 60%).

THIS REVERSAL OF THE TREND CAN BE EXPLAINED BY THE FACT THAT THE MAIN SUBJECT OF COMPLAINTS DURING THE REPORT PERIOD CONCERNED BENEFITS, AN ISSUE ABOUT WHICH WOMEN GENERALLY COMPLAIN MORE THAN MEN (FOR EXAMPLE, IN 2019 THE PERCENTAGE OF WOMEN COMPLAINANTS ABOUT BENEFITS WAS 54.7%. THIS TREND INTENSIFIED DURING THE REPORT PERIOD, DURING WHICH THE PERCENTAGE OF WOMEN SUBMITTING COMPLAINTS ABOUT BENEFITS WAS 59.5%).

MOREOVER, FROM DATA PUBLISHED BY THE EMPLOYMENT SERVICE, THE PERCENTAGE OF WOMEN AMONG THOSE REGISTERING AS JOB-SEEKERS UNTIL THE END OF MAY 2020 WAS 55.3%. **IN OTHER WORDS, WOMEN WERE HIT HARDER BY THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC, AND THEREFORE THEY ALSO SUBMITTED MORE COMPLAINTS TO THE OMBUDSMAN.**

Breakdown of the Complaints according to Residential District of Complainant

TO COMPARE THE DISTRICTS, WHICH DIFFER IN SIZE, THE NUMBER OF COMPLAINTS WAS MULTIPLIED BY 100,000 AND THE RESULT WAS DIVIDED BY THE NUMBER OF RESIDENTS IN EACH DISTRICT.

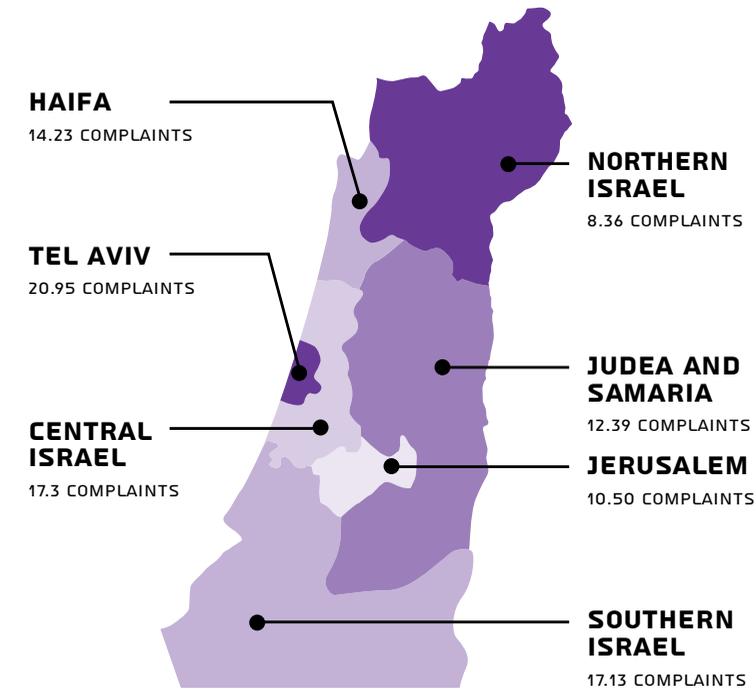


REPORT PERIOD
2019

[8] COMPLAINANTS WHICH ARE NOT CORPORATIONS.

[9] EMPLOYMENT SERVICE, "JOB MARKET PULSE - MAY 2020", PAGE 12.

Number of complaints related to the COVID-19 Pandemic per 100,000 residents, by Ministry of Interior districts



THE DATA INDICATES THAT THE LARGEST NUMBER OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC-RELATED COMPLAINTS PER 100,000 INHABITANTS WAS IN THE TEL AVIV DISTRICT, FOLLOWED BY THE CENTRAL AND SOUTHERN DISTRICTS. THIS IN CONTRAST WITH THE DATA FROM THE YEAR 2019, WHERE THE GREATEST NUMBER OF COMPLAINTS PER 10,000 INHABITANTS WAS IN THE SOUTHERN DISTRICT, FOLLOWED BY THE TEL AVIV DISTRICT¹⁰. IT SHOULD BE NOTED, THAT THE CENTRAL DISTRICT, WHICH WAS SECOND IN THE NUMBER OF CORONAVIRUS-RELATED COMPLAINTS, WAS ONLY IN FOURTH PLACE REGARDING THE NUMBER OF COMPLAINTS PER 10,000 INHABITANTS IN 2019, BEHIND THE SOUTHERN DISTRICT, TEL AVIV AND JUDEA AND SAMARIA.

AS FOR THE HAIFA DISTRICT, IN 2019 THIS DISTRICT WAS IN THE SIXTH PLACE IN TERMS OF THE NUMBER OF COMPLAINTS PER 10,000 INHABITANTS, WHILE DURING THE REPORT PERIOD IT WAS FOURTH IN THE NUMBER OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC-RELATED COMPLAINTS PER 100,000 INHABITANTS. A NOTEWORTHY FACT IS THE LOW NUMBER OF COMPLAINTS IN THE NORTHERN DISTRICT - 8.36 PER 100,000 INHABITANTS - DESPITE THE FACT THAT THE PERCENTAGE OF UNEMPLOYED WOMEN IN THIS DISTRICT HAS CONSISTENTLY BEEN THE HIGHEST IN THE COUNTRY¹¹.

[10] ISRAEL OMBUDSMAN ANNUAL REPORT 46 (2020), PAGE 47. THE ANNUAL REPORT STATED THAT IN 2019 THE NUMBER OF COMPLAINTS PER 10,000 INHABITANTS IN THE SOUTHERN DISTRICT WAS 18.87, IN THE TEL AVIV DISTRICT - 18.24, IN THE JUDEA AND SAMARIA DISTRICT - 16.57, IN THE CENTRAL DISTRICT - 16.34, IN THE HAIFA DISTRICT - 14.19 AND IN THE NORTHERN DISTRICT - 13.13.

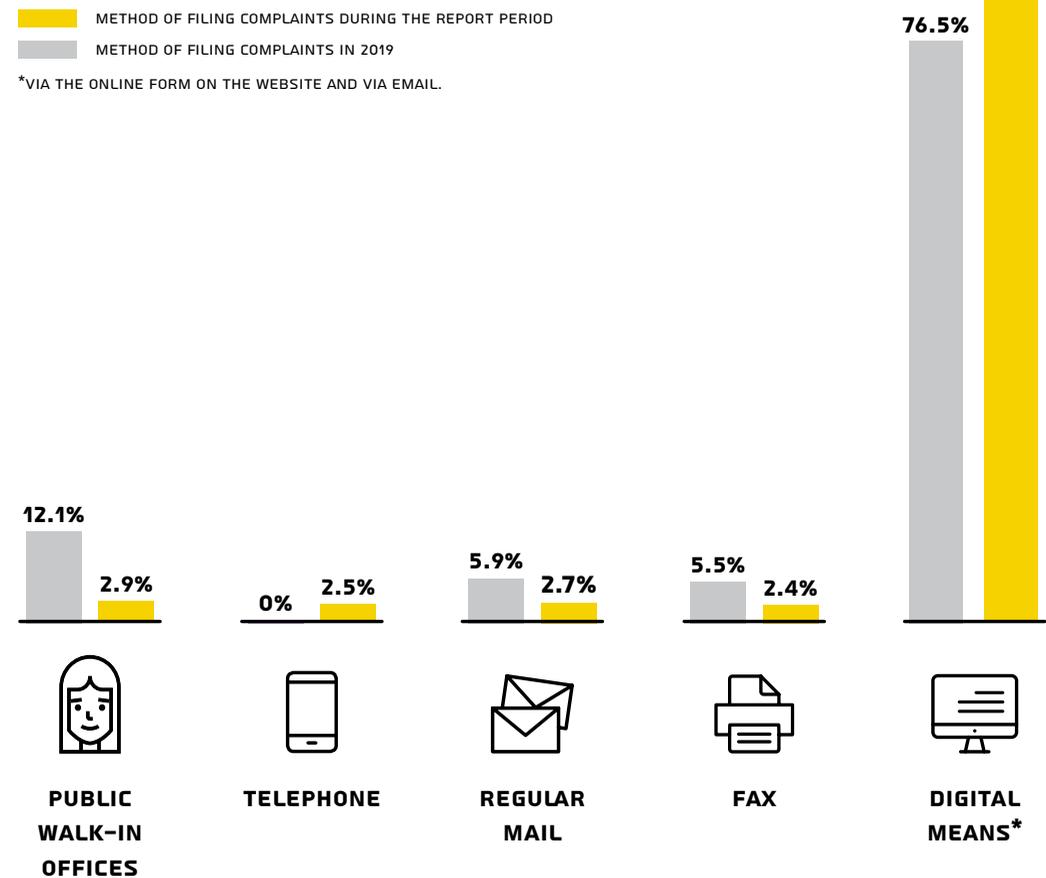
[11] THE GALILEE RESEARCH INSTITUTE, WESTERN GALILEE ACADEMIC COLLEGE, "GALILEE INDEX 2020", PAGES 39 - 42. NUMBER OF COMPLAINTS PER 10,000 INHABITANTS IN THE DISTRICT

HOW COMPLAINTS ARE RECEIVED

AS A RULE, THERE ARE SEVERAL WAYS A COMPLAINT CAN BE FILED WITH THE OFFICE: VIA AN ONLINE FORM ON THE OMBUDSMAN WEBSITE, VIA EMAIL, BY FAX, BY REGULAR MAIL OR IN PERSON AT ONE OF THE BRANCH OFFICES.

MOST COMPLAINTS ARE FILED WITH THE OFFICE DIGITALLY: THE ONLINE FORM ON THE WEBSITE OR EMAIL. FOR EXAMPLE, IN 2019 **76.5%** OF THE TOTAL COMPLAINTS WERE SUBMITTED VIA THE ONLINE FORM OR BY EMAIL, AND DURING THE REPORT PERIOD - **89.5%**.

Breakdown of the Complaints during the Report period according to the way they were submitted, compared with same period last year



AS FOR COMPLAINTS CONCERNING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC, DURING THE REPORT PERIOD, **OVER 97%** WERE FILED VIA THE ONLINE FORM OR BY EMAIL.

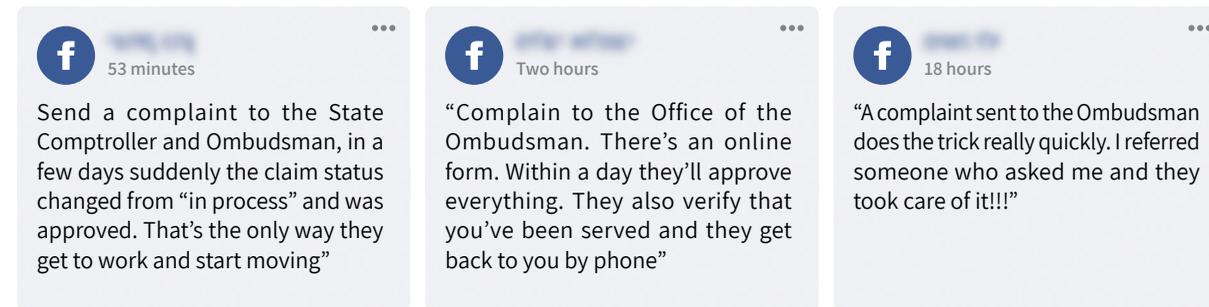
Breakdown of responses from applicants to the Office to the question: "How did you hear about us?"

AS MENTIONED ABOVE, THE OMBUDSMAN'S OFFICE INVESTS CONSIDERABLE EFFORTS TO REACH OUT TO POPULATIONS WHO WERE UNAWARE OF THE POSSIBILITY OF CONTACTING THE OFFICE. AS PART OF THIS DRIVE, THE OFFICE ASKS THOSE WHO CONTACT THE OMBUDSMAN TO STATE HOW THEY HEARD ABOUT THE OFFICE AND THE POSSIBILITY OF MAKING CONTACT. 44% OF THOSE THAT FILED COMPLAINTS WITH THE OFFICE DURING THE REPORT PERIOD ON ISSUES RELATED TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC STATED HOW THEY HEARD ABOUT THE OFFICE. THIS IS THE BREAKDOWN OF THEIR ANSWERS:

| | |
|---|-------|
| SOCIAL MEDIA | 35% |
| HEARD ABOUT IT FROM A FRIEND | 26.8% |
| INTERNET ADVERTISING | 20% |
| TELEVISION | 3.5% |
| RADIO | 2.3% |
| ANOTHER INSTITUTION SUGGESTED THEY CONTACT THE OFFICE | 1.7% |
| OUTREACH LEAFLET FROM THE OFFICE | 1.1% |
| LECTURE BY AN OFFICE REPRESENTATIVE | 0.8% |
| OTHER | 8.8% |

IN RECENT YEARS, SOCIAL MEDIA HAVE COME TO OCCUPY AN EVER-MORE CENTRAL ROLE IN DISSEMINATION AND SHARING OF INFORMATION AMONG PEOPLE. THE ABOVE NUMBERS REFLECT THIS TREND, AS 35% OF THE COMPLAINANTS DURING THE REPORT PERIOD LEARNED OF THE POSSIBILITY TO CONTACT THE OMBUDSMAN'S OFFICE THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA. THE DIFFERENT GROUPS ON SOCIAL MEDIA, WHICH WERE ESTABLISHED TO CONNECT PEOPLE DEALING WITH SIMILAR COVID-19 PANDEMIC-RELATED PROBLEMS, GENERATED A CONSIDERABLE BUZZ AROUND THE OFFICE'S WORK. COMPLAINANTS WHO WERE MEMBERS OF THESE GROUPS AND WHOSE COMPLAINTS TO THE OMBUDSMAN HAD BEEN HANDLED QUICKLY AND EFFECTIVELY, RECOMMENDED THE OTHER MEMBERS OF THE GROUP WHO WERE DEALING WITH SIMILAR PROBLEMS TO CONTACT THE OFFICE.

FOLLOWING IS A SAMPLE OF MEMBERS' COMMENTS IN GROUPS WHICH DEALT WITH FILING CLAIMS WITH THE NATIONAL INSURANCE INSTITUTE DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC DAYS:



IN COMPARISON, ONLY 7.4% OF ALL COMPLAINANTS TO THE OFFICE¹² DURING THE FIRST QUARTER OF 2020 SAID, IN RESPONSE TO THE QUESTION "HOW DID YOU HEAR ABOUT US?" THAT THEY HEARD ABOUT THE OMBUDSMAN ON SOCIAL MEDIA. THIS PHENOMENON POINTS TO INCREASED USE OF THIS TOOL AMONG THE GENERAL PUBLIC, AND IT IS WORTH CONSIDERING THE POSSIBILITY OF COMMUNICATING MESSAGES TO THE PUBLIC THROUGH THESE NETWORKS IN EMERGENCIES AND DURING NORMAL TIMES.

IT MUST BE NOTED THAT 42.2% OF THE COMPLAINANTS AGAINST THE NATIONAL INSURANCE INSTITUTE ON CORONAVIRUS-RELATED ISSUES DURING THE REPORT PERIOD WHO PROVIDED INFORMATION ON HOW THEY HEARD ABOUT THE OMBUDSMAN'S OFFICE, STATED THAT THEY LEARNED ABOUT THE OFFICE VIA NETWORKING ON SOCIAL MEDIA.

AS MENTIONED EARLIER, MANY OF THE COMPLAINTS RELATED TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC WERE ABOUT THE NATIONAL INSURANCE INSTITUTE. COMPLAINTS ABOUT OTHER BODIES, WHICH WERE AT THE FOREFRONT OF THE FINANCIAL AID TO PEOPLE AFFECTED BY THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC, SUCH AS THE TAX AUTHORITY AND THE EMPLOYMENT SERVICE, WERE SUBSTANTIALLY FEWER IN NUMBER THAN THE COMPLAINTS ABOUT THE NATIONAL INSURANCE INSTITUTE. ONE POSSIBLE REASON FOR THE SIGNIFICANT INCREASE IN THE NUMBER OF COMPLAINTS ABOUT THE NATIONAL INSURANCE INSTITUTE IS THE BROAD EXPOSURE THE OFFICE HAD IN SOCIAL MEDIA GROUPS WHICH DEALT WITH ISSUES RELATED TO THE INSTITUTE. FOR EXAMPLE, MEMBERS OF SOCIAL NETWORK GROUPS WHICH DEALT WITH JOB-SEEKERS' ISSUES WHO HAD SUBMITTED UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFIT CLAIMS TO THE NATIONAL INSURANCE INSTITUTE, DESCRIBED THE

ASSISTANCE THEY WERE GIVEN BY THE OFFICE AND ENCOURAGED THE REST OF THE GROUP MEMBERS TO SEEK IT AS WELL. NOTWITHSTANDING THE ABOVE, THERE MAY BE OTHER REASONS FOR THE INCREASE IN COMPLAINTS AGAINST THE NATIONAL INSURANCE INSTITUTE RELATIVE TO OTHER BODIES: FOR EXAMPLE DIFFERENCES IN THE WORK PROCESSES IN THE NATIONAL INSURANCE INSTITUTE COMPARED WITH THE WORK PROCESSES IN THE OTHER BODIES WHICH INFLUENCED THE NUMBER OF COMPLAINTS, THE COMPLEXITY OF THE REQUESTS SUBMITTED TO THE NATIONAL INSURANCE INSTITUTE, AND THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE NATIONAL INSURANCE INSTITUTE AND THE OTHER BODIES IN MATTERS RELATED TO THE WAY THE UPSURGE IN APPLICATIONS WERE HANDLED. THESE ISSUES, AND OTHERS, ARE CURRENTLY BEING MONITORED AND ARE UNDER EXAMINATION BY THE OFFICE OF THE OMBUDSMAN AND THE AUDIT DEPARTMENTS OF THE STATE COMPTROLLER'S OFFICE. WE WISH TO EMPHASIZE THAT THIS REPORT REFLECTS ONLY THE PRELIMINARY STATUS REGARDING THE FIRST WAVE OF THE PANDEMIC AND WE WILL NEED TO REEXAMINE THE SITUATION LATER ON FROM A BROADER PERSPECTIVE - TO SEE WHETHER THE RISE IN THE NUMBER OF COMPLAINTS AGAINST THE NATIONAL INSURANCE INSTITUTE, AS DESCRIBED IN THE REPORT, REFLECTS A CONTINUING TREND, OR WHETHER IT REFLECTS THE REACTION OF THE POPULATION TO THE SERVICE THEY RECEIVED DURING THE FIRST WAVE ONLY, WHEREAS LATER ON THIS TREND MIGHT CHANGE.

[12] COMPLAINANTS THAT ANSWERED THE QUESTION. THE PERCENTAGE OF COMPLAINANTS THAT ANSWERED THE QUESTION DURING THIS QUARTER OUT OF THE TOTAL COMPLAINANTS WAS 35.3%.

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SELECTED COMPLAINTS

The National Insurance Institute

Israel Employment Service

Israel Tax Authority

Complaints on Health Services

Education-Related Complaints

Welfare Issues in the Local Authorities

Public Housing

Entering and Exiting the Country -
Population and Immigration Authority

Israel Prison Service

Postal Services -
Israel Postal Company Ltd.

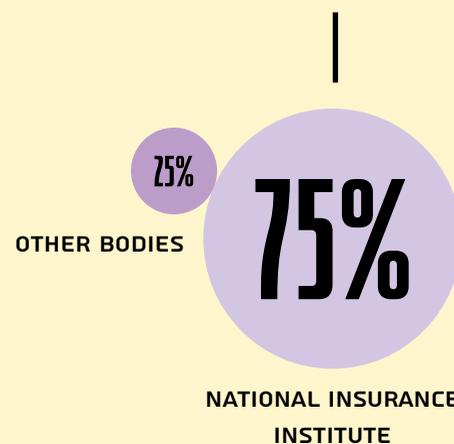


THE NATIONAL

INSURANCE

INSTITUTE

COMPLAINT LETTERS REGARDING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC



1,253

COMPLAINT
LETTERS



COMPARED WITH THE SAME
PERIOD IN 2019

ONE OF THE CONSEQUENCES OF THE SWEEPING RESTRICTIONS IMPOSED ON THE ECONOMY IN ISRAEL DUE TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC WAS THAT FROM MARCH 2020 HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS OF WORKERS WERE LAID OFF OR SENT ON FURLOUGH. ACCORDING TO THE EMPLOYMENT SERVICE, BY THE END OF MAY 2020 THE TOTAL NUMBER OF PEOPLE SEEKING EMPLOYMENT WAS 1.165 MILLION¹³. ABOUT ONE MILLION PEOPLE FILED UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFIT CLAIMS WITH THE NATIONAL INSURANCE INSTITUTE.

UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS ARE PRESCRIBED BY THE NATIONAL INSURANCE LAW [CONSOLIDATED VERSION], 5755-1995 (NATIONAL INSURANCE LAW) AND BY THE REGULATIONS ENACTED PURSUANT TO THE LAW. IN ORDER TO ASSIST THE WORKERS WHO HAD CEASED TO BE EMPLOYED, THE GOVERNMENT DECIDED TO RELAX THE CONDITIONS FOR RECEIVING UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS. TO FACILITATE THIS, THE NATIONAL INSURANCE LAW WAS AMENDED BY EMERGENCY REGULATIONS, AND TEMPORARY PROVISIONS WERE ENACTED, WHICH MADE IT EASIER FOR EMPLOYEES WHO WERE FORCED TO CEASE WORKING DUE TO THE CRISIS TO RECEIVE UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS¹⁴. FOR EXAMPLE, THE QUALIFICATION PERIOD FOR UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS WAS SHORTENED FROM 12 MONTHS TO 6 MONTHS, AND THE PERIOD OF ENTITLEMENT TO UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS WAS EXTENDED. IN ADDITION, WORKERS ABOVE AGE 67¹⁵ WHO HAD BEEN OUT OF WORK FOR AT LEAST 30 DAYS FROM MARCH 2020 BECAME ELIGIBLE FOR A SPECIAL ACCOMMODATION GRANT SUBJECT TO CERTAIN CONDITIONS. THESE EMERGENCY REGULATIONS FURTHER PROVIDE THAT A JOB SEEKER WHO HAS FILED AN UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS CLAIM WILL RECEIVE AN ADVANCE PAYMENT OF UP TO NIS 2,000 FOR MARCH 2020, EVEN BEFORE THE CLAIM PROCESSING HAS BEEN COMPLETED.

WHOEVER FILED A CLAIM FOR UNEMPLOYMENT WAS REQUIRED TO PRESENT VARIOUS DOCUMENTS SUPPORTING THE CLAIM AND TO FULFILL THE CONDITIONS SET FORTH IN THE NATIONAL INSURANCE LAW.

THE NEED TO DEAL WITH THE HUGE NUMBER OF CLAIMS PLACED AN INORDINATE BURDEN ON THE NATIONAL INSURANCE INSTITUTE, MAKING IT THE FOCUS OF FRICTION BETWEEN THE INDIVIDUAL CITIZEN AND THE AUTHORITIES. THIS IS SUBSTANTIATED BY THE FACT, AMONG OTHER THINGS, THAT THE LION'S SHARE OF THE COMPLAINT LETTERS (1,253 OF 1,677 LETTERS) WHICH THE OMBUDSMAN RECEIVED DURING THE REPORT PERIOD CONCERNING ISSUES RELATED TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC WERE AGAINST THE NATIONAL INSURANCE INSTITUTE. 93.6% OF THE COMPLAINTS AGAINST THE NATIONAL INSURANCE INSTITUTE, WHICH WERE RELATED TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC WERE ABOUT BENEFITS, AND 97% OF THE COMPLAINTS ABOUT BENEFITS WERE ABOUT UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS.

[13] SEE "JOB MARKET PULSE: MONTHLY PUBLICATION, MAY 2020": [HTTPS://WWW.TAASUKA.GOV.IL/HE/INFOANDPUBLICATIONS/IESFILESMANAGERREPORTSLIST/PIRSUMHODSHIO520.PDF](https://www.taasuka.gov.il/he/infoandpublications/iesfilesmanagerreportslist/pirsumhodshio520.pdf).

[14] THESE LENIENCIES AND OTHER RELAXATION OF CRITERIA WERE INCLUDED, AMONG OTHER THINGS, IN EMERGENCY REGULATIONS (NEW CORONAVIRUS) (SPECIAL INSTRUCTIONS REGARDING UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE), 5780-2020.

[15] WHO ARE NOT ENTITLED TO UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS DUE TO THEIR AGE.

Main sub-topics of complaints regarding unemployment benefits



AS CAN BE SEEN FROM THE CHART, 41.2% OF ALL COMPLAINTS CONCERNING UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS WERE ABOUT DELAYS IN PROCESSING CLAIMS, CAUSING COMPLAINANTS NOT TO RECEIVE THE UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS THEY THOUGHT THEY WERE ENTITLED TO; AND 25.3% OF ALL COMPLAINTS ON THIS ISSUE DEALT WITH THE VERY RECOGNITION OF THE ENTITLEMENT TO UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS.

IN COMPARISON, DURING THE SAME PERIOD IN 2019, THE OFFICE RECEIVED 120 COMPLAINTS AGAINST THE NATIONAL INSURANCE INSTITUTE REGARDING BENEFITS, OF WHICH ONLY 4.2% WERE ABOUT UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS.

IT SHOULD BE NOTED, THAT IN MANY CASES THE COMPLAINANTS WERE NOT AWARE, AT THE TIME THEY FILED THEIR COMPLAINTS TO THE OFFICE, WHAT THE PRECISE REASON WAS FOR THE FAILURE TO APPROVE THEIR CLAIM OR TO RECEIVE THE PAYMENTS TO WHICH THEY BELIEVED THEY WERE ENTITLED. ONLY DURING THE INVESTIGATION AND AFTER RECEIVING THE RESPONSE FROM THE NATIONAL INSURANCE INSTITUTE WERE THE COMPLAINT INVESTIGATORS ABLE TO PINPOINT THE SUBJECT OF THE COMPLAINT.

SINCE MANY COMPLAINANTS CLAIMED THAT DUE TO THE DELAY IN RECEIVING THEIR UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS THEY WERE EXPERIENCING ACUTE FINANCIAL DISTRESS, THE COMPLAINTS WERE INVESTIGATED THROUGH AN EXPEDITED, SHORTENED PROCESS ADAPTED TO THE EMERGENCY CONDITIONS. MOST OF THE COMMUNICATION WITH THE COMPLAINANTS - RECEIPT OF INFORMATION

AND CLARIFICATIONS AND ALSO NOTIFICATION OF THE OUTCOMES OF THE INVESTIGATION - WAS DONE BY TELEPHONE, AND LIKEWISE COMMUNICATION WITH THE NATIONAL INSURANCE INSTITUTE WAS BY PHONE. WITH RESPECT TO COMMUNICATION WITH THE NATIONAL INSURANCE INSTITUTE, THE OMBUDSMAN'S OFFICE TOOK INTO CAREFUL CONSIDERATION THE EXTREME PRESSURE THE INSTITUTE EMPLOYEES WERE EXPERIENCING AND THE NEED TO AVOID DISRUPTING THEIR WORK ROUTINES.

THIS APPROACH OF ADAPTING THE MODE OF INVESTIGATION TO THE TIMES AND PROVIDING RAPID REMEDIES TO THE COMPLAINANT IS ALSO REFLECTED IN THE FACT THAT 81.9% OF THE COMPLAINTS AGAINST THE NATIONAL INSURANCE INSTITUTE REACHED THEIR RESOLUTION DUE TO THE INTERVENTION OF THE OMBUDSMAN'S OFFICE. THIS PERCENTAGE IS SUBSTANTIALLY HIGHER THAN THE PERCENTAGE FOR THE YEAR 2019, WHICH WAS ONLY 41%.

THE EMOTIONAL THANK-YOU LETTERS RECEIVED IN THE OFFICE TESTIFY TO THE HIGH QUALITY OF SERVICE DELIVERED TO THE PEOPLE WHO CONTACTED THE OFFICE AND TO THE OFFICE'S UNSTINTING AVAILABILITY TO PEOPLE AFFECTED BY THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC.

THROUGHOUT THE ENTIRE PERIOD, THE OFFICE'S EMPLOYEES MAINTAINED ONGOING CONTACT WITH THE NATIONAL INSURANCE INSTITUTE, RESULTING IN THE ESTABLISHMENT OF SPECIAL MECHANISMS FOR COMPLAINT INVESTIGATION OVER THE PHONE, ON A DAILY BASIS, WITH THE RELEVANT REPRESENTATIVES AT THE NATIONAL INSURANCE INSTITUTE HEADQUARTERS. THESE SPECIAL MECHANISMS YIELDED QUICK SOLUTIONS AND REDUCED TO THE MINIMUM POSSIBLE THE TURNAROUND TIME FROM THE MOMENT THE COMPLAINT ARRIVED AT THE OMBUDSMAN'S OFFICE UNTIL THE FULL RESOLUTION OF THE COMPLAINANT'S ISSUE.

DUE TO THE ADAPTATION OF THE OFFICE'S METHOD OF INVESTIGATION TO ACCOMMODATE THE UNUSUAL CIRCUMSTANCES, IN MANY CASES THE COMPLAINTS WERE RESOLVED WITHIN A MATTER OF DAYS, AND SOMETIMES EVEN ON THE SAME DAY THE COMPLAINT WAS FILED.

FOLLOWING ARE DESCRIPTIONS OF A SAMPLE OF COMPLAINTS CONCERNING UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS:

Complaints regarding delay in the handling of unemployment benefit claims

A CONSIDERABLE PROPORTION OF THE COMPLAINTS WERE REGARDING THE DELAYS IN HANDLING OF UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFIT CLAIMS. MANY COMPLAINANTS CLAIMED THAT DUE TO THE DELAY AND IN THE ABSENCE OF ALTERNATIVE SOURCES OF INCOME, THEIR ECONOMIC SITUATION HAD SEVERELY DETERIORATED.

FOLLOWING IS A DESCRIPTION OF A COMPLAINT ON THIS ISSUE:

The details were not inputted, unemployment benefits were paid retroactively



THE COMPLAINT

A COMPLAINANT WAS SENT ON FURLOUGH IN MARCH 2020, BUT BY THE LATTER PART OF MAY 2020, WHEN HE SUBMITTED A COMPLAINT, HE HAD NOT YET RECEIVED UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS FOR MARCH AND APRIL, WITH THE EXCEPTION OF NIS 2,000 WHICH WERE PAID IN ADVANCE .



THE INVESTIGATION

THE OMBUDSMAN'S OFFICE FOUND THAT EVEN THOUGH THE COMPLAINANT HAD PROVIDED ALL OF THE DATA REQUIRED, THE CLAIM WAS NOT PROCESSED FULLY SINCE FOR SOME INEXPLICABLE REASON, THERE WAS AN INCOMPLETE INTAKE OF THE DATA REGARDING THE QUALIFICATION PERIOD, WHICH IS ONE OF THE PREREQUISITES FOR RECEIVING UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS. THE OFFICE CONTACTED THE NATIONAL INSURANCE INSTITUTE, WHICH RESUMED THE PROCESSING OF THE CLAIM AND FOUND THAT THE QUALIFICATION PERIOD HAD BEEN COMPLETED IN FULL.



THE OUTCOME

FOLLOWING THE OFFICE'S INTERVENTION, THE PROCESSING OF THE COMPLAINANT'S CLAIM WAS COMPLETED, AND WITHIN ABOUT A WEEK AFTER THE OMBUDSMAN'S OFFICE COMMENCED INVESTIGATION, THE BALANCE OF

THE UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS WAS PAID TO THE COMPLAINANT - A TOTAL OF APPROXIMATELY NIS 1,880.

(1095133)

The Call Center

IN MOST COMPLAINTS RECEIVED AT THE OFFICE DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC, THE COMPLAINANTS COMPLAINED ABOUT DIFFICULTY IN MAKING CONTACT WITH THE NATIONAL INSURANCE INSTITUTE'S CALL CENTERS. THE COMPLAINANTS STATED THAT MANY CALLS TO THE CALL CENTER WERE LEFT UNANSWERED; THAT CALLS GOT CUT OFF WITHOUT THE CALL CENTER OPERATORS RETURNING THE CALLS; AND CALLS TO THE CALL CENTER OR ONLINE INQUIRIES VIA THE NATIONAL INSURANCE INSTITUTE'S WEBSITE WERE NOT DEALT WITH PROPERLY OR AT ALL.

THE OMBUDSMAN'S OFFICE PRESENTED TO THE NATIONAL INSURANCE INSTITUTE THE OBSTACLES THE COMPLAINANTS EXPERIENCED IN GETTING REASONABLE SERVICE FROM THE CALL CENTERS. THE NATIONAL INSURANCE INSTITUTE SAID IN RESPONSE THAT THEY WERE AWARE OF THE PROBLEM, THEY ACKNOWLEDGED THE DIFFICULTIES IN MAKING CONTACT WITH THEM VIA THE VARIOUS CHANNELS AND THEY WERE WORKING TO REMEDY THE SITUATION. ACCORDING TO THE NATIONAL INSURANCE INSTITUTE, THE EMPLOYEES WHO HANDLE THESE CLAIMS AT THE BRANCH OFFICES ARE REQUIRED TO DEAL WITH HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS OF UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFIT CLAIMS, AND DESPITE THEIR BEST EFFORTS AND THE ASSISTANCE THEY HAVE BEEN RECEIVING, THE ONUS IS CAUSING DELAYS IN HANDLING THE CLAIMS.

IT SHOULD BE NOTED THAT AT THE START OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC, THE NATIONAL INSURANCE INSTITUTE INFORMED THE OFFICE THAT ACCORDING TO THE MINISTRY OF HEALTH'S INSTRUCTIONS, THE NUMBER OF WORKERS AT THE SERVICE CENTERS MUST BE REDUCED TO AVOID CROWDING. THIS REDUCTION OF MANPOWER ON THE ONE HAND, AND THE SHARP INCREASE IN THE NUMBER OF CLAIMS ON THE OTHER, MEANT THAT THE NATIONAL INSURANCE INSTITUTE'S SERVICE CENTERS WERE TREMENDOUSLY OVERLOADED.

ACCORDINGLY, AND IN ORDER TO COPE WITH THE UNFORESEEN CIRCUMSTANCES, THE NATIONAL INSURANCE INSTITUTE INFORMED THE OFFICE AFTER AWHILE, THAT THEY HAD DOUBLED THE NUMBER OF THEIR REPRESENTATIVES AT

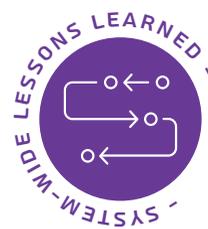


THE SERVICE CENTERS, BUT THAT DUE TO THE MANY CLAIMS THERE WERE STILL CASES WHERE THE CLAIMANTS DID NOT RECEIVE PROPER SERVICE.

THE INABILITY TO ADDRESS SUCH A LARGE NUMBER OF CITIZENS WHO FOUND THEMSELVES IN A CRISIS SITUATION REQUIRES, IN THE OMBUDSMAN'S OPINION, A REVIEW OF WORKING METHODS DURING TIMES OF EMERGENCY, INCLUDING CONSIDERING EXPANDING THE POSSIBILITY OF PAYING ADVANCES ON UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS EVEN BEFORE THE EXAMINATION OF ALL THE CLAIM DOCUMENTS HAS BEEN COMPLETED.

Malfunctions in the National Insurance Institute's computer systems

THE INVESTIGATIONS OF THE COMPLAINTS REVEALED THAT IN SOME CASES THE UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS TO WHICH THE COMPLAINANTS WERE ENTITLED HAD BEEN WRONGLY CALCULATED DUE TO VARIOUS MALFUNCTIONS IN THE COMPUTER SYSTEMS AT THE NATIONAL INSURANCE INSTITUTE. IN OTHER CASES, THE NATIONAL INSURANCE INSTITUTE WEBSITE PREVENTED FILING OF A NEW CLAIM FROM JOB SEEKERS WHOSE YEAR OF UNEMPLOYMENT HAD NOT YET EXPIRED DUE TO A PREVIOUS CLAIM. FOLLOWING ARE A FEW EXAMPLES OF SUCH COMPLAINTS:



She went back to work after having been put on furlough and did not receive the unemployment benefits she was entitled to



THE COMPLAINT

THE COMPLAINANT WAS EMPLOYED IN TWO DIFFERENT WORKPLACES AND WAS PUT ON FURLOUGH FROM BOTH PLACES ALREADY IN MARCH 2020. HOWEVER BY MAY 2020, AT THE TIME SHE FILED HER COMPLAINT, SHE HAD NOT RECEIVED

THE UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS DUE TO HER, WITH THE EXCEPTION OF A NIS 2,000 ADVANCE PAYMENT.



THE INVESTIGATION

IT WAS FOUND THAT ON APRIL 7, 2020 THE COMPLAINANT HAD RECEIVED THE ADVANCE PAYMENT. HOWEVER, SINCE IN MAY 2020 THE COMPLAINANT REPORTED THAT SHE HAD GONE BACK TO WORK AT ONE OF HER PLACES OF EMPLOYMENT, THE NATIONAL INSURANCE INSTITUTE'S COMPUTING SYSTEM DID NOT RECEIVE AN ORDER TO PAY UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS FOR THE MONTH OF APRIL.

THE NATIONAL INSURANCE INSTITUTE INFORMED THE OFFICE THAT THIS WAS A SYSTEMIC MALFUNCTION IN THE COMPUTER SYSTEM, IN WHICH EMPLOYEES WHO REPORTED THAT THEY HAD RESUMED FULL-TIME OR PART-TIME EMPLOYMENT, WERE NOT PAID UNEMPLOYMENT FOR THE PERIOD PRECEDING THEIR RETURN TO WORK.



THE OUTCOME

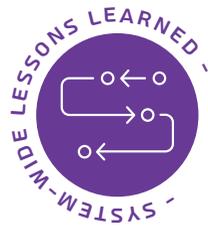
SUBSEQUENTLY, THE NATIONAL INSURANCE INSTITUTE INFORMED THE OMBUDSMAN'S OFFICE THAT THE MALFUNCTION HAD BEEN FIXED AND THAT REPORTS OF RESUMING WORK NO LONGER CAUSED DELAYS IN PAYMENT OF UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS TO WHICH THE CLAIMANT WAS ENTITLED FOR PRECEDING PERIODS.

THE OFFICE VERIFIED THAT THE NATIONAL INSURANCE INSTITUTE HAD MADE FULL PAYMENT OF THE UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS DUE TO THE COMPLAINANT AND ALSO TO OTHER COMPLAINANTS WHO WERE VICTIMS OF THIS MALFUNCTION.

(1094722)



The inability to address such a large number of citizens who found themselves in a crisis situation requires, in the Ombudsman's opinion, a review of working methods during times of emergency



Robot Error Brought the Claim to a Halt



THE COMPLAINT

A COMPLAINANT WHO WAS SENT ON FURLOUGH FILED AN UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS CLAIM IN MARCH 2020. HOWEVER BY THE TIME THE COMPLAINT WAS FILED, IN MAY 2020, SHE HAD NOT RECEIVED THE UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS SHE WAS ENTITLED TO, WITH THE EXCEPTION OF A NIS 2,000 ADVANCE PAYMENT.



THE INVESTIGATION

THE INVESTIGATION REVEALED THAT THE COMPLAINANT'S UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS CLAIM HAD BEEN HANDLED BY A DIGITAL ROBOT THAT HAD INPUT THE CLAIM DATA IN THE COMPUTER SYSTEM OF THE NATIONAL INSURANCE INSTITUTE.

IT WAS FOUND THAT IN CASES WHERE ANY ITEM OF REQUIRED DATA WAS MISSING ON THE FORM, THE DIGITAL ROBOT STOPPED THE PROCESSING OF THE CLAIM WITHOUT SENDING AN ALERT TO A HUMAN RESPONDER FOR FURTHER HANDLING. THIS FLAW IN THE PROGRAMMING AFFECTED MANY CLAIMANTS, INCLUDING THE COMPLAINANT.



THE OUTCOME

THE OMBUDSMAN'S OFFICE MONITORED THE RECTIFICATION OF THE DEFECT AT THE NATIONAL INSURANCE INSTITUTE. SUBSEQUENTLY, THE NATIONAL INSURANCE INSTITUTE INFORMED THE OMBUDSMAN'S OFFICE THAT ALL OF THE CLAIMS WHOSE PROCESSING HAD BEEN DELAYED DUE TO THE DIGITAL



Subsequently the National Insurance Institute informed the Ombudsman's Office that all of the claims whose processing had been delayed due to the digital robot - had been resolved, and that the claimants, including the complainant, had received their unemployment benefits

ROBOT - HAD BEEN RESOLVED, AND THAT THE CLAIMANTS, INCLUDING THE COMPLAINANT, HAD RECEIVED THEIR UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS.

(1095376)



A Prior Claim Prevented Filing of a New claim



THE COMPLAINT

A MOTHER OF FOUR WAS PUT ON FURLOUGH IN MARCH 2020 DUE TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC. SHE CLAIMED THAT SHE HAD RECEIVED UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS FOR MARCH, BUT THAT THE BENEFITS FOR APRIL AND MAY 2020 WERE NOT PAID, EVEN THOUGH, ACCORDING TO HER, THE NATIONAL INSURANCE INSTITUTE'S SERVICE REPRESENTATIVES WITH WHOM SHE HAD SPOKEN HAD INFORMED HER THAT HER CLAIM HAD BEEN APPROVED.



THE INVESTIGATION

THE INVESTIGATION REVEALED THAT IN APRIL 2019 THE COMPLAINANT HAD SUBMITTED A PREVIOUS CLAIM FOR UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS. ON THE BASIS OF THE PREVIOUS CLAIM, THE COMPLAINANT WAS ENTITLED TO 12 MONTHS OF UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS FROM THE DATE THE CLAIM HAD BEEN FILED, UNTIL MARCH 2020¹⁶, WITHOUT HAVING TO PROVE A QUALIFICATION PERIOD. THE UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS FOR MARCH 2020 WERE PAID BASED ON THE CLAIM SHE HAD FILED A YEAR EARLIER. SINCE HER YEAR OF UNEMPLOYMENT

[16] ACCORDING TO CLAUSE 161(E) OF THE NATIONAL INSURANCE LAW, AN INSURED INDIVIDUAL IS ENTITLED TO CLAIM UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS FOR 12 MONTHS FROM THE DAY THE INITIAL CLAIM HAS BEEN FILED. DURING THESE 12 MONTHS, THE INDIVIDUAL DOES NOT HAVE TO PROVE THAT HE OR SHE HAS MET THE QUALIFICATION PERIOD REQUIREMENT EACH TIME THEY SUBMIT A NEW CLAIM. TO RECEIVE UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS AFTER ONE YEAR HAS ELAPSED FROM THE DATE OF FILING THE INITIAL CLAIM, THE INSURED HAS TO FILE A NEW CLAIM.

HAD COME TO AN END, SHE HAD TO FILE A NEW CLAIM IN APRIL 2020 IN ORDER TO CONTINUE TO RECEIVE THE UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS.

THE OFFICE NOTIFIED THE COMPLAINANT THAT SHE HAS TO FILE A NEW CLAIM; HOWEVER SHE RESPONDED THAT SHE HAD TRIED TO DO THIS SEVERAL TIMES WITHOUT SUCCESS. UPON EXAMINATION IT WAS FOUND THAT THE NATIONAL INSURANCE INSTITUTE'S COMPUTER SYSTEM DID NOT ALLOW THE COMPLAINANT TO ENTER THE DATE OF MARCH 2020 AS THE START DATE FOR THE CLAIM IN THE ONLINE CLAIM FORM, SINCE THIS MONTH STILL FELL UNDER THE PERIOD OF THE PREVIOUS CLAIM. TO OVERCOME THE PROBLEM, THE NATIONAL INSURANCE INSTITUTE INSTRUCTED THE COMPLAINANT TO ENTER A START DATE IN HER NEW CLAIM, WHICH FALLS AFTER THE EXPIRY OF THE PREVIOUS CLAIM [FROM APRIL 1, 2020].



THE OUTCOME

THE COMPLAINANT ENTERED A CLAIM DATE AS INSTRUCTED BY THE NATIONAL INSURANCE INSTITUTE AND HER CLAIM WAS ACCEPTED AND HANDLED.

AT THE SAME TIME, THE OFFICE POINTED OUT TO THE NATIONAL INSURANCE INSTITUTE THE NEED TO TAKE MEASURES TO PREVENT A SITUATION IN WHICH A PERSON IS UNABLE TO FILE AN ONLINE CLAIM FOR UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS AND NEITHER THE SYSTEM NOR THE CALL CENTER REPRESENTATIVES CAN PROVIDE THE CLAIMANT WITH AN EXPLANATION.

THE NATIONAL INSURANCE INSTITUTE SAID IN RESPONSE THAT THEY ACCEPT THE POINT MADE BY THE OMBUDSMAN'S OFFICE'S POINT AND ARE WORKING TO RECTIFY THE PROBLEM.

(1096173)



Following the intervention of the Ombudsman's Office on this issue, the National Insurance Institute revisited the matter and recognized resignation in order to protect at-risk family members as dismissals entitling the claimant to immediate unemployment benefits

Recognition of Entitlement to Unemployment Benefits

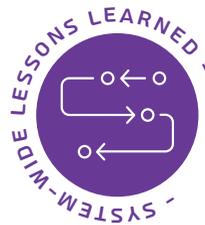
RECOGNITION OF VOLUNTARY RESIGNATION AS A DISMISSAL FOR UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFIT PURPOSES: ACCORDING TO CLAUSE 166 OF THE NATIONAL INSURANCE LAW, A PERSON WHO HAS VOLUNTARILY TERMINATED HIS OR HER EMPLOYMENT WITH NO JUSTIFICATION, SHALL NOT BE ENTITLED TO UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS FOR THE FIRST 90 DAYS FOLLOWING THE FINAL DATE OF TERMINATION OF EMPLOYMENT. HOWEVER, WHEN THE EMPLOYMENT TERMINATION IS DONE UNDER CIRCUMSTANCES WHICH HAVE BEEN DEFINED AS BEING JUSTIFIED - ILL HEALTH, SEVERE DOWNGRADING OF THE TERMS OF EMPLOYMENT OR OTHER CIRCUMSTANCES UNDER WHICH IT WAS NOT POSSIBLE TO REQUIRE THE EMPLOYEE TO CONTINUE WITH HIS OR HER JOB - THE EMPLOYEE MAY BE ENTITLED TO UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS WITHOUT THE WAIT PERIOD.

A NUMBER OF COMPLAINTS RECEIVED AT THE OFFICE DURING THE PANDEMIC RELATED TO POSTPONEMENT OF UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFIT PAYMENTS BY 90 DAYS DUE TO VOLUNTARY TERMINATION OF EMPLOYMENT, DESPITE CLAIMS FROM THE COMPLAINANTS THAT THEY RESIGNED UNDER JUSTIFIABLE CIRCUMSTANCES, AND THAT THEY WERE THEREFORE ENTITLED TO IMMEDIATE UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS.

OF SPECIAL NOTE ARE CASES IN WHICH EMPLOYEES RESIGNED FROM THEIR JOBS BECAUSE THEY WERE AFRAID OF CONTRACTING THE CORONAVIRUS AND INFECTING AT-RISK FAMILY MEMBERS. AS WILL BE DESCRIBED BELOW, THE NATIONAL INSURANCE INSTITUTE'S INITIAL POSITION WAS THAT RESIGNATIONS UNDER THESE CIRCUMSTANCES WERE NOT TO BE REGARDED AS DISMISSALS FOR THE PURPOSES OF RECEIVING UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS. HOWEVER FOLLOWING THE OFFICE'S INTERVENTION ON THIS ISSUE, THE NATIONAL INSURANCE INSTITUTE REVISITED THE MATTER AND RECOGNIZED RESIGNATION IN ORDER TO PROTECT AT-RISK FAMILY MEMBERS AS DISMISSALS ENTITLING THE CLAIMANT TO IMMEDIATE UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS.

IT IS WORTH NOTING THAT COMPLAINANTS ARE NOT ALWAYS AWARE OF THEIR RIGHTS IN THIS RESPECT, AND ONLY BECAUSE OF A CONVERSATION WITH THE COMPLAINT INVESTIGATORS, IN WHICH THE COMPLAINANTS DESCRIBED THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF THEIR RESIGNATION, DID THEY FIND OUT THAT BY LAW THEIR DISMISSAL WAS TO BE CONSIDERED A DISMISSAL FOR THE PURPOSES OF RECEIVING UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS.

FOLLOWING IS A DESCRIPTION OF TWO COMPLAINTS ON THE ISSUE OF RECOGNIZING VOLUNTARY RESIGNATION:



Did you resign because you have a family member that is in a high risk group? You will be entitled to receive unemployment benefits



THE COMPLAINT

THE COMPLAINANT RESIGNED FROM HIS JOB IN MARCH 2020 FOR FEAR THAT HE WOULD BE EXPOSED TO THE CORONAVIRUS AT THE WORKPLACE AND INFECT HIS ELDERLY MOTHER, WHO IS IN A HIGH RISK GROUP. THE COMPLAINANT FILED A CLAIM FOR UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS WITH THE NATIONAL INSURANCE INSTITUTE; HOWEVER UNTIL MAY 2020 HE DID NOT RECEIVE THE PAYMENTS HE WAS ENTITLED TO.



THE INVESTIGATION

THE NATIONAL INSURANCE INSTITUTE INFORMED THE OFFICE THAT INDEED ACCORDING TO THE REGULATIONS¹⁷, IF AN EMPLOYEE RESIGNED DUE TO THE STATE OF HIS HEALTH OR THAT OF A FAMILY MEMBER, THEN THE RESIGNATION SHALL BE REGARDED AS IF THE PERSON HAD BEEN DISMISSED; HOWEVER RESIGNATION DUE SOLELY TO FEAR OF INFECTION IS NOT RECOGNIZED AS A DISMISSAL. THE NATIONAL INSURANCE INSTITUTE ADDED THAT ACCORDINGLY, THE COMPLAINANT'S ENTITLEMENT TO UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS WOULD BEGIN ONLY IN JUNE 2020, AFTER 90 DAYS HAVE ELAPSED FROM THE DAY HE TERMINATED HIS EMPLOYMENT. THE OMBUDSMAN'S OFFICE REQUESTED CLARIFICATION¹⁸.



THE OUTCOME

THE NATIONAL INSURANCE INSTITUTE RESPONDED THAT DUE TO THE OFFICE'S INQUIRY, THE ISSUE WAS RECONSIDERED AND THE DECISION WAS MADE TO REGARD A RESIGNATION IN ORDER TO PROTECT AT-RISK MEMBERS OF THE

[17] CLAUSE 8 OF THE NATIONAL INSURANCE REGULATIONS (UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE), 5733-1972, WHICH REFERS TO CLAUSE 6 OF THE SEVERANCE PAY LAW, 5723-1963.

[18] IT MUST BE NOTED THAT THE COMPLAINANT WAS NOT FOUND TO BE ENTITLED TO INCOME SUPPORT BENEFITS EITHER, SINCE HE RECEIVES A DISABILITY PENSION.

POPULATION TO BE A JUSTIFIED RESIGNATION. ACCORDINGLY, A DIRECTIVE WILL BE PREPARED AND DISTRIBUTED TO ALL BRANCHES, AND INsofar AS POSSIBLE, CLAIMS DUE TO RESIGNATION UNDER SUCH CIRCUMSTANCES THAT HAD BEEN DENIED WILL BE RE-EVALUATED.

IN LIGHT OF THE NEW DECISION, THE COMPLAINANT'S RESIGNATION DUE TO HIS MOTHER'S BEING IN A HIGH RISK GROUP WAS RECOGNIZED AS BEING JUSTIFIED. THE COMPLAINANT WAS FOUND TO BE ENTITLED TO UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS FROM THE DATE OF TERMINATION OF HIS EMPLOYMENT, AND TOTAL UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS OF NIS 13,059 WERE PAID FOR THE MONTHS OF MARCH TO JUNE 2020.

(1094601)

The employee resigned due to a deterioration in the terms of employment - and was recognized as having been laid off



THE COMPLAINT

A MOTHER OF FIVE WORKED FROM HOME IN SALES AND HER WAGES WERE PAID ACCORDING TO ACTUAL SALES. SHE CLAIMED THAT SHE WAS FORCED TO RESIGN FROM HER JOB IN MARCH 2020 DUE TO A DETERIORATION IN THE TERMS OF HER EMPLOYMENT. THE NATIONAL INSURANCE INSTITUTE REJECTED HER CLAIM FOR IMMEDIATE UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFIT PAYMENTS, SINCE THE TERMINATION OF HER EMPLOYMENT WAS DONE AT HER INITIATIVE.



THE INVESTIGATION

IN A CONVERSATION WITH THE COMPLAINANT SHE DESCRIBED PROBLEMATIC LABOR RELATIONS, WHICH INCLUDED, AMONG OTHER THINGS, NON-PAYMENT OF SOCIAL BENEFITS, AND SHE SAID THAT THESE LABOR RELATIONS WERE THE MAIN REASON FOR HER RESIGNATION. AT THE OFFICE'S REQUEST, THE COMPLAINANT PUT HER CLAIMS IN WRITING AND ATTACHED SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION.



I turned to you after having despaired from the National Insurance Institute's decision not to approve unemployment benefits for me. I was in a terrible mental state with suicidal thoughts. My case was dealt with by the case handler who was like my guardian angel. I opened up to him and told him everything. The case handler first of all calmed me down, was encouraging and supportive and most important of all - he listened to me. I would like to express my thanks for the warmth, the help and the outcome. This is not something to be taken for granted; you saved me. And as for you, the case handler, I have no way of thanking you enough for your kindness - thank you thank you thank you."

**THE OUTCOME**

THE OFFICE FORWARDED THE LETTER AND THE DOCUMENTS TO THE NATIONAL INSURANCE INSTITUTE, WHERE THEY WERE EXAMINED AND A DECISION WAS REACHED TO RECOGNIZE HER RESIGNATION AS JUSTIFIED. THE INSTITUTE PAID TO THE COMPLAINANT THE UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS SHE WAS ENTITLED TO, TOTALING NIS 9,193. THE COMPLAINANT SENT THE OFFICE AN EMOTIONAL THANK-YOU LETTER.

(1094497)

Are you under the age of 20?

You may still be entitled to unemployment benefits

**THE COMPLAINT**

ACCORDING TO CLAUSE 160 OF THE NATIONAL INSURANCE LAW, UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS SHALL NOT BE PAID TO AN UNEMPLOYED INDIVIDUAL WHO IS NOT YET 20 YEARS OLD.

HOWEVER, ACCORDING TO CLAUSE 4 OF THE NATIONAL INSURANCE REGULATIONS (UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE), 5733-1972, A PERSON WHO RECEIVED AN EXEMPTION FROM CONSCRIPTION TO THE IDF, OR A PERSON WHOSE IDF SERVICE HAS BEEN DEFERRED DUE TO HEALTH REASONS, IS ENTITLED TO UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS EVEN THOUGH THEY ARE UNDER THE AGE OF 20.

THE OFFICE RECEIVED COMPLAINTS FROM UNEMPLOYED PERSONS DURING THE REPORT PERIOD WHOSE CLAIMS FOR UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS HAD BEEN REJECTED OR HAD NOT BEEN PROCESSED ON THE GROUNDS THAT THE CLAIMANTS WERE LESS THAN 20 YEARS OLD.

**THE INVESTIGATION**

THE OMBUDSMAN'S OFFICE CONTACTED THE COMPLAINANTS TO INQUIRE WHETHER THEY HAD BEEN EXEMPTED FROM MILITARY SERVICE.

THE OFFICE UPDATED THE NATIONAL INSURANCE INSTITUTE REGARDING ALL THE COMPLAINANTS WHO PRESENTED A CERTIFICATE OF EXEMPTION FROM MILITARY SERVICE.

**THE OUTCOME**

THE CLAIMS WERE APPROVED AND UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS WERE PAID TO THE COMPLAINANTS.

(1094405)

Method of Calculation of Unemployment Benefits

16.7% OF THE COMPLAINTS AGAINST THE NATIONAL INSURANCE INSTITUTE REGARDING UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS WERE ABOUT THE METHOD OF CALCULATION OF THE BENEFITS.

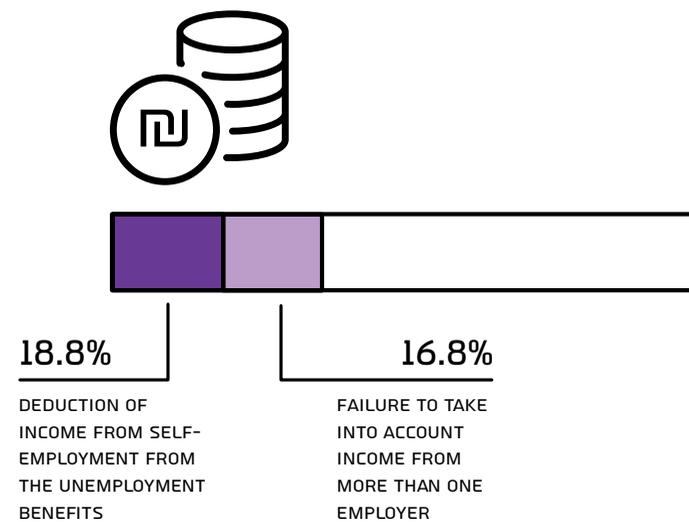
INVESTIGATION OF THE COMPLAINTS FOUND THAT AMONG THE REASONS FOR THE ERRONEOUS CALCULATIONS WERE INPUT OF INCORRECT OR INCOMPLETE DATA ON WAGES WHICH FORMED THE BASIS FOR THE CALCULATION AND INPUT OF INCORRECT DATES OF TERMINATION OF EMPLOYMENT.

ERRONEOUS CALCULATION OF THE UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS ALSO OCCURED WHEN THE COMPLAINANT WAS EMPLOYED BY MORE THAN ONE EMPLOYER OR WHEN BESIDES BEING A SALARIED EMPLOYEE, THE COMPLAINANT WAS ALSO SELF-EMPLOYED.

18.8% OF THE COMPLAINTS REGARDING THE METHOD OF CALCULATING THE UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS WERE ABOUT DEDUCTING THE COMPLAINANTS' INCOME FROM SELF-EMPLOYMENT FROM THE UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS THEY WERE ENTITLED TO, EVEN THOUGH THE COMPLAINANTS CLAIMED THAT THEY HAD NO INCOME OR DECREASED INCOME FROM SELF-EMPLOYMENT DURING THE CORONAVIRUS PERIOD.

16.8% OF THE COMPLAINTS WERE ABOUT FAILURE TO TAKE INTO ACCOUNT THE COMPLAINANTS' INCOME FROM ALL OF THEIR WORKPLACES IN CALCULATING THEIR UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS.

Main issues in complaints regarding calculation of unemployment benefits



FOLLOWING ARE TWO EXAMPLES OF COMPLAINTS REGARDING THE CALCULATION OF UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS:

The data were entered erroneously and corrected due to the Office's intervention



THE COMPLAINT

THE COMPLAINANT WENT ON FURLOUGH IN MARCH 2020 AND REGISTERED AT THE EMPLOYMENT SERVICE; HOWEVER, THE NATIONAL INSURANCE INSTITUTE INFORMED HER THAT SHE WAS NOT ENTITLED TO UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS FOR MARCH.

AS FOR APRIL 2020, THE COMPLAINANT CLAIMED THAT THE UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS PAID HER FOR THAT MONTH WERE LESS THAN WHAT SHE WAS ENTITLED TO BECAUSE THE NATIONAL INSURANCE INSTITUTE ENTERED AN EMPLOYMENT TERMINATION DATE THAT WAS LATER THAN THE DATE SHE HAD REPORTED AND THE DATE SHE HAD REGISTERED AT THE EMPLOYMENT

SERVICE. THE COMPLAINANT ADDED THAT HER ATTEMPTS TO CONTACT THE NATIONAL INSURANCE INSTITUTE THROUGH VARIOUS MEANS IN ORDER TO RESOLVE THE ISSUE WERE UNSUCCESSFUL.



THE INVESTIGATION

THE INVESTIGATION REVEALED THAT INDEED THERE HAD BEEN A MISTAKE IN THE DATA ENTRY: EVEN THOUGH THE COMPLAINANT'S EMPLOYMENT HAD BEEN TERMINATED ON MARCH 15, 2020, THE DATE ENTERED ON THE NATIONAL INSURANCE INSTITUTE'S SYSTEM WAS MARCH 30, 2020. FURTHERMORE, THE UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS WERE CALCULATED BASED ON WAGES FROM A SINGLE EMPLOYER, EVEN THOUGH THE COMPLAINANT AT THE TIME RELEVANT TO HER CLAIM HAD BEEN WORKING AT ANOTHER, ADDITIONAL WORKPLACE.



THE OUTCOME

DUE TO THE INVESTIGATION, THE COMPLAINANT RECEIVED THE FULL UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS SHE WAS ENTITLED TO .

(1096089)

Did you receive maternity allowance and a pregnancy bed rest benefit? Your unemployment benefit entitlement must be increased as well



THE COMPLAINT

SEVERAL COMPLAINTS WERE RECEIVED AT THE OMBUDSMAN'S OFFICE FROM WOMEN WHO HAD BEEN RECEIVING PREGNANCY BED REST BENEFITS OR WHO HAD GIVEN BIRTH AND WERE RECEIVING A MATERNITY ALLOWANCE. THE COMPLAINANTS ALLEGED THAT THE UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS THEY RECEIVED SHORTLY AFTER HAVING RECEIVED THE SAID BENEFITS, WERE SUBSTANTIALLY LOWER THAN THE UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS THEY WERE ENTITLED TO.





THE INVESTIGATION

THE INVESTIGATION OF THE COMPLAINTS REVEALED THAT THE NATIONAL INSURANCE INSTITUTE ERRED IN CALCULATING THE INCOME OF THE COMPLAINANTS WHICH FORMED THE BASIS OF THE UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS ENTITLEMENT, BY FAILING TO INCLUDE THE BENEFITS PAID THEM WHILE ON BED REST DURING THE PREGNANCY AND THE MATERNITY ALLOWANCE THEY HAD BEEN RECEIVING.



THE OUTCOME

AS A RESULT OF THE OFFICE'S INTERVENTION, THE NATIONAL INSURANCE INSTITUTE INSTRUCTED THE BRANCH OFFICES TO RECALCULATE THE UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS PAID TO THE COMPLAINANTS, AND TO INCLUDE THE PREGNANCY BED REST BENEFITS AND THE MATERNITY ALLOWANCE IN THEIR INCOME.

(1093983, 1093989)

Deducting income from self-employment from the unemployment benefits

ACCORDING TO CLAUSE 176 OF THE NATIONAL INSURANCE LAW, INCOME FROM OTHER WORK, INCLUDING FREELANCING, SELF-EMPLOYMENT, OR FROM A BUSINESS THE CLAIMANT OWNS, IS TO BE DEDUCTED FROM A CLAIMANT'S UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS DURING THE PERIOD FOR WHICH THE CLAIMANT IS CLAIMING UNEMPLOYMENT. IN ORDER TO DETERMINE THE CLAIMANT'S INCOME FROM SELF-EMPLOYMENT, THE NATIONAL INSURANCE INSTITUTE USES DATA AT ITS DISPOSAL REGARDING THE MONTHLY NATIONAL INSURANCE CONTRIBUTIONS THE CLAIMANT PAYS FOR THEIR BUSINESS.

THE OMBUDSMAN'S OFFICE RECEIVED MANY COMPLAINTS FROM COMPLAINANTS CLAIMING THAT THEY WERE NOT PAID UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS OR THAT THE AMOUNT PAID WAS CONSIDERABLY LOWER THAN THE AMOUNT THEY WERE ENTITLED TO ACCORDING TO THE INFORMATION PROVIDED ON THE NATIONAL INSURANCE INSTITUTE'S WEBSITE. INVESTIGATION OF THESE COMPLAINTS

FOUND CASES IN WHICH THE UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFIT CLAIMANTS WERE CLASSIFIED IN THE NATIONAL INSURANCE INSTITUTE'S RECORDS ALSO AS SELF-EMPLOYED, WHOSE SELF-EMPLOYMENT INCOME WAS TO BE DEDUCTED FROM THE UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS. THIS WAS THE CASE DESPITE THE FACT THAT THE COMPLAINANTS HAD NO INCOME FROM SELF-EMPLOYMENT DURING THE PERIOD IN WHICH THEY WERE OUT OF A JOB DUE TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC.

FOLLOWING IS A DESCRIPTION OF THREE COMPLAINTS RELATED TO THE CLASSIFICATION OF THE COMPLAINANTS AS SELF-EMPLOYED BY THE NATIONAL INSURANCE INSTITUTE:

Received unemployment benefits as a salaried employee - but was underpaid due to being self-employed as well



THE COMPLAINT

THE COMPLAINANT COMPLAINED ABOUT THE LOW UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFIT HE WAS RECEIVING. ACCORDING TO THE COMPLAINANT, HE HAD WORKED IN TWO WORKPLACES AS A SALARIED EMPLOYEE AND HAD ALSO PROVIDED SERVICES AS A FREELANCER. HE CONTACTED THE NATIONAL INSURANCE INSTITUTE SEVERAL TIMES ABOUT THE LOW UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS HE WAS BEING PAID, BUT HE WAS NEVER GIVEN AN EXPLANATION. THE COMPLAINANT REQUESTED INTERVENTION FROM THE OMBUDSMAN ON THIS ISSUE TO ENABLE HIM TO RECEIVE THE UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS TO WHICH HE WAS ENTITLED IN ORDER TO PROVIDE FOR HIS FAMILY.



THE INVESTIGATION

THE OFFICE'S INVESTIGATION WITH THE NATIONAL INSURANCE INSTITUTE REVEALED THAT INCOME FROM HIS EARNINGS AS A FREELANCER WERE DEDUCTED FROM THE COMPLAINANT'S UNEMPLOYMENT PAYMENT, ON THE BASIS OF AN INCOME REPORT HE HAD SUBMITTED TO THE NATIONAL INSURANCE FOR THE PURPOSE OF PAYING NATIONAL INSURANCE CONTRIBUTIONS IN ADVANCE .

THE COMPLAINANT CLAIMED THAT HE HAD NOT HAD ANY INCOME FROM FREELANCING DURING THE CRISIS. THE NATIONAL INSURANCE INSTITUTE

PRESENTED TO THE COMPLAINANT VIA THE OMBUDSMAN'S OFFICE THE POSSIBILITIES OPEN TO HIM – EITHER TO TEMPORARILY CLOSE HIS FILE AS A FREELANCER OR TO SUBMIT A REQUEST TO REDUCE HIS ADVANCE CONTRIBUTIONS.



THE OUTCOME

THE COMPLAINANT UPDATED THE OFFICE THAT HE ACTED ACCORDING TO THE INFORMATION PROVIDED AND THAT THE UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS HAD BEEN PAID TO HIM TO HIS SATISFACTION. THE COMPLAINANT THANKED THE OMBUDSMAN'S OFFICE FOR THE ASSISTANCE HE RECEIVED IN HIS TIME OF NEED.

(1095393)

Joining forces: Inquiries with the Tax Authority, the National Insurance Institute and the Employment Service

WHEN AN INQUIRY INTO A COMPLAINT AGAINST A BODY SUBJECT OF A COMPLAINT NECESSITATES FURTHER INVESTIGATION WITH OTHER BODIES OR IF ADDITIONAL DETAILS ARE NEEDED FROM OTHER INSTITUTIONS, THE OMBUDSMAN'S OFFICE WILL CONTACT THOSE OTHER BODIES ON ITS OWN INITIATIVE IN ORDER TO OBTAIN ALL THE INFORMATION NECESSARY FOR OPTIMAL HANDING OF THE COMPLAINT. FOLLOWING IS A DESCRIPTION OF A COMPLAINT WHICH WAS RESOLVED THROUGH INQUIRIES WITH SEVERAL BODIES.



THE COMPLAINT

THE COMPLAINANT CLAIMED THAT IN EARLY APRIL 2020 HE WAS SENT ON FURLOUGH FROM HIS JOB, BUT THAT HE DID NOT RECEIVE THE UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS FOR THAT MONTH. THE COMPLAINANT STATED THAT HE RECEIVED A LETTER FROM THE NATIONAL INSURANCE INSTITUTE INFORMING HIM THAT HE HAD ALSO BEEN CLASSIFIED AS A SELF-EMPLOYED INDIVIDUAL, AND THAT HIS INCOME FROM SELF-EMPLOYMENT HAD BEEN DEDUCTED FROM THE UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS TO WHICH HE WAS ENTITLED AND AS A CONSEQUENCE HE WAS NOT ENTITLED TO ANY UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS. THE COMPLAINANT CLAIMED THAT HE IS NOT SELF-EMPLOYED AND ADDED THAT HIS ATTEMPTS TO CONTACT THE NATIONAL INSURANCE INSTITUTE TO CORRECT THIS CLASSIFICATION HAD BEEN UNSUCCESSFUL.



THE INVESTIGATION

THE INVESTIGATION REVEALED THAT THE COMPLAINANT WAS CLASSIFIED AT THE NATIONAL INSURANCE INSTITUTE BOTH AS A SALARIED EMPLOYEE AND AS SELF-EMPLOYED, BASED ON A REPORT HE HAD PROVIDED TO THE TAX AUTHORITY IN 2013. IN RESPONSE THE COMPLAINANT CLAIMED THAT HE HAD REPORTED TO THE TAX AUTHORITY THAT HIS BUSINESS HAD BEEN CLOSED DOWN AND THAT HE HAD COMPLETED THE CLOSURE PROCEEDINGS AT THE TAX AUTHORITY ALREADY IN 2014, ALTHOUGH HE DID NOT HAVE ANY CORROBORATING DOCUMENT TO PROVE THIS.

WHILE THE COMPLAINT WAS BEING INVESTIGATED, THE TAX AUTHORITY WAS NOT RECEIVING THE GENERAL PUBLIC, AND THE COMPLAINANT CLAIMED THAT THEREFORE HE WAS UNABLE TO GO TO THE TAX AUTHORITY AND RECEIVE A CORROBORATING DOCUMENT. ALTHOUGH THE TAX AUTHORITY COULD HAVE SENT THE DOCUMENT BY MAIL, DUE TO THE CURRENT SITUATION THE POSTAL SERVICE MIGHT BE DISRUPTED AND THE CERTIFICATE MIGHT GET HELD UP IN THE MAIL.

THE OMBUDSMAN'S OFFICE CONTACTED THE RELEVANT INCOME TAX ASSESSOR AND ASKED FOR ASSISTANCE IN OBTAINING THE CERTIFICATE WITHOUT DELAY. THE INCOME TAX ASSESSOR SENT THE CERTIFICATE TO THE OMBUDSMAN'S OFFICE, WHO FORWARDED IT TO THE NATIONAL INSURANCE INSTITUTE.

IT WAS ALSO DISCOVERED THAT THE EMPLOYMENT SERVICE HAD REPORTED TO THE NATIONAL INSURANCE INSTITUTE AN ERRONEOUS STARTING DATE OF THE COMPLAINANT'S FURLOUGH. THE OMBUDSMAN'S OFFICE CONTACTED THE EMPLOYMENT SERVICE ON THIS MATTER AND THE START DATE OF THE FURLOUGH WAS CORRECTED.



THE OUTCOME

FOLLOWING RECEIPT OF THE CERTIFICATE FROM THE TAX AUTHORITY CONFIRMING THAT THE COMPLAINANT NO LONGER RUNS A BUSINESS, AND AFTER THE NATIONAL INSURANCE INSTITUTE RECEIVED A CORRECTED REPORT FROM THE EMPLOYMENT SERVICE REGARDING THE START DATE OF THE COMPLAINANT'S FURLOUGH, HE RECEIVED ALL OF THE UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS TO WHICH HE WAS ENTITLED. THE COMPLAINANT THANKED THE OFFICE FOR THE ASSISTANCE HE RECEIVED.



When an inquiry into a complaint against a body subject of a complaint necessitates further investigation with other bodies or if additional details are needed from other institutions, the Ombudsman's Office will contact those bodies on its own initiative

AS MENTIONED AT THE BEGINNING OF THIS REPORT, THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC IS ALSO AN OPPORTUNITY FOR PUBLIC BODIES TO IMPROVE THE WAYS THEY OPERATE AND THEIR WORK PROCESSES, IN ORDER TO PROVIDE MORE EFFICIENT SERVICE TO THE PUBLIC IN REGULAR TIMES AS WELL. THIS APPLIES ESPECIALLY REGARDING INFORMATION SHARING BETWEEN THE VARIOUS BODIES AND THE PROVISION OF MORE COMPREHENSIVE ASSISTANCE TO THE PUBLIC THROUGH ONLINE MEANS.

(1094648)

Theater actress? The Classification Order comes to your assistance

ACCORDING TO THE NATIONAL INSURANCE ORDER (CLASSIFICATION OF INSURED AND DETERMINING EMPLOYERS), 5732-1972 (THE CLASSIFICATION ORDER), THERE ARE CERTAIN OCCUPATIONS AND SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES IN WHICH SELF-EMPLOYED WORKERS WILL BE REGARDED TO BE SALARIED EMPLOYEES FOR UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS PURPOSES.



THE COMPLAINT

THE COMPLAINANT CEASED WORKING DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC AND CLAIMED UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS. SHE CLAIMED THAT FOR SEVERAL MONTHS SHE WAS NOT PAID ANY UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS, WITH THE EXCEPTION OF AN ADVANCE OF NIS 2,000. THE COMPLAINANT NOTED IN HER COMPLAINT THAT "LIVING OFF NIS 2000... MEANS GOING HUNGRY".



THE INVESTIGATION

THE INVESTIGATION REVEALED THAT THE COMPLAINANT HAD STATED IN HER CLAIM THAT SHE ALSO WORKED IN A THEATER AS A FREELANCER AND THAT THEREFORE HER INCOME AS A FREELANCER HAD BEEN DEDUCTED FROM THE UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS. HOWEVER THE HANDLING OF HER CLAIM HAD NOT BEEN COMPLETED, AND SHE WAS NOT ASKED FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ABOUT HER OCCUPATION AS A FREELANCER IN ORDER FOR A FINAL DECISION TO BE REACHED REGARDING HER CLAIM. AS A RESULT OF

THE OFFICE'S INVESTIGATION, THE NATIONAL INSURANCE INSTITUTE STATED THAT IF THE COMPLAINANT'S OCCUPATION WAS INCLUDED IN THE LIST OF OCCUPATIONS IN THE CLASSIFICATION ORDER, THEN SHE WILL BE CONSIDERED A SALARIED EMPLOYEE, AND HER INCOME AS A FREELANCER WILL NOT BE DEDUCTED FROM HER UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS.

THE COMPLAINANT DECLARED THAT SHE WAS A THEATER ACTRESS, AND THE OFFICE FORWARDED THIS INFORMATION TO THE NATIONAL INSURANCE INSTITUTE. SINCE ARTISTIC OR ENTERTAINMENT APPEARANCES BY AN ARTIST ARE INCLUDED IN THE SECOND ADDENDUM TO THE CLASSIFICATION ORDER, THE NATIONAL INSURANCE INSTITUTE DECIDED THAT THE ORDER APPLIED TO THE COMPLAINANT AND THAT SHE IS ENTITLED TO FULL UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS.



THE OUTCOME

THE COMPLAINANT RECEIVED THE BALANCE OF THE UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS SHE WAS ENTITLED TO TOTALING NIS 4,400.

(1094771)



The COVID-19 pandemic is also an opportunity for public bodies to improve the ways they operate and their work processes in order to provide more efficient service to the public in regular times as well

ISRAEL

EMPLOYMENT

SERVICE



1.165 million

JOB SEEKERS CONTACTED THE EMPLOYMENT SERVICE DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC UNTIL THE END OF MAY 2020

WHOEVER SEEKS TO RECEIVE UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS, BESIDES FILING A CLAIM WITH THE NATIONAL INSURANCE INSTITUTE, MUST REGISTER WITH THE EMPLOYMENT SERVICE AS A JOB SEEKER. THE INITIAL REGISTRATION CAN BE DONE ONLINE ON THE EMPLOYMENT SERVICE'S WEBSITE. NORMALLY, THE JOB SEEKERS HAVE TO PRESENT THEMSELVES AT THE EMPLOYMENT SERVICE BUREAUS NEAR THEIR DOMICILES, MAKE THEMSELVES AVAILABLE AND BE PREPARED TO ACCEPT ANY SUITABLE EMPLOYMENT REFERRALS. THE EMPLOYMENT SERVICE PROVIDES TO THE NATIONAL INSURANCE INSTITUTE REPORTS ABOUT JOB SEEKERS AND THE DATES ON WHICH THEY ARRIVE AT THE BUREAUS, AND ACCORDING TO THESE REPORTS THEIR ENTITLEMENT TO UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS IS DETERMINED.

FOLLOWING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC, THE EMPLOYMENT SERVICE CLOSED THEIR OFFICES TO THE PUBLIC FROM MARCH 15, 2020. IN ADDITION, THE EMPLOYMENT SERVICE'S ABILITY TO REFER JOB SEEKERS TO PROSPECTIVE EMPLOYERS WAS SEVERELY DIMINISHED DUE TO THE PANDEMIC. DUE TO THE CLOSING OF THE BUREAUS, THE JOB SEEKERS WERE REQUIRED TO REGISTER ONLINE ON THE EMPLOYMENT SERVICE'S WEBSITE INSTEAD OF PRESENTING THEMSELVES IN PERSON AT THE BUREAUS.

DURING THE PERIOD THAT THE BUREAUS WERE CLOSED, THE EMPLOYMENT SERVICE OPERATED ACCORDING TO EMERGENCY REGULATIONS ENACTED REGARDING THE CORONAVIRUS¹⁹ AND RETROACTIVELY RECOGNIZED THE REGISTRATIONS OF JOB SEEKERS WHO WERE

UNABLE TO REGISTER IN PERSON AT THE TIME THEIR EMPLOYMENT WAS TERMINATED. THIS WAS DONE BASED ON THE JOB SEEKER'S DECLARATION OF THE DATE OF TERMINATION OF EMPLOYMENT AND PRESENTATION OF CORROBORATING DOCUMENTS.

CANCELLATION OF THE REQUIREMENT TO APPEAR PHYSICALLY AT THE BUREAU TOGETHER WITH CREATING THE POSSIBILITY TO REGISTER ONLINE CONTRIBUTED GREATLY TOWARD REDUCING POTENTIAL FRICTION BETWEEN THE HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS OF JOB SEEKERS AND THE EMPLOYMENT SERVICE AND ENABLED THE EMPLOYMENT SERVICE TO REPORT EFFECTIVELY AND EFFICIENTLY TO THE NATIONAL INSURANCE INSTITUTE THE PRECISE DATES ON WHICH PREVIOUSLY EMPLOYED INDIVIDUALS BECAME JOB SEEKERS. THE ISRAEL OMBUDSMAN VIEWS THIS DEVELOPMENT FAVORABLY, WHICH RADICALLY STREAMLINED THE SERVICE DELIVERED TO THE JOB SEEKERS IN THIS TIME OF CRISIS. THE OMBUDSMAN BELIEVES THAT THIS STEP PLAYED A MAJOR PART IN THE FACT THAT THE NUMBER OF COMPLAINTS RECEIVED AGAINST THE EMPLOYMENT SERVICE WAS NEGLIGIBLE.

DURING THE REPORT PERIOD, THE OMBUDSMAN'S OFFICE DID INVESTIGATE A FEW COVID-19 PANDEMIC-RELATED COMPLAINTS AGAINST THE EMPLOYMENT SERVICE. MOST OF THESE COMPLAINTS WERE INVESTIGATED PURSUANT TO INVESTIGATIONS OF COMPLAINTS FILED AGAINST THE NATIONAL INSURANCE INSTITUTE, WHICH REVEALED THAT THE NATIONAL INSURANCE INSTITUTE HAD NOT BEEN NOTIFIED BY THE EMPLOYMENT SERVICE OF THE DATE OF EMPLOYMENT TERMINATION OF THE COMPLAINANTS, OR THAT THE NOTIFICATION GIVEN DID NOT MATCH THE ACTUAL DATE OF TERMINATION.

FOLLOWING ARE EXAMPLES OF COMPLAINTS REGARDING THE EMPLOYMENT SERVICE'S SERVICE TO JOB SEEKERS.

[19] EMERGENCY REGULATIONS (NEW CORONAVIRUS) (SPECIAL INSTRUCTIONS REGARDING UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE), 5780-2020.

Employment Service website crashed?**You can also file a claim through a manual registration form****THE COMPLAINT**

ON MARCH 15, 2020, FOLLOWING THE CLOSING OF THE EMPLOYMENT SERVICE BUREAUS, THE COMPLAINANT CONTACTED THE OMBUDSMAN'S OFFICE AND COMPLAINED THAT HE WAS UNABLE TO REGISTER ONLINE AS A JOB SEEKER BECAUSE THE EMPLOYMENT SERVICE'S WEBSITE HAD CRASHED. THE COMPLAINANT WAS CONCERNED THAT HE WOULD NOT RECEIVE UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS FOR ALL THE DAYS TO WHICH HE WAS ENTITLED.

**THE INVESTIGATION**

THE EMPLOYMENT SERVICE SAID IN RESPONSE THAT BESIDES REGISTERING ONLINE ON THE WEBSITE, JOB SEEKERS CAN ALSO FILL IN THE REGISTRATION FORM MANUALLY AND SEND IT TO THE EMPLOYMENT SERVICE VIA EMAIL OR THEY COULD LEAVE THE FORM AT THE EMPLOYMENT SERVICE BUREAU NEAREST TO THEIR HOMES. THE EMPLOYMENT SERVICE STATED THAT THEY WERE WORKING TO INCREASE THEIR NETWORK RESOURCES IN ORDER TO BE ABLE TO COPE WITH THE INCREASED NUMBER OF ENTRIES TO THEIR WEBSITE AND TO ENABLE TROUBLE-FREE ONLINE REGISTRATION.

**THE OUTCOME**

THE COMPLAINANT CONFIRMED VERBALLY TO AN EMPLOYEE OF THE OMBUDSMAN'S OFFICE THAT HE HAD SUCCEEDED IN REGISTERING AS A JOB SEEKER BY SENDING A MANUAL REGISTRATION FORM. ON MARCH 18, 2020, THE EMPLOYMENT SERVICE REPORTED TO THE OFFICE THAT THE WEBSITE HAD FULLY RESUMED ITS OPERATIONS, INCLUDING ONLINE REGISTRATION OF JOB SEEKERS. SINCE THAT TIME THE OFFICE HAS NOT RECEIVED ANY MORE COMPLAINTS ON THIS ISSUE.

(1092280)

Registered but not acknowledged?**You should keep your confirmation****THE COMPLAINT**

THE COMPLAINANT WAS SENT ON FURLOUGH FOLLOWING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC AND FILED A CLAIM FOR UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS WITH THE NATIONAL INSURANCE INSTITUTE ON MARCH 15, 2020. ACCORDING TO THE COMPLAINANT, EVEN THOUGH SHE REGISTERED AS A JOB SEEKER AT THE EMPLOYMENT SERVICE ON MARCH 29, 2020, SHE DID NOT RECEIVE THE UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS DUE TO HER AND NEITHER DID SHE RECEIVE AN ADVANCE UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFIT PAYMENT. THE NATIONAL INSURANCE INSTITUTE INFORMED THE COMPLAINANT THAT THEY HAD NOT RECEIVED A REPORT FROM THE EMPLOYMENT SERVICE THAT SHE HAD REGISTERED AS A JOB SEEKER.

**THE INVESTIGATION**

THE EMPLOYMENT SERVICE CLAIMED IN RESPONSE THAT ACCORDING TO THEIR RECORDS, THE COMPLAINANT HAD REGISTERED ONLY AT THE END OF APRIL 2020. THEY ADDED THAT THIS WAS DULY REPORTED TO THE NATIONAL INSURANCE INSTITUTE. HOWEVER THE OMBUDSMAN'S OFFICE SENT THE EMPLOYMENT SERVICE A CORROBORATING DOCUMENT PROVIDED BY THE COMPLAINANT, INDICATING THAT SHE HAD REGISTERED AS REQUIRED WITH THE EMPLOYMENT SERVICE ALREADY IN MARCH 2020.

**THE OUTCOME**

FOLLOWING THE OFFICE'S INQUIRY, AND BASED ON THE COMPLAINANT'S DECLARATION AND THE CORROBORATION SHE SUPPLIED, HER REGISTRATION DATE WITH THE EMPLOYMENT SERVICE WAS CORRECTED RETROACTIVELY TO MARCH 15, 2020 IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE EMERGENCY REGULATIONS [NEW CORONAVIRUS] [SPECIAL INSTRUCTIONS REGARDING UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE], 5780-2020 AS MENTIONED ABOVE. A REPORT WAS DULY PROVIDED TO THE NATIONAL INSURANCE INSTITUTE.

(1092838)

Late in registering with the Employment Service?**You can register retroactively****THE COMPLAINT**

THE COMPLAINANT FILED A COMPLAINT WITH THE OMBUDSMAN AT THE END OF MAY 2020 REGARDING DELAYS IN PROCESSING HIS UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS CLAIM. THE COMPLAINANT NOTED THAT EVEN THOUGH HE REPORTED TO THE EMPLOYMENT SERVICE AS REQUIRED ON APRIL 29, 2020, THAT HE HAD BEEN PUT ON FURLOUGH ALREADY AT THE BEGINNING OF APRIL 2020, AND DESPITE HAVING FILED A CLAIM WITH THE NATIONAL INSURANCE INSTITUTE FOR UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS - HE HAD NOT RECEIVED THE BENEFITS DUE TO HIM FOR THE MONTH OF APRIL. IN ADDITION, HE CLAIMED THAT HE HAD ALSO NOT RECEIVED ANY ADVANCE PAYMENT, EVEN THOUGH HE HAD RECEIVED CONFIRMATION THAT HIS CLAIM WAS BEING PROCESSED.

**THE INVESTIGATION**

THE INVESTIGATION REVEALED THAT THE EMPLOYMENT SERVICE REPORTED TO THE NATIONAL INSURANCE INSTITUTE THAT THE COMPLAINANT HAD REGISTERED AS A JOB SEEKER ON APRIL 24, 2020. SINCE BY LAW THE FIVE FIRST DAYS OF UNEMPLOYMENT ARE DEDUCTED FROM THE FIRST UNEMPLOYMENT PAYMENT²⁰, THE COMPLAINANT WAS NOT ENTITLED TO UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS FOR APRIL.

THE OMBUDSMAN'S OFFICE CONTACTED THE EMPLOYMENT SERVICE AND POINTED OUT THAT THE COMPLAINANT HAD DECLARED THAT HIS EMPLOYMENT HAD BEEN TERMINATED FROM THE BEGINNING OF APRIL. THE OFFICE ASKED THE EMPLOYMENT SERVICE TO CONSIDER WHETHER UNDER THE CIRCUMSTANCES IT WAS POSSIBLE TO AMEND THE REPORT SENT TO THE NATIONAL INSURANCE INSTITUTE. AFTER THE EMPLOYMENT SERVICE REVIEWED THE INFORMATION THE COMPLAINANT HAD SUBMITTED REGARDING THE TERMINATION OF HIS EMPLOYMENT, IT SENT A CORRECTED REPORT TO THE NATIONAL INSURANCE INSTITUTE AS SPECIFIED IN EMERGENCY REGULATIONS (NEW CORONAVIRUS) (SPECIAL INSTRUCTIONS REGARDING UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE), 5780-2020 REGARDING RETROACTIVE REGISTRATION DURING THE CORONAVIRUS PERIOD.

[20] CLAUSE 172 OF THE NATIONAL INSURANCE LAW STATES THAT "UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS SHALL NOT BE PAID FOR THE FIRST FIVE DAYS OF UNEMPLOYMENT FOR ALL PERIODS OF FOUR CONSECUTIVE MONTHS".

**THE OUTCOME**

AS A RESULT OF THE CORRECTED REPORT, THE COMPLAINANT WAS AWARDED UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS FOR THE MONTH OF APRIL.

(1096011)

Sent on furlough while pregnant?**The actual date of termination is the deciding date****THE COMPLAINT**

THE COMPLAINANT WAS SENT ON FURLOUGH ON MARCH 24, 2020. SINCE THE COMPLAINANT WAS PREGNANT, HER EMPLOYER WAITED FOR APPROVAL FROM THE MINISTRY OF LABOR, SOCIAL AFFAIRS AND SOCIAL SERVICES TO SEND HER ON FURLOUGH BEFORE HE GAVE HER OFFICIAL CONFIRMATION OF THE FURLOUGH. THE COMPLAINANT RECEIVED THE CONFIRMATION ABOUT TWO WEEKS AFTER HAVING BEEN ON FURLOUGH IN ACTUALITY. ON APRIL 12, 2020 THE COMPLAINANT REPORTED TO THE EMPLOYMENT SERVICE THAT SHE WAS NOW UNEMPLOYED AND SEEKING WORK AND AT THE SAME TIME SHE FILED AN UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS CLAIM WITH THE NATIONAL INSURANCE INSTITUTE. THE COMPLAINANT NOTED IN THE FORMS SHE SUBMITTED THAT THE ACTUAL DATE OF TERMINATION WAS MARCH 24, 2020 AND SHE ALSO ATTACHED THE EMPLOYER'S CONFIRMATION.

IN SPITE OF THE ABOVE, THE COMPLAINANT RECEIVED UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS ONLY FROM THE DATE SHE REGISTERED AT THE EMPLOYMENT SERVICE.

THE COMPLAINANT WROTE IN HER COMPLAINT: "I AM AT HOME WITHOUT A SALARY, IN AN ADVANCED STATE OF PREGNANCY, TRYING TO GET HOLD OF THE NATIONAL INSURANCE INSTITUTE AND THE EMPLOYMENT SERVICE BUREAU... I AM ANGRY, DISAPPOINTED AND MOST OF ALL EXHAUSTED FROM TRYING TO GET AN ANSWER".



The Employment Service reviewed the information the complainant had submitted regarding the termination of his employment and sent a corrected report to the National Insurance Institute. As a result of the corrected report, the complainant was awarded unemployment benefits for the month of April

**THE INVESTIGATION**

THE OMBUDSMAN'S OFFICE CONTACTED THE EMPLOYMENT SERVICE, WHICH RESPONDED THAT THE COMPLAINANT HAD ALREADY CONTACTED THEM ON THE ISSUE AND THAT THEY CORRECTED THE REPORT TO THE NATIONAL INSURANCE INSTITUTE SHORTLY AFTER THE COMPLAINANT CONTACTED THE OFFICE.

**THE OUTCOME**

BASED ON THE COMPLAINANT'S DECLARATION AND THE EMPLOYER'S CONFIRMATION THAT SHE HAD BEEN SENT ON FURLOUGH ALREADY IN MARCH 2020, THE EMPLOYMENT SERVICE RECOGNIZED THE COMPLAINANT AS A JOB SEEKER FROM THE DATE HER EMPLOYMENT WAS ACTUALLY TERMINATED.

(1096012)

**TAX****AUTHORITY**

BESIDES THE NATIONAL INSURANCE INSTITUTE, WHICH WAS CHARGED WITH DELIVERING AID TO SALARIED EMPLOYEES WHOSE EMPLOYMENT HAD BEEN TERMINATED DUE TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC, THE TAX AUTHORITY WAS CHARGED WITH ASSISTING THE SELF-EMPLOYED SECTOR, WHOSE BUSINESSES HAD BEEN NEGATIVELY AFFECTED BY THE CRISIS. THIS WAS TO BE DONE THROUGH AN AID GRANT (THE "GRANT")²¹.

**FIRST TRANCHE**

OWNERS OF SMALL AND MEDIUM-SIZED BUSINESSES UPON 25% DECLINE IN BUSINESS TURNOVER AND WITH INCOME OF NO MORE THAN NIS 240,000

**SECOND TRANCHE**

FOR CONTROLLING SHAREHOLDERS IN A CLOSELY-HELD CORPORATION. UPON 25% DECLINE IN BUSINESS TURNOVER COMPARED TO 2019

**THIRD TRANCHE**

AID IN FINANCING FIXED EXPENSES FOR BUSINESSES WITH A TURNOVER OF UP TO NIS 20 MILLION.

DURING THE TIME PERIOD COVERED BY THIS REPORT, THE ENTITLEMENT TO A GRANT WAS SPLIT INTO THREE TRANCHE. THE FIRST TRANCHE WAS INTENDED TO PROVIDE AN INITIAL, RAPID RESPONSE FOR OWNERS OF SMALL AND MEDIUM-SIZED BUSINESSES NEGATIVELY AFFECTED BY THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC. CONDITIONS FOR RECEIVING THE GRANT INCLUDED A MINIMUM 25% DECLINE IN BUSINESS TURNOVER IN MARCH-APRIL 2020 AS OPPOSED TO THE PARALLEL PERIOD IN THE YEAR 2019; CHARGEABLE INCOME FROM A BUSINESS OF A MINIMUM OF NIS 24,000 AND NO MORE THAN NIS 240,000 IN 2018; AND BUSINESS ACTIVITY FOR NO LESS A PERIOD THAN SEPTEMBER 1, 2019 TO FEBRUARY 29, 2020 .

IN THE SECOND TRANCHE, CONTROLLING SHAREHOLDERS IN CLOSELY-HELD CORPORATIONS²² WHOSE INCOME HAD DECLINED, WERE ALSO INCLUDED. THE ENTITLEMENT WAS DETERMINED ACCORDING TO VARIOUS CRITERIA, INCLUDING THE TOTAL CHARGEABLE INCOME²³ AND A DECLINE OF AT LEAST 25% IN THE BUSINESS TURNOVER DURING THE PERIOD FROM MARCH TO JUNE 2020 AS OPPOSED TO THE SAME MONTHS DURING THE YEAR 2019.

[21] THE GRANT IS PAID ACCORDING TO THE DIRECTIVES OF THE EMERGENCY REGULATIONS (NEW CORONAVIRUS) (AID GRANT TO SELF-EMPLOYED), 5780-2020, WHICH AMENDED THE LAW FOR INCREASING PARTICIPATION IN THE WORKFORCE AND NARROWING SOCIOECONOMIC GAPS (EMPLOYMENT BONUS), 5767-2007. DURING THE REPORT PERIOD CHANGES WERE MADE IN REGULATIONS AND IN ENTITLEMENTS, AND THEREFORE IN SOME CASES THOSE THAT WERE INITIALLY REJECTED, RECEIVED THE GRANT AT A LATER STAGE.

THE THIRD TRANCHE WAS INTENDED FOR BUSINESSES WITH TURNOVERS OF UP TO NIS 20 MILLION, AND WHOSE BUSINESS TURNOVER WAS NEGATIVELY AFFECTED BY THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC. THE GRANT WAS INTENDED TO ASSIST THESE BUSINESS OWNERS TO FINANCE THE BUSINESS'S FIXED EXPENSES (ELECTRICITY, WATER, RENT ETC.), WHICH HAVE TO BE PAID IN FULL DESPITE THE DECLINE IN THE BUSINESS'S TURNOVER.

EVEN THOUGH THE TAX AUTHORITY DEALT WITH SOME 900,000 REQUESTS FOR GRANTS WITHIN A FEW MONTHS, THE OMBUDSMAN'S OFFICE RECEIVED ONLY 67 COMPLAINT LETTERS CONCERNING THE TAX AUTHORITY, A RELATIVELY LOW NUMBER.

MOST OF THE COMPLAINTS AGAINST THE TAX AUTHORITY RECEIVED AT THE OMBUDSMAN'S OFFICE DURING THE REPORT PERIOD REVOLVED AROUND THE PAYMENT OF THE GRANT IN THE FIRST TWO TRANCHES - SOME OF THE COMPLAINTS WERE ABOUT ENTITLEMENT TO A GRANT, AND SOME WERE ABOUT THE PROBLEMS ARISING IN PAYMENT OF THE GRANTS. OTHER COMPLAINTS ABOUT THE TAX AUTHORITY WERE ABOUT THE SERVICE DELIVERED TO THE PUBLIC AND ABOUT RECEIVING THE PUBLIC IN THE TAX AUTHORITY OFFICES. IT MUST BE NOTED THAT DURING PART OF THE REPORT PERIOD THE TAX AUTHORITY OFFICES WERE CLOSED TO THE PUBLIC AND ONLY ALLOWED SUBMISSION OF DOCUMENTS OUTSIDE OF THE OFFICES.

THROUGHOUT THE PERIOD, THE OMBUDSMAN'S OFFICE WAS IN TOUCH WITH REPRESENTATIVES FROM THE TAX AUTHORITY. THE OFFICE TRACKED THE SERVICE MECHANISMS SET UP BY THE AUTHORITY TO COPE WITH THE DIFFICULTIES IN DELIVERING SERVICE DURING THE CRISIS, INCLUDING DIGITAL MEANS OF COMMUNICATION, WHICH WERE PLACED AT THE DISPOSAL OF THE PUBLIC, A DIGITAL ROBOT WHICH RESPONDED TO FREQUENTLY-ASKED QUESTIONS OVER THE PHONE, AND AN AUTOMATIC SEARCH PROGRAM WHICH SCANNED THE REQUESTS RECEIVED BY KEYWORDS ("BANK ACCOUNT", "FIRST TRANCHE" AND SO FORTH) AND SENT THE CALLER A STRUCTURED ANSWER. IT IS IMPORTANT TO NOTE THAT THE OMBUDSMAN'S OFFICE SHARED THE INFORMATION IT RECEIVED IN THE COURSE OF INVESTIGATING COMPLAINTS WITH THE RELEVANT AUDIT DEPARTMENTS IN THE STATE COMPTROLLER'S OFFICE.

[22] ACCORDING TO CLAUSE 76 OF THE INCOME TAX ORDINANCE [NEW VERSION], A CLOSELY-HELD CORPORATION IS A COMPANY CONTROLLED BY UP TO FIVE PERSONS AND WHICH IS NOT A SUBSIDIARY OR COMPANY IN WHICH THE PUBLIC HAS AN INTEREST.

[23] INCOME OF NIS 8,568 AND UP TO NIS 1,000,000 IN THE 2018 TAX YEAR. NEW BUSINESSES WHICH WERE NOT IN OPERATION IN 2018 WERE REQUIRED TO MEET THE CHARGEABLE INCOME REQUIREMENT FOR THE YEAR 2019.

Special grant for the self-employed - according to assessments submitted



THE COMPLAINT

THE COMPLAINANT COMPLAINED THAT HIS CLAIM FOR A SPECIAL GRANT FOR BEING SELF-EMPLOYED WAS REJECTED DUE TO THE SIZE OF HIS INCOME.



THE INVESTIGATION

THE TAX AUTHORITY EXPLAINED THAT THE AUTOMATIC GRANT APPROVAL SYSTEM REJECTED THE CLAIM SINCE THE TOTAL TAXABLE INCOME FOR THE 2018 TAX YEAR ACCORDING TO THE COMPLAINANT'S REPORT EXCEEDED NIS 240,000, WHICH IS THE MAXIMUM INCOME THRESHHOLD ENTITLING TO A GRANT IN THE FIRST TRANCHE.

HOWEVER THE COMPLAINANT CLAIMED THAT HIS TAXABLE INCOME FOR 2018 WAS MUCH LOWER THAN THE MAXIMUM AMOUNT.

IN RESPONSE THE TAX AUTHORITY STATED THAT THE COMPLAINANT MUST CORRECT HIS TAX RETURN ACCORDING TO HIS ACTUAL INCOME, AND AFTER THAT HE WOULD BE ABLE TO RESUBMIT THE CLAIM THROUGH THE COMPUTERIZED SYSTEM.



THE OUTCOME

AFTER THE COMPLAINANT CORRECTED HIS 2018 TAX RETURN HIS ENTITLEMENT WAS RE-EXAMINED AND APPROVED.

(1092764)



Even though the Tax Authority dealt with some 900,000 requests for grants within a few months, the Office received only a small number of complaint letters



Are you a non-citizen resident? You can receive the grant for the self-employed using a special identifying number



THE COMPLAINT

THE COMPLAINANT - A FOREIGN NATIONAL RESIDING IN ISRAEL WHO OWNS A BUSINESS - WAS UNABLE TO FILE A CLAIM FOR THE GRANT SINCE SHE DOES NOT HAVE AN ISRAELI ID NUMBER. FOLLOWING REPEATED FAILED ATTEMPTS TO RESOLVE THE ISSUE WITH THE TAX AUTHORITY OVER THE PHONE AND BY EMAIL, SHE CONTACTED THE OMBUDSMAN'S OFFICE.



THE INVESTIGATION

IN RESPONSE TO THE OFFICE'S INQUIRY, THE TAX AUTHORITY EXPLAINED THAT ONE OF THE CONDITIONS FOR PAYING A GRANT TO A FOREIGN NATIONAL WHO OWNS A BUSINESS IN ISRAEL IS THAT THE SAID FOREIGNER'S STATUS MUST BE THAT OF AN ISRAELI RESIDENT. IN OTHER WORDS, THE CLAIMANT HAS TO PROVE THAT HIS OR HER LIFE IS CENTERED IN ISRAEL (RESIDENCY). HOWEVER EVEN IF THE FOREIGN NATIONAL'S RESIDENCY IS PROVEN, HE OR SHE WILL STILL ENCOUNTER THE OBSTACLE WHICH THE COMPLAINANT RAISED IN HER COMPLAINT, SINCE FOREIGN NATIONALS DO NOT HAVE AN ISRAELI ID NUMBER.

THE TAX AUTHORITY SAID THEY WERE AWARE OF THE PROBLEM AND THAT UPON CONSIDERATION, THEY DECIDED TO ASSIGN RESIDENTS WHO ARE FOREIGN NATIONALS A SPECIAL ID NUMBER FOR THE PURPOSES OF FILING A CLAIM FOR THE GRANT.



THE OUTCOME

THE RESIDENCY OF THE COMPLAINANT WAS CHECKED AND CONFIRMED. DUE TO THE INTERVENTION OF THE OMBUDSMAN'S OFFICE, THE TAX AUTHORITY REPRESENTATIVES CONTACTED THE COMPLAINANT AND INFORMED HER THAT SHE MAY APPEAR FOR IDENTIFICATION PURPOSES AT THE RELEVANT TAX ASSESSOR'S OFFICE, WHERE SHE WILL BE GIVEN A SPECIAL ID NUMBER FOR FILING A GRANT CLAIM. THE COMPLAINANT RECEIVED THE ID NUMBER AND THEN PROCEEDED TO FILE A CLAIM FOR THE GRANT.

THE TAX AUTHORITY INFORMED THE OFFICE THAT THEY IDENTIFIED APPROXIMATELY 100 TAXPAYERS IN SITUATIONS SIMILAR TO THE COMPLAINANT'S, AND ON THEIR OWN INITIATIVE, SENT THOSE TAXPAYERS NOTICES ON THE MATTER. THESE TAXPAYERS WERE REQUESTED TO APPEAR AT THE TAX AUTHORITY AND, AFTER UNDERGOING IDENTIFICATION, WERE ISSUED AN ID NUMBER THROUGH WHICH THEY WILL BE ABLE TO FILE A CLAIM FOR THE GRANT.

(1093371 ,1097838)

The complainant requested that the compensation be paid to him urgently, and the Tax Authority sent the necessary permission by email.



THE COMPLAINT

THE COMPLAINANT WISHED TO WITHDRAW MONEY FROM A COMPENSATION FUND DUE TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC AND THE DECLINE IN HIS INCOME. HE THEREFORE CONTACTED THE RELEVANT INCOME TAX ASSESSOR'S OFFICE AND REQUESTED PERMISSION TO WITHDRAW THE MONEY WITHOUT HAVING TO PAY TAX. SINCE THE COMPLAINANT NEEDED THE MONEY URGENTLY, HE ASKED THAT THE PERMISSION BE SENT TO HIM VIA EMAIL RATHER THAN BY ORDINARY MAIL; HOWEVER, HE WAS TOLD THAT DUE TO THE REDUCED MANPOWER AT THE TAX AUTHORITY'S OFFICES IT WOULD NOT BE POSSIBLE TO FULFILL HIS REQUEST.



THE OUTCOME

FOLLOWING AN INQUIRY FROM THE OMBUDSMAN'S OFFICE AND AFTER THE OFFICE EXPLAINED THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF THE CASE, THE TAX AUTHORITY SENT THE REQUESTED PERMIT BY EMAIL TO THE COMPLAINANT AND THE COMPLAINT WAS RESOLVED. THE COMPLAINANT THANKED THE OFFICE IN AN EMOTIONAL LETTER.

THE ISRAEL OMBUDSMAN BELIEVES THAT ONLINE AND DIGITAL MEANS AND TOOLS SHOULD BE USED MORE EXTENSIVELY DURING ORDINARY TIMES AS WELL, NOT ONLY IN EMERGENCIES, IN ORDER TO STREAMLINE WORK PROCESSES AND SHORTEN THE LEAD TIMES FOR HANDLING INQUIRIES AND REQUESTS.

(1092721)

THANK YOU
Letters



I would like to thank you for your extremely quick and efficient intervention - this very afternoon I received the email from the Income Tax Authority with the permission attached. I have no words to express how much you helped me - I had already lost hope of ever overcoming the bureaucratic stage I was in because no matter what, at the end of the day anyone contacting these institutions knows in advance there's no chance they'll get what they need in a civilized manner without having to fight, to get upset and in these hard times for the whole world this is even more the case. I'm really not cut out for this, for me it's easier to just give up without even trying.

I contacted you because the situation I was in seemed to be without any sense or justification. This is not the way that things should ever be. I'm glad you managed to sort out this absurdity... After all, such institutions are the face the country projects toward its citizens and it is important to maintain their good reputation - that way citizens will respect them and be proud of their country... Thanks to you of course. And that is what I felt when I saw your email... I felt I was proud of the State of Israel, I felt someone's got my back. I think I haven't felt that way since my army days. Thanks a million for the work you're doing. I will never forget this case!"



The complainant filed an annual report to the Tax Authority but the documents ended up in the hands of a total stranger



THE COMPLAINT

THE COMPLAINANT SOUGHT TO FILE HER ANNUAL REPORT TO THE TAX AUTHORITY. ACCORDING TO THE INSTRUCTIONS ISSUED DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC SHE ARRIVED AT THE INCOME TAX ASSESSOR'S OFFICE AND PLACED THE REPORT ON A DESK SITUATED OUTSIDE THE OFFICE. AN OFFICE EMPLOYEE STAMPED THE REPORT "RECEIVED".

TO THE COMPLAINANT'S SURPRISE, SEVERAL DAYS LATER A STRANGER CALLED HER AND TOLD HER THAT HE FOUND HER REPORT AMONG OTHER DOCUMENTS HE RECEIVED FROM THE INCOME TAX ASSESSOR.

THE COMPLAINANT COMPLAINED ABOUT THE SEVERE BREACH OF HER PRIVACY AND ABOUT THE AGGRAVATION CAUSED HER DUE TO THE NEED TO FILE THE REPORT A SECOND TIME.



THE INVESTIGATION

THE MANAGER AT THE INFORMATION, SERVICE AND RESOURCES (MASHAM) CENTER AT THE RELEVANT INCOME TAX ASSESSOR'S OFFICE NOTIFIED THE OFFICE THAT THIS WAS A MISTAKE MADE BY A SUBSTITUTE WORKER, AS A RESULT OF THE EXTREMELY HEAVY WORKLOAD SHE HAD BEEN COPING WITH. THE MASHAM MANAGER ADDED THAT WHEN THE ERROR WAS DISCOVERED, THE REPORT WAS SENT FOR INPUT WITH ITS ORIGINAL DATE AND THAT SHE HAD SPOKEN TO THE COMPLAINANT AND APOLOGIZED FOR THE ERROR.



THE OUTCOME

THE OFFICE BROUGHT THIS INCIDENT TO THE ATTENTION OF THE DEPUTY DIRECTOR GENERAL OF CUSTOMER SERVICE AT THE ISRAEL TAX AUTHORITY WHO EXPRESSED HIS REGRET FOR THE INCIDENT AND SAID THAT THE CASE WOULD BE PRESENTED AS A TEST CASE FOR THE MASHAM EMPLOYEES IN ORDER TO PREVENT SUCH INCIDENTS FROM RECURRING IN FUTURE.

(1094573)

COMPLAINTS ON HEALTH SERVICES

UNDER NORMAL CIRCUMSTANCES, THE OMBUDSMAN'S OFFICE DEALS WITH COMPLAINTS ABOUT SERVICES PROVIDED BY THE PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICES SYSTEM IN ISRAEL, WHICH INCLUDES THE MINISTRY OF HEALTH, THE HEALTHCARE FUNDS AND THE PUBLIC HOSPITALS.

DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC THE OFFICE CONTINUED TO RECEIVE COMPLAINTS CONCERNING THE HEALTH SYSTEM. THE COMPLAINTS, WHICH WERE RELATED TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC, WERE MAINLY ABOUT THE FOLLOWING ISSUES: HANDLING OF REQUESTS TO UNDERGO CORONAVIRUS TESTING AND RECEIVING THE TEST RESULTS; THE CONTINUED ROUTINE MEDICAL WORK IN THE HOSPITALS AND WITHIN THE COMMUNITY DURING THE CRISIS; THE ISOLATION POLICY CONCERNING PEOPLE WHO WERE SUSPECTED OF HAVING CONTRACTED THE VIRUS; HOW ASSISTED LIVING FACILITIES AND LONG-TERM CARE INSTITUTIONS WERE COPING WITH THE PANDEMIC; HEALTHCARE FUNDS' TREATMENT OF PATIENTS SUSPECTED OF BEING SICK; AND THE HEALTH SYSTEM'S POLICY ON WEARING MASKS.

THE COMPLAINTS FILED DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC REQUIRED URGENT ATTENTION DUE TO THEIR VERY NATURE. THEY WERE INVESTIGATED AS QUICKLY AS POSSIBLE WITH FULL COOPERATION OF THE BODIES OPERATING WITHIN THE HEALTH SYSTEM. THE OFFICE CONTINUALLY WORKED TO GIVE A VOICE TO THE COMPLAINANTS WHO WERE IN DIRE DISTRESS, AND TO HELP THEM GET THE CARE THEY NEEDED QUICKLY AND WITHOUT PROBLEMS. FOLLOWING ARE SEVERAL EXAMPLES OF COMPLAINTS THE OMBUDSMAN'S OFFICE INVESTIGATED CONCERNING THE ISSUES LISTED ABOVE:

The Coronavirus test results were delayed - the complainant couldn't return home



THE COMPLAINT

THE COMPLAINANT, AN ISRAELI CITIZEN, RETURNED TO ISRAEL FROM A FEW MONTHS STAY IN SOUTH AMERICA AND SHE WAS REQUIRED TO GO INTO QUARANTINE FOR 14 DAYS, ACCORDING TO THE MINISTRY OF HEALTH GUIDELINES. WHEN THE QUARANTINE PERIOD WAS OVER THE COMPLAINANT WANTED TO RETURN HOME, BUT SINCE HER MOTHER WAS IN A HIGH RISK GROUP THE COMPLAINANT WAS GIVEN PERMISSION TO UNDERGO TESTING TO RULE OUT THE POSSIBILITY THAT SHE MAY BE INFECTED BY THE CORONAVIRUS. UP UNTIL THE DATE THE COMPLAINANT FILED THE COMPLAINT, SHE HAD UNDERGONE THREE CORONAVIRUS TESTS. THE FIRST TWO TESTS WERE DONE BY MAGEN DAVID ADOM (MDA) AND THE THIRD WAS DONE BY MACCABI HEALTHCARE SERVICES TWO DAYS PRIOR TO HER CONTACTING THE OFFICE.

THE COMPLAINANT ALLEGED THAT SHE WAS NOT GIVEN THE TEST RESULTS AND EVEN THOUGH TEN DAYS HAD PASSED SINCE SHE COMPLETED HER QUARANTINE PERIOD, SHE WAS STILL UNABLE TO GO BACK HOME.



THE INVESTIGATION

THE COMPLAINT WAS RECEIVED AT THE OFFICE ON APRIL 10, 2020, WHICH FELL ON THE FRIDAY DURING THE WEEK OF THE HOLIDAY OF PASSOVER. EVEN THOUGH THE OMBUDSMAN'S OFFICE WAS CLOSED FOR THE HOLIDAY, SINCE THE COMPLAINT REQUIRED IMMEDIATE ATTENTION, AN OFFICE EMPLOYEE CONTACTED THE COMPLAINANT TO OBTAIN ADDITIONAL DETAILS AND CLARIFICATIONS CONCERNING HER COMPLAINT. IMMEDIATELY AFTER THAT CONVERSATION THE EMPLOYEE CONTACTED THE PUBLIC INQUIRIES DEPARTMENT AT MACCABI HEALTHCARE SERVICES, WHICH ALSO JOINED THE EFFORT TO HELP THE COMPLAINANT GET THE TEST RESULTS. THROUGHOUT THE ENTIRE PERIOD THE OFFICE EMPLOYEE REMAINED IN DIRECT CONTACT WITH THE COMPLAINANT AND UPDATED HER ON THE PROGRESS OF THE INVESTIGATION.



The complaints filed during the COVID-19 Pandemic required urgent attention due to their very nature. They were investigated as quickly as possible with full cooperation of the bodies operating within the health system



THE OUTCOME

DUE TO THE OFFICE'S INTERVENTION, THE RESULTS OF THE THIRD TEST DONE BY MACCABI HEALTHCARE SERVICES WERE RECEIVED ON APRIL 11, 2020, JUST ONE DAY AFTER THE COMPLAINT WAS FILED. THE COMPLAINANT WAS NOTIFIED THAT THE TEST RESULTS WERE NEGATIVE AND THAT SHE CAN RETURN HOME.

THE MINISTRY OF HEALTH, MACCABI HEALTHCARE SERVICES (1092931)

Complainant was kept in quarantine for a month - needlessly



THE COMPLAINT

THE COMPLAINANT WAS EXPOSED TO A CORONAVIRUS-POSITIVE PATIENT. ON MARCH 24, 2020, AFTER HAVING EXPERIENCED SYMPTOMS OF THE DISEASE, THE COMPLAINANT CONTACTED MDA AND ASKED TO UNDERGO A CORONAVIRUS TEST. SHORTLY AFTER THE COMPLAINANT CONTACTED MDA, SHE UNDERWENT A TEST BUT DID NOT RECEIVE THE RESULTS. ON APRIL 5, 2020, AFTER THE SYMPTOMS HAD FADED, THE COMPLAINANT CONTACTED MDA AND INFORMED THEM THAT SHE HAD NOT RECEIVED THE TEST RESULTS, AND CONSEQUENTLY SHE WAS REFERRED FOR ANOTHER TEST. WHILE SHE WAS WAITING FOR THE RESULTS OF THE SECOND TEST, SHE RECEIVED A MESSAGE FROM MDA ON APRIL 10, 2020 SAYING SHE NEEDED TO BE TESTED YET AGAIN - THIS DESPITE NOT HAVING RECEIVED RESULTS FROM THE TWO PREVIOUS TESTS. AFTER HAVING BEEN IN QUARANTINE FOR THREE WEEKS, AND WITHOUT HAVING RECEIVED ANY TEST RESULTS OR ANY RESPONSE TO HER MESSAGES TO THE MINISTRY OF HEALTH, THE COMPLAINANT CONTACTED THE OMBUDSMAN'S OFFICE.



THE INVESTIGATION

ON APRIL 21, 2020, THE OMBUDSMAN'S OFFICE CONTACTED THE MINISTRY OF HEALTH AND THE NEXT DAY A DOCTOR FROM THE DISTRICT HEALTH BUREAU CALLED THE COMPLAINANT AND APPROVED YET ANOTHER TEST, WHICH WAS DONE THAT SAME DAY. ON APRIL 24, 2020, THE TEST RESULT, WHICH WAS

NEGATIVE, WAS RECEIVED AND THE COMPLAINANT WAS UPDATED. A DAY AFTER RECEIVING THE RESULTS OF THE THIRD TEST, THE RESULTS OF THE TWO PREVIOUS TESTS ARRIVED AND WERE ALSO NEGATIVE.



THE OUTCOME

THE OMBUDSMAN'S OFFICE DETERMINED THAT THE COMPLAINT WAS JUSTIFIED, AND THAT THE FINDINGS SHOWED THAT THE COMPLAINANT HAD REMAINED IN QUARANTINE FOR SOME DAYS UNNECESSARILY. THE OFFICE COMMENTED TO THE MINISTRY OF HEALTH ON ITS CONDUCT IN THIS CASE AND HIGHLIGHTED THE NEED TO LEARN LESSONS IN ORDER TO PREVENT SUCH INCIDENTS FROM RECURRING.

MINISTRY OF HEALTH (1092875)

Family members of long-term care patients complained - and the guideline concerning visits was relaxed



THE COMPLAINT

THE SON OF THE COMPLAINANTS IS UNCONSCIOUS AND IS IN A COMPLEX MEDICAL SITUATION. THE SON HAS BEEN HOSPITALIZED FOR APPROXIMATELY TEN YEARS WITH HIS FAMILY MEMBERS CARING FOR HIM DAY AND NIGHT. WITH THE OUTBREAK OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC THE FAMILY WAS INFORMED THAT IN VIEW OF THE MINISTRY OF HEALTH GUIDELINES FOR PREVENTING THE SPREAD OF THE VIRUS, ONLY ONE FAMILY MEMBER WOULD BE ALLOWED TO BE BY THE SON'S SIDE CONSECUTIVELY FOR A WEEK AND OTHER FAMILY MEMBERS WOULD NOT BE ALLOWED TO VISIT ON A DAILY BASIS.

THE COMPLAINANTS CONTACTED THE OFFICE AND EXPLAINED THE IMPORTANCE OF THE DAILY VISITS BY FAMILY MEMBERS TO CARE FOR THEIR SON, AND DETAILED THE NEGATIVE IMPACT THAT WOULD BE CAUSED BY INTERRUPTION OF REGULAR VISITS TO HIS BEDSIDE.



THE INVESTIGATION

THE MINISTRY OF HEALTH SAID THAT THE PROHIBITION ON FAMILY VISITS IN THE LONG-TERM CARE WARDS IS DUE TO THE DESIRE TO LIMIT THE SPREAD OF THE PANDEMIC AND THE RISK OF CONTAGION, PARTICULARLY AMONG PATIENTS IN THESE WARDS.

THIS BEING SAID, DUE TO THE OFFICE'S REQUESTS AND A REQUEST FROM THE HOSPITAL MANAGER CONCERNING THE BOY'S SITUATION, THE MINISTRY OF HEALTH REVISITED THE GUIDELINE AND DECIDED TO ALTER IT. INSTEAD OF A SWEEPING PROHIBITION ON FAMILY VISITS, THE HOSPITAL ADMINISTRATIONS WERE GIVEN THE DISCRETION TO APPROVE VISITS OF FAMILY MEMBERS WHILE SETTING LIMITS AND PUTTING APPROPRIATE PROTECTIONS IN PLACE.



THE OUTCOME

WITH THE CHANGE IN THE MINISTRY OF HEALTH GUIDELINES, THE HOSPITAL MANAGER CONTACTED THE COMPLAINANTS AND PERMITTED THEM AND OTHER FAMILY MEMBERS TO VISIT THE SON, SUBJECT TO THE UPDATED GUIDELINES FROM THE MINISTRY OF HEALTH. ADDITIONALLY, THE HOSPITAL STAFF WAS INSTRUCTED TO SUPERVISE THE SON DURING ALL THE HOURS IN WHICH FAMILY MEMBERS WERE NOT BY HIS SIDE.

MINISTRY OF HEALTH (1092629)



Instead of a sweeping prohibition on family visits, the hospital administrations were given the discretion to approve visits of family members while setting limits and putting appropriate protections in place

All the way to the hostel:
three children, two rooms and one Coronavirus patient



THE COMPLAINT

THE COMPLAINANT, WHO IS CLASSIFIED AS A HIGH RISK GROUP PATIENT, LIVES IN A TWO-ROOM APARTMENT WITH HER THREE CHILDREN: A 6-YEAR-OLD DAUGHTER, A 17-YEAR-OLD SON AND A SON WITH 100% DISABILITY. HER 17-YEAR-OLD SON WAS DIAGNOSED WITH COVID-19 AND THE COMPLAINANT'S COMPLAINED THAT MACCABI HEALTHCARE SERVICES WAS REFUSING TO EVACUATE HIM TO A HOSTEL. THE COMPLAINANT NOTED THAT AS SOON AS THE INFECTION WAS DISCOVERED THE PATIENT LOCKED HIMSELF IN HIS ROOM AND WAS EXTREMELY RELUCTANT TO EXIT IT AND THEREBY ENDANGER HIS MOTHER AND SIBLINGS. ACCORDING TO THE MOTHER, EVEN THOUGH SHE AND HER SON HAD APPLIED TO THE MACCABI HEALTHCARE SERVICES, THEY REFUSED TO EVACUATE THE SON TO A HOSTEL.



THE INVESTIGATION

IMMEDIATELY UPON RECEIPT OF THE COMPLAINT, THE OMBUDSMAN'S OFFICE CONTACTED MACCABI HEALTHCARE SERVICES, WHICH IMMEDIATELY BEGAN WORKING WITH THE REPRESENTATIVES OF THE HOME FRONT COMMAND TO HELP THE COMPLAINANT FIND A SOLUTION TO HER PREDICAMENT. WHILE INVESTIGATING THE COMPLAINT, THE OFFICE'S EMPLOYEES SPOKE WITH THE COMPLAINANT, WHO WAS EXTREMELY DISTRAUGHT, CALMED HER DOWN AND PROMISED HER THEY WOULD TRY TO HELP HER AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE.



THE OUTCOME

DUE TO THE OFFICE'S INTERVENTION, THE SON WAS TRANSFERRED TO A HOSTEL ON THE SAME DAY THE COMPLAINT WAS FILED. THE COMPLAINANT CALLED THE OFFICE AND THANKED THEM FOR THEIR INVALUABLE ASSISTANCE, AND SHE ALSO SENT AN EMOTIONAL THANK-YOU LETTER.

MACCABI HEALTHCARE SERVICES (1098718)



I have no words to describe the help I got from you including emotional support. You are always there for the ordinary citizen".

Problems due to the Enactment of the Cellular Phone Geolocation Law

ON MARCH 17, 2020, DURING THE FIRST WAVE OF INFECTION, THE ISRAEL SECURITY AGENCY (KNOWN BY ITS ACRONYM AS "THE SHABAK") RECEIVED AUTHORIZATION PURSUANT TO EMERGENCY REGULATIONS²⁴ TO ASSIST IN LOCATING PEOPLE INFECTED WITH THE CORONAVIRUS AND IN PREVENTING CONTAGION THROUGH CELLULAR GEOLOCATION. THE SHABAK'S ACTIVITY ON THIS MATTER WAS DISCONTINUED ON JUNE 10, 2020, AND THE MATTER WAS REFERRED FOR REGULARIZATION IN PRIMARY LAW.

AS PART OF THE COPING STRATEGY FOR THE SECOND WAVE OF INFECTION, ON JULY 1, 2020 A LAW WAS PASSED - LAW AUTHORIZING THE ISRAEL SECURITY AGENCY TO ASSIST IN THE NATIONAL EFFORTS TO REDUCE THE SPREAD OF THE NEW CORONAVIRUS AND TO ADVANCE THE USE OF CIVILIAN TECHNOLOGY TO LOCATE PEOPLE WHO HAD COME IN CONTACT WITH INFECTED PERSONS (TEMPORARY ORDER), 5780-2020. THE LAW IS INTENDED TO AUTHORIZE THE SHABAK TO HELP THE MINISTRY OF HEALTH IN CONDUCTING EPIDEMIOLOGICAL INVESTIGATIONS IN ORDER TO REDUCE THE SPREAD OF THE CORONAVIRUS.

ONCE THE LAW CAME INTO EFFECT THE SHABAK RESUMED CELLULAR GEOLOCATION ACTIVITY AND ON THAT BASIS, THE MINISTRY OF HEALTH SENT TEXT MESSAGES TO TENS OF THOUSANDS OF PEOPLE INSTRUCTING THEM TO

[24] EMERGENCY REGULATIONS (AUTHORIZATION OF THE ISRAEL SECURITY AGENCY TO ASSIST IN THE NATIONAL EFFORT TO REDUCE THE SPREAD OF THE NEW CORONAVIRUS), 5780-2020.



SELF-ISOLATE IMMEDIATELY DUE TO EXPOSURE TO A CONFIRMED CORONAVIRUS PATIENT, UNLESS THEY RECEIVE PERMISSION FROM THE MINISTRY OF HEALTH TO DO OTHERWISE.

MANY PEOPLE, WHO BELIEVED THEY HAD RECEIVED THE MESSAGES BY MISTAKE, CALLED THE MINISTRY OF HEALTH'S "VOICE OF HEALTH" HOTLINE TO OBJECT TO THE MESSAGE.

THE OMBUDSMAN'S OFFICE RECEIVED A LARGE NUMBER OF COMPLAINTS REGARDING THE HOTLINE'S AVAILABILITY²⁵. THE COMPLAINTS WERE ABOUT LONG WAIT TIMES FOR A RESPONSE AND CALLS BEING CUT OFF. THE COMPLAINANTS ALSO CLAIMED THAT THEY HAD BEEN TRYING FOR SEVERAL DAYS TO SPEAK WITH A HOTLINE REPRESENTATIVE WITHOUT SUCCESS.

THE OFFICE EMPLOYEES MADE AN EFFORT TO TALK WITH EACH PERSON WHO HAD FILED A COMPLAINT ON THIS ISSUE IN ORDER TO HELP THEM. ALL THE COMPLAINANTS RECEIVED A WRITTEN RESPONSE AS WELL REGARDING THE COMPLAINT. THROUGHOUT THE PERIOD THE OMBUDSMAN'S OFFICE MAINTAINED CONTINUOUS DIRECT CONTACT WITH THE MINISTRY OF HEALTH.

MOREOVER, IN ORDER TO GAUGE THE SEVERITY OF THE PROBLEM IN THE OPERATION OF THE HOTLINE, THE OFFICE USED THE "UNDERCOVER CLIENT" INVESTIGATIVE METHOD. OVER SEVERAL DAYS THE OFFICE EMPLOYEES CALLED THE HOTLINE AT VARIOUS HOURS OF THE DAY AND ATTEMPTED TO MAKE CONTACT. THE INVESTIGATION REVEALED THAT THE COMPLAINTS WERE INDEED JUSTIFIED AND THAT IT WAS INORDINATELY DIFFICULT TO GET IN TOUCH WITH THE HOTLINE.

IN ITS RESPONSE TO THE OMBUDSMAN, THE MINISTRY OF HEALTH CONFIRMED THAT THE LARGE NUMBER OF OBJECTIONS TO THE GEOLOCATION MESSAGES OVERLOADED THE HOTLINE CAUSING THE WAIT TIME TO LENGTHEN CONSIDERABLY. THE MINISTRY ADDED THAT THEY WERE TAKING MEASURES TO ALLEVIATE THE LOAD, INCLUDING AUGMENTING THE HOTLINE WITH 250 SOLDIERS FROM THE HOME FRONT COMMAND WHOSE SOLE TASK WILL BE TO ANSWER CALLERS WHO WERE CALLING THE HOTLINE CENTER TO DISPUTE THE GEOLOCATION NOTICE.

THE OMBUDSMAN'S OFFICE PUT THE MINISTRY OF HEALTH ON NOTICE THAT THERE WAS A NEED TO IMPROVE THE SERVICE AND THE AVAILABILITY OF THE HOTLINE. THE OMBUDSMAN'S OFFICE IS IN DIRECT CONTACT WITH THE MINISTRY OF HEALTH TO MAKE SURE THIS IS INDEED BEING DONE. AFTER THE OFFICE MONITORED THE SITUATION FOR A WHILE, IT WAS FOUND THAT THE WAIT TIME FOR AN ANSWER HAD INDEED BEEN SIGNIFICANTLY SHORTENED.

[25] THE LAW TOOK EFFECT ON JULY 1, 2020 AND THEREFORE THE COMPLAINTS ON THIS ISSUE WERE RECEIVED AFTER THE REPORT PERIOD, WHICH ENDED ON JUNE 30, 2020.

EDUCATION- RELATED COMPLAINTS

ACCORDING TO GUIDELINES FROM THE MINISTRIES OF HEALTH AND EDUCATION, ALL EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS WERE CLOSED DOWN IN THE MIDDLE OF MARCH 2020. THE SHUTDOWN LASTED FOR MANY WEEKS. THE SCHOOLS WORKED TO MAINTAIN A CURRICULAR ROUTINE THROUGH REMOTE LEARNING, PRIMARILY USING ONLINE RESOURCES.

THE OMBUDSMAN RECEIVED COMPLAINTS AGAINST THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND LOCAL AUTHORITIES ON ISSUES RELATED TO REMOTE LEARNING AND ALSO ON OTHER ISSUES. A FEW OF THE COMPLAINTS ARE PRESENTED HEREIN:

At least one computer per household



THE COMPLAINT

THE COMPLAINANT, A SINGLE MOTHER WITH A 100% DISABILITY, LIVES IN BEER SHEVA. SHE HAS TWO CHILDREN IN THE EDUCATION SYSTEM. SHE ALLEGED THAT SHE WAS HAVING DIFFICULTY MAINTAINING A REMOTE LEARNING ROUTINE FOR HER CHILDREN, SINCE SHE CANNOT AFFORD TO BUY THEM A COMPUTER.



THE INVESTIGATION

THE WELFARE AND EDUCATION DEPARTMENTS IN THE BEER SHEVA MUNICIPALITY INFORMED THE OFFICE THAT THEY WERE RECEIVING SIMILAR CALLS FROM OTHER CITY RESIDENTS, THEY ARE MAKING EFFORTS TO SOLVE THE PROBLEM AND EACH CASE WAS BEING EXAMINED ON ITS OWN MERITS.



THE OUTCOME

DUE TO THE OFFICE'S INQUIRY, THE MUNICIPALITY EVALUATED THE COMPLAINANT'S CASE AND DECIDED TO LEND HER A COMPUTER FOR HER CHILDREN.

THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION RESPONDED THAT THEY WERE AWARE OF THE DIFFICULTY PARENTS WERE HAVING IN ENABLING THEIR CHILDREN TO STUDY REMOTELY BY COMPUTER AND THAT THE ISSUE WAS UNDER ADVISEMENT.

THE OMBUDSMAN'S OFFICE ALSO CONTACTED THE "COMPUTER FOR EVERY CHILD" PROJECT COORDINATOR IN THE PRIME MINISTER'S OFFICE. THE COORDINATOR SAID THAT IF THE OFFICE OF THE OMBUDSMAN RECEIVES FURTHER COMPLAINTS ON THIS ISSUE, THEY CAN REFER THE COMPLAINANTS TO THE LOCAL AUTHORITIES OR TO THE PROJECT DIRECTLY.

SINCE THE OFFICE OF THE OMBUDSMAN DISCOVERED THE EXISTENCE OF A BROADER ISSUE BEYOND THE COMPLAINANT'S INDIVIDUAL COMPLAINT, THAT IS AFFECTING MANY FAMILIES, THE OMBUDSMAN'S OFFICE INFORMED THE RELEVANT AUDIT DEPARTMENT IN THE STATE COMPTROLLER'S OFFICE REGARDING THE INVESTIGATION, AND THE STATE COMPTROLLER'S OFFICE IS CONTINUING TO LOOK INTO THE MATTER.

MUNICIPALITY OF BEER SHEVA, MINISTRY OF EDUCATION (1092768)

Entitled to a frontal lesson in his home - and to a remote lesson during the COVID-19 pandemic

AS A RULE, THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION PROVIDES HOME SCHOOLING FOR STUDENTS WHO ARE UNABLE TO BE AT SCHOOL DUE TO THEIR MEDICAL CONDITION. THE SERVICES ARE PROVIDED THROUGH OUTSOURCING.



THE COMPLAINT

THE COMPLAINANT'S SON STUDIES FROM HOME DUE TO HIS MEDICAL CONDITION, VIA A PROGRAM OPERATED BY THE ORGANIZATION "KADIMA MADA". THE CHILD WAS ALLOCATED 20 WEEKLY HOURS OF LESSONS, OF WHICH 16 WERE FRONTAL CLASSES BY TEACHERS IN THE CHILD'S HOME.

IN MARCH 2020 THE AT-HOME FRONTAL LESSONS WERE HALTED DUE TO CORONAVIRUS RESTRICTIONS. THE COMPLAINANT CONTACTED THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND ASKED FOR HER SON TO RECEIVE ONLINE ALL THE SCHOOL HOURS HE HAD BEEN ALLOCATED.

THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION NOTIFIED THE COMPLAINANT THAT HER SON'S NAME WAS GIVEN TO "KADIMA MADA" AS A STUDENT IN A HIGH RISK GROUP. HOWEVER THE ORGANIZATION CLAIMED THAT ALTHOUGH IT HAD INDEED RECEIVED A LIST OF STUDENTS IN A HIGH RISK GROUP INCLUDING THE COMPLAINANT'S

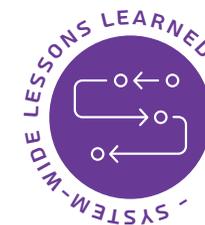
SON, THE MINISTRY HAD NOT INSTRUCTED THEM TO CONVERT ALL OF HER SON'S FRONTAL HOURS INTO REMOTE STUDY HOURS.



THE OUTCOME

THE OMBUDSMAN'S OFFICE CONTACTED THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, WHICH LOOKED INTO THE CASE AND APPROVED ADDITIONAL ONLINE LEARNING HOURS TO REPLACE THE FRONTAL LEARNING HOURS THE STUDENT HAD INITIALLY BEEN ALLOCATED. THE TEACHING STAFF AT "KADIMA MADA" RECEIVED AN UPDATE ON THE CHANGES AND THE TEACHERS ALSO SPOKE WITH THE COMPLAINANT. THE BOY RECEIVED THE LESSONS HE WAS ENTITLED TO ONLINE.

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION (1095040)



The data entry was delayed - and the Ministry of Education extended the deadline for submitting requests for Special Education students



THE COMPLAINT

THE COMPLAINANT, A BNEI BRAK RESIDENT AND MOTHER OF A 4-YEAR-OLD SON, COMPLAINED THAT A DATE HAD NOT BEEN SET FOR A HEARING REGARDING HER SON IN THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION'S ENTITLEMENTS AND CLASSIFICATION COMMITTEE²⁶. ACCORDING TO THE MOTHER, HER SON MEETS THE CRITERIA FOR INCLUSION IN A KINDERGARTEN FOR CHILDREN WITH LANGUAGE DIFFICULTIES; HOWEVER SHE WAS CONCERNED HE WOULD NOT BE PLACED IN THE KINDERGARTEN DUE TO THE FAILURE TO HOLD THE HEARINGS IN TIME.



The complainant thanked the OMBUDSMAN's Office for its assistance and added that she had not believed the Office would be able to bring her problem to resolution within just a few days

[26] AN ENTITLEMENT AND CLASSIFICATION COMMITTEE DETERMINES THE ENTITLEMENT OF STUDENTS TO RECEIVE SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL SERVICES WITHIN THE SPECIAL EDUCATION SYSTEM, AND ALSO THE EXTENT OF THE BASKET OF SERVICES ALLOCATED TO EACH STUDENT IN ACCORDANCE WITH THEIR FUNCTIONAL LEVEL.



THE INVESTIGATION

IN VIEW OF THE URGENCY OF THIS ISSUE, THE COMPLAINT WAS INVESTIGATED IN RAPID INVESTIGATION MODE, MAINLY BY PHONE. THE HEAD OF THE SPECIAL EDUCATION DEPARTMENT IN THE BNEI BRAK MUNICIPALITY CONFIRMED THAT THERE IS INDEED A DELAY IN THE PROGRESS OF THE HEARINGS OF THE ENTITLEMENT AND CLASSIFICATION COMMITTEES, PARTLY DUE TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC, AND THAT THE PROBLEM RAISED BY THE COMPLAINANT WAS AFFECTING MANY OTHER CHILDREN AS WELL, WHOSE MATTERS HAD NOT BEEN BROUGHT IN A TIMELY MANNER BEFORE THE COMMITTEE AS DICTATED BY THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION'S GUIDELINES.

THE HEAD OF THE SPECIAL EDUCATION DEPARTMENT ADDED THAT DUE TO AN AMENDMENT OF THE SPECIAL EDUCATION LAW, 5748-1988, WHICH CAME INTO EFFECT THIS YEAR, THE REFERRAL PROCESSES TO THE ENTITLEMENT AND CLASSIFICATION COMMITTEES HAD BEEN REORGANIZED. ACCORDING TO THE NEW ARRANGEMENT, THE KINDERGARTEN TEACHERS HAVE TO FILL IN ONLINE QUESTIONNAIRES ABOUT THE STUDENTS SUBJECT OF THE COMMITTEES' HEARINGS. ACCORDING TO THE DEPARTMENT HEAD, IN ORDER TO ASSIST TEACHERS IN FILLING OUT THE FORMS, THE DEPARTMENT PROVIDED TRAINING FOR THE KINDERGARTEN STAFF, PUT COMPUTERS AT THE DISPOSAL OF THE TEACHERS THAT DO NOT OWN A COMPUTER AND ASSIGNED SUPPORT PERSONNEL TO ASSIST.

THE DEPARTMENT HEAD NOTED THAT THE KINDERGARTEN TEACHERS WERE SUPPOSED TO FILL IN THE ONLINE QUESTIONNAIRES UNTIL THE END OF MARCH 2020; HOWEVER DUE TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC THE DEADLINE WAS EXTENDED UNTIL THE END OF APRIL 2020. NEVERTHELESS, BECAUSE OF RESTRICTIONS IMPOSED ON THE RESIDENTS OF BNEI BRAK DUE TO THE VIRUS'S SPREAD, NOT ALL OF THE DATA REGARDING STUDENTS WAS INPUT INTO THE SYSTEM IN TIME. THE MUNICIPALITY REFERRED TO THE HEAD OF THE HAREDI EDUCATION DISTRICT IN THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, WHO SUGGESTED THAT THE STUDENTS WHOSE DATA HAD NOT BEEN INPUT WOULD BE SUBJECT TO HEARINGS BEFORE A COMMITTEE FOR SPECIAL CASES IN THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION. HOWEVER THE MUNICIPALITY BELIEVES THAT, SINCE THE CRITERIA FOR A HEARING IN THE SPECIAL CASES COMMITTEE ARE HIGHLY STRINGENT, THIS WOULD NOT BE AN OPTIMAL SOLUTION, AND THEREFORE THE TEACHING STAFF SHOULD BE GIVEN A CHANCE TO INPUT THE DATA OF THOSE CHILDREN WHO HAD NOT BEEN INPUT INTO THE SYSTEM, WHICH

WOULD ENABLE THEIR MATTER TO BE HEARD BEFORE THE ENTITLEMENT AND CLASSIFICATION COMMITTEES.

THE OMBUDSMAN'S OFFICE SPOKE TO THE HEAD OF THE SPECIAL EDUCATION DIVISION IN THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND POINTED OUT THAT THE ISSUE RAISED IN THE COMPLAINT PERTAINS TO MANY CHILDREN IN BNEI BRAK, ESPECIALLY BECAUSE OF THE PARTICULAR CIRCUMSTANCES WHICH AROSE IN THAT CITY DUE TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC.

THE HEAD OF THE DIVISION RESPONDED THAT THE DEADLINE WAS BEING EXTENDED FOR SUBMITTING ONLINE REQUESTS REGARDING STUDENTS RESIDENTS OF BNEI BRAK WHOSE CASES HAD NOT YET BEEN RESOLVED – INCLUDING THE COMPLAINANT'S SON. THE HEAD OF THE DIVISION OF SPECIAL EDUCATION ASKED THE MUNICIPALITY TO PROVIDE HER WITH THE NAMES OF ALL OF THE STUDENTS WHOSE DETAILS HAD NOT BEEN ENTERED IN THE SYSTEM, IN ORDER TO ENSURE THAT THEIR CASES WOULD BE ATTENDED TO.

FURTHERMORE, SINCE THE INVESTIGATION OF THE COMPLAINT REVEALED AN OVERALL PROBLEM REGARDING THE ENTRY OF THE STUDENT DATA DUE TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC, THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION NOTIFIED THE OMBUDSMAN'S OFFICE THAT THEY HAD DECIDED TO EXTEND THE DEADLINE FOR SUBMITTING THE ONLINE REQUESTS IN OTHER CITIES AS WELL.



THE OUTCOME

THE OFFICE MONITORED THE COMPLAINANT'S CASE AND FOUND THAT SHE HAD BEEN SUMMONED TO A HEARING ABOUT HER SON AT THE ENTITLEMENT AND CLASSIFICATION COMMITTEE. THE COMPLAINANT THANKED THE OMBUDSMAN'S OFFICE FOR ITS ASSISTANCE AND ADDED THAT SHE HAD NOT BELIEVED THE OFFICE WOULD BE ABLE TO BRING HER PROBLEM TO RESOLUTION WITHIN JUST A FEW DAYS.

AS FOR THE OTHER STUDENTS WHOSE ISSUES HAD NOT YET BEEN SETTLED, THE EDUCATIONAL STAFF IN BNEI BRAK COMPLETED THE ENTRY OF DATA REGARDING APPROXIMATELY 100 SUCH CHILDREN, AND HEARINGS WERE HELD ON THEIR CASES IN THE ENTITLEMENT AND CLASSIFICATION COMMITTEES.

BNEI BRAK MUNICIPALITY, MINISTRY OF EDUCATION (1098142)

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WELFARE ISSUES IN THE LOCAL AUTHORITIES

THE OFFICE OF THE OMBUDSMAN PLACES SPECIAL EMPHASIS, IN NORMAL TIMES AND ALL THE MORE SO DURING EMERGENCIES, ON HELPING DISADVANTAGED POPULATIONS IN NEED OF ASSISTANCE FROM THE AUTHORITIES REGARDING VARIOUS ASPECTS OF WELFARE. THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC AND THE RESTRICTIONS IMPOSED IN CONSEQUENCE THEREOF LED TO DIFFICULT CIRCUMSTANCES, ESPECIALLY FOR THESE POPULATIONS. CITIZENS AND RESIDENTS WHO, EVEN IN NORMAL TIMES ARE COMPELLED TO SEEK THE ASSISTANCE OF THE WELFARE SERVICES, FOUND THEMSELVES IN EVEN WORSE STRAITS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC PERIOD. THE MOST ACUTE PROBLEMS AROSE AMONG THOSE WHO BENEFIT FROM WELFARE SERVICES AND WHO BELONG TO GROUPS AT HIGH RISK OF CONTRACTING THE CORONAVIRUS, WHO WERE AFRAID TO LEAVE THEIR HOMES TO TAKE CARE OF THINGS.

THE OMBUDSMAN'S OFFICE RECEIVED WELFARE-RELATED COMPLAINTS ON A WIDE RANGE OF PROBLEMS WHICH HAD BEEN CAUSED OR EXACERBATED BY THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC. THE OFFICE SERVED AS A LIAISON BETWEEN THE COMPLAINANTS AND THE RELEVANT WELFARE SERVICE PROVIDERS, TO ASSIST THE COMPLAINANTS AS QUICKLY AS POSSIBLE.

FOLLOWING IS A DESCRIPTION OF WELFARE-RELATED COMPLAINTS INVESTIGATED DURING THE REPORT PERIOD:

The senior citizens requested assistance in buying food and medication but received nothing more than courteous treatment



THE COMPLAINT

THE COMPLAINANT, A HAIFA RESIDENT WHO SPEAKS ONLY RUSSIAN, CONTACTED THE OMBUDSMAN'S OFFICE SHORTLY BEFORE THE EVE OF THE HOLIDAY OF PASSOVER WHEN THE SEDER TAKES PLACE AND DESCRIBED HOW HE AND HIS WIFE, BOTH OVER 70 YEARS OLD, WERE LIVING WITH HIS MOTHER-IN-LAW, A 99-YEAR-OLD HOLOCAUST SURVIVOR. THE COMPLAINANT NOTED THAT DUE TO THE RESTRICTIONS IMPOSED IN THE CURRENT EMERGENCY AND DUE TO HIS AND HIS WIFE'S MEDICAL CONDITIONS, THEY WERE UNABLE TO LEAVE HOME TO PURCHASE FOOD SUPPLIES AND MEDICATION. THE COMPLAINANT ADDED THAT OTHER THAN HIS MOTHER-IN-LAW, NEITHER HE NOR HIS WIFE HAVE ANY OTHER RELATIVES IN THE COUNTRY.

THE COMPLAINANT ALLEGED THAT HE HAD ATTEMPTED TO CONTACT SEVERAL BODIES, INCLUDING THE HAIFA MUNICIPALITY AND THE NATIONAL INSURANCE INSTITUTE, SEEKING ASSISTANCE; HOWEVER, EVEN THOUGH ALL OF THOSE BODIES HAD BEEN EXCEEDINGLY COURTEOUS, NONE OF THEM HAD IN FACT RESPONDED TO HIS REQUEST.

THE COMPLAINANT FURTHER ALLEGED THAT THE FIVE HOT MEALS THE HAIFA MUNICIPALITY'S WELFARE DIVISION WAS SUPPOSED TO DELIVER TO THEM TO TIDE THEM OVER THE ENTIRE HOLIDAY, WERE INSUFFICIENT FOR THE THREE OF THEM.



THE INVESTIGATION

SINCE THE COMPLAINANT SPEAKS RUSSIAN ONLY, A RUSSIAN-SPEAKING EMPLOYEE OF THE OMBUDSMAN'S OFFICE WAS IN CONTACT WITH HIM BY TELEPHONE. THIS EXPEDITED THE INQUIRY AND ALSO ELEVATED THE LEVEL OF THE COMPLAINANT'S TRUST IN THE OFFICE OF THE OMBUDSMAN.

DUE TO THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF THE CASE THE OMBUDSMAN'S OFFICE URGENTLY CONTACTED THE HEAD OF THE SOCIAL SERVICES DEPARTMENT IN THE HAIFA MUNICIPALITY, BOTH BY PHONE AND IN WRITING. THE DEPARTMENT HEAD PROMISED THAT SOMEONE FROM THE MUNICIPALITY WOULD CONTACT THE

COMPLAINANT AND ATTEND TO THE FAMILY. THE DEPARTMENT HEAD ALSO INFORMED THE OFFICE THAT THE FAMILY WOULD BE RECEIVING ADDITIONAL FOOD RATIONS OVER THE HOLIDAY.



THE OUTCOME

IN A CONVERSATION WITH THE COMPLAINANT AFTER THE HOLIDAY HE CONFIRMED THAT THE MATTER HAD BEEN RESOLVED DUE TO THE INTERVENTION OF THE OMBUDSMAN'S OFFICE, AND HE THANKED THE OFFICE FROM THE BOTTOM OF HIS HEART FOR THE CARE AND ATTENTION TO HIS CASE.

MUNICIPALITY OF HAIFA (1092805)

The senior citizen waited for her reimbursement, which was delayed due to the COVID-19 Pandemic



THE COMPLAINT

THE COMPLAINANT, A 79-YEAR-OLD HOLOCAUST SURVIVOR FROM BEER SHEVA, RECEIVED DENTAL TREATMENT AT ONE OF THE HEALTHCARE FUNDS IN THE CITY. THE COMPLAINANT REQUESTED REIMBURSEMENT FROM THE SOCIAL AFFAIRS AND SOCIAL SERVICES DIVISION IN THE BEER SHEVA MUNICIPALITY FOR THE TREATMENT DUE TO HER FINANCIAL CONDITION.

THE COMPLAINANT CLAIMED THAT APPROVAL WAS GRANTED FOR REIMBURSEMENT OF NIS 2,000, WHICH WAS SUPPOSED TO HAVE BEEN PAID IN TWO CHECKS FROM THE CITY'S WELFARE DIVISION - ONE IN FEBRUARY 2020 AND THE OTHER IN MARCH 2020. THE COMPLAINANT RECEIVED THE FIRST CHECK BUT WHEN SHE CONTACTED THE DIVISION TO RECEIVE THE SECOND CHECK, SHE WAS TOLD THAT DUE TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC THE DIVISION WAS NOT ISSUING CHECKS.

THE COMPLAINANT CLAIMED THAT IT WAS UNREASONABLE THAT ESPECIALLY DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC AND RIGHT BEFORE THE PASSOVER HOLIDAY, CONDITIONS FOR ELDERLY PEOPLE IN HER STATE SHOULD BE HARDER, NOT TO MENTION THAT THE PAYMENT HAD ALREADY BEEN APPROVED.



THE OUTCOME

FOLLOWING AN INQUIRY FROM THE OMBUDSMAN'S OFFICE, THE COMPLAINANT'S MATTER WAS ATTENDED TO AND SHE RECEIVED THE APPROVED PAYMENT. THE COMPLAINANT THANKED THE OFFICE FOR DEALING WITH THE MATTER.

MUNICIPALITY OF BEER SHEVA (1092795)

Moved to Israel before the COVID-19 pandemic - and suffered food shortages



THE COMPLAINT

THE COMPLAINANT MOVED TO ISRAEL A FEW MONTHS BEFORE THE OUTBREAK OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC AND SETTLED IN NOF HAGALIL. IN HER APPLICATION TO THE OMBUDSMAN'S OFFICE, THE COMPLAINANT DESCRIBED HER DIFFICULT SITUATION AND ASKED FOR THE OFFICE'S HELP IN RECEIVING FOOD RATIONS.



THE INVESTIGATION

SHORTLY AFTER RECEIVING THE COMPLAINT, THE OMBUDSMAN'S OFFICE SPOKE WITH THE HEAD OF THE SOCIAL SERVICES DEPARTMENT IN THE NOF HAGALIL MUNICIPALITY AND INFORMED HER OF THE COMPLAINANT'S DIRE SITUATION.



THE OUTCOME

IN A CONVERSATION WITH THE COMPLAINANT A FEW DAYS LATER, IT TRANSPIRED THAT THE MATTER HAD BEEN RESOLVED AND THAT SHE HAD RECEIVED FOOD RATIONS. THE COMPLAINANT STATED THAT SHE HAD BEEN PROMISED CONTINUING AID IN THE FUTURE.

NOF HAGALIL MUNICIPALITY (1093148)

PUBLIC HOUSING

UNDER NORMAL CIRCUMSTANCES, THE OFFICE OF THE OMBUDSMAN INVESTIGATES MANY COMPLAINTS CONCERNING PUBLIC HOUSING. THE COMPLAINTS ARE AGAINST THE MINISTRY OF CONSTRUCTION AND HOUSING (MINISTRY OF HOUSING), AGAINST THE HOUSING COMPANIES THAT MANAGE THE APARTMENTS BELONGING TO THE PUBLIC HOUSING SYSTEM AND AGAINST COMPANIES WHICH, ON BEHALF OF THE MINISTRY OF HOUSING, DEAL WITH REQUESTS FOR RENTAL ASSISTANCE IN ACCORDANCE WITH CRITERIA ESTABLISHED BY THE MINISTRY OF HOUSING. THE COMPLAINTS PERTAIN TO A VARIETY OF ISSUES, INCLUDING THE ENTITLEMENT TO PUBLIC HOUSING, THE ENTITLEMENT TO RENT SUPPORT WITHIN THE PUBLIC HOUSING SYSTEM, DETERMINING THE MONTHLY RENTAL FEES, THE LONG WAIT FOR AN APARTMENT WITHIN THE PUBLIC HOUSING SYSTEM AND THE MAINTENANCE OF THE PUBLIC HOUSING SYSTEM (APARTMENTS AND HOSTELS).

THE COMPLAINTS CONCERNING PUBLIC HOUSING WHICH THE OFFICE OF THE OMBUDSMAN RECEIVED DURING THE REPORT PERIOD DEALT MOSTLY WITH REJECTIONS OF REQUESTS FOR ASSISTANCE IN PAYING RENT AND ISSUES RELATED TO THE ISSUANCE OF CERTIFICATES OF ENTITLEMENT TO SUCH ASSISTANCE. THESE COMPLAINTS AROSE SINCE THE OFFICES OF THE COMPANIES DEALING WITH HOUSING ASSISTANCE WERE CLOSED TO THE PUBLIC DURING THIS PERIOD, AND THE PUBLIC DID NOT ALWAYS KNOW HOW TO CONTACT THOSE COMPANIES. IN MANY CASES, THE OFFICE FACILITATED A DIRECT CONNECTION BETWEEN THE COMPLAINANTS AND THE COMPANIES, ASSISTING THE COMPLAINANTS TO GET THE PAYMENTS THEY WERE ENTITLED TO. FOLLOWING ARE THREE COMPLAINTS THE OFFICE INVESTIGATED ON THIS ISSUE:

The rent assistance got delayed and the complainant found the offices closed



THE COMPLAINT

THE COMPLAINANT, A SINGLE MOTHER, STOPPED RECEIVING THE RENTAL ASSISTANCE TO WHICH SHE WAS ENTITLED. SHE CLAIMED THAT ALL OF HER ATTEMPTS TO CONTACT AMIDAR, THE NATIONAL HOUSING COMPANY IN ISRAEL LTD. (AMIDAR), GOT NOWHERE, SINCE THE AMIDAR OFFICES WERE CLOSED DUE TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC. THE COMPLAINANT ADDED THAT THE TELEPHONE ANSWERING SYSTEM WAS INACTIVE AND SHE HAD NOT RECEIVED A RESPONSE TO THE MESSAGES SHE HAD SENT BY EMAIL.

THE COMPLAINANT STATED THAT SHE WAS AT HER WIT'S END AND WAS AFRAID OF BEING EVICTED FROM HER APARTMENT DUE TO HER INABILITY TO PAY THE RENT.



THE INVESTIGATION

THE OMBUDSMAN'S OFFICE CONTACTED THE MINISTRY OF HOUSING AND AMIDAR, REQUESTING THAT THE COMPLAINANT'S ISSUE BE EXAMINED URGENTLY. THE OFFICE'S INVESTIGATION REVEALED THAT THE COMPLAINANT'S PERIOD OF ENTITLEMENT TO RENTAL ASSISTANCE HAD EXPIRED, AND DUE TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC SHE HAD BEEN UNABLE TO SUBMIT A REQUEST FOR AN EXTENSION OF HER ENTITLEMENT. DUE TO THE OFFICE'S INQUIRY, THE RELEVANT AUTHORITIES IN AMIDAR SPOKE WITH THE COMPLAINANT AND OBTAINED FROM HER ALL OF THE DOCUMENTS REQUIRED TO EXTEND HER ENTITLEMENT FOR RENTAL ASSISTANCE AND TO GRANT HER RETROACTIVELY RENTAL ASSISTANCE FOR THE MONTHS DURING WHICH SHE HAD NOT RECEIVED IT.



THE OUTCOME

ABOUT A WEEK AFTER SHE CONTACTED THE OMBUDSMAN'S OFFICE, ON PASSOVER EVE, THE COMPLAINANT'S BANK ACCOUNT WAS CREDITED WITH THE RENTAL ASSISTANCE MONEY.

THE MINISTRY OF CONSTRUCTION AND HOUSING, AMIDAR (1092630)

The Company offices were closed - and the senior citizens stopped receiving the rental assistance



THE COMPLAINT

THE COMPLAINANTS, A MARRIED COUPLE WHO ARE SENIOR CITIZENS AND NEW IMMIGRANTS AND WHOSE INCOME CONSISTS OF A NATIONAL INSURANCE INSTITUTE STIPEND FOR SENIOR CITIZENS AND AN ADDITIONAL STIPEND, LIVE IN A RENTED APARTMENT AND ARE RECIPIENTS OF RENTAL ASSISTANCE. THE

COMPLAINANTS WISHED TO SEND A COPY OF A NEW RENTAL AGREEMENT TO THE COMPANY M.G.A.R.²⁷, IN ORDER TO EXTEND THEIR ENTITLEMENT TO RENTAL ASSISTANCE. SINCE THE M.G.A.R. OFFICES WERE CLOSED, THE COMPLAINANTS WERE UNABLE TO DELIVER THE CONTRACT TO THE COMPANY AND THE RENTAL ASSISTANCE MONEY WAS DISCONTINUED.



THE INVESTIGATION

THE OMBUDSMAN'S OFFICE CONTACTED M.G.A.R. AND THE MINISTRY OF HOUSING, SENT THEM THE NEW RENTAL CONTRACT AND ASKED FOR URGENT HANDLING OF THE COMPLAINANTS' REQUEST TO RENEW THEIR ENTITLEMENT TO RENTAL ASSISTANCE ACCORDING TO THE PROCEDURES.



THE OUTCOME

THE MINISTRY OF HOUSING APPROVED THE COMPLAINANTS' CONTINUED ENTITLEMENT FOR RENTAL ASSISTANCE AND THE MONEY WAS TRANSFERRED TO THEM.

MINISTRY OF CONSTRUCTION AND HOUSING, M.G.A.R. (1092746)

[27] WHICH HANDLES REQUESTS FOR RENTAL ASSISTANCE FOR THE MINISTRY OF HOUSING.

ENTERING AND EXITING ISRAEL - POPULATION AND IMMIGRATION AUTHORITY AND THE ISRAEL DEFENSE FORCES - IDF

ONE OF THE MECHANISMS USED BY THE STATE OF ISRAEL TO COPE WITH THE SPREAD OF THE CORONAVIRUS, WAS IMPOSING SUBSTANTIAL RESTRICTIONS ON ENTRY TO AND EXIT FROM THE COUNTRY. DURING THE REPORT PERIOD THE OFFICE OF THE OMBUDSMAN RECEIVED COMPLAINTS PERTAINING TO ENTRY AND EXIT PERMITS. THE COMPLAINTS WERE PRIMARILY DIRECTED AT THE POPULATION, IMMIGRATION AND BORDER AUTHORITY (THE POPULATION AND IMMIGRATION AUTHORITY); HOWEVER OTHER BODIES WHICH ISSUED ORDERS RESTRICTING EXITS FROM THE COUNTRY WERE ALSO SUBJECT OF COMPLAINTS, INCLUDING THE IDF.

FOLLOWING IS A DESCRIPTION OF TWO COMPLAINTS ON THIS ISSUE:



She was diagnosed as terminally ill - and a visit by family members was approved



THE COMPLAINT

THE COMPLAINANT, AN ISRAELI CITIZEN AND RESIDENT, WAS DIAGNOSED WITH A TERMINAL ILLNESS IN AN ADVANCED STAGE, AND SHE SOUGHT TO INVITE HER RELATIVES, ETHIOPIAN CITIZENS, TO ISRAEL FOR A FAREWELL VISIT.

IN VIEW OF THE GOVERNMENT DECISION TO ESTABLISH A "CLOSED SKIES" POLICY AND FORBID ENTRY OF FOREIGN NATIONALS INTO ISRAEL, THE COMPLAINANT WAS UNABLE TO ARRANGE AN ENTRY VISA FOR HER RELATIVES.



THE INVESTIGATION

THE OMBUDSMAN'S OFFICE CONTACTED THE POPULATION AND IMMIGRATION AUTHORITY AND THE MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS FOR CLARIFICATION CONCERNING THE HANDLING OF THE COMPLAINANT'S REQUEST.

DUE TO THE SENSITIVITY OF THE CASE AND THE URGENCY DESCRIBED IN THE COMPLAINT, THE OFFICE ACCOMPANIED THE COMPLAINANT THROUGHOUT THE PROCESS AND EXPLAINED WHAT SHE HAD TO DO IN ORDER TO OBTAIN THE ENTRY VISAS. THE DIRECT CONTACT WITH THE COMPLAINANT HELPED HER MAKE PROGRESS WITH SUBMITTING AND HANDLING THE REQUEST.

THE INVESTIGATION REVEALED THAT THE POPULATION AND IMMIGRATION AUTHORITY HAD ANTICIPATED THAT MANY COMPLAINTS WOULD BE RECEIVED DUE TO THE DECISION TO "CLOSE THE SKIES", AND THAT IT WOULD BE NECESSARY TO EXAMINE EXCEPTIONAL HUMANITARIAN CASES. THEREFORE, IMMEDIATELY PRIOR TO THE "CLOSE THE SKIES" DECISION, THE AUTHORITY ESTABLISHED SPECIAL PROCEDURES FOR HANDLING SUCH CASES.

ACCORDINGLY, THE COMPLAINANT'S CASE WAS ALSO EVALUATED AND HER REQUEST FOR ENTRY VISAS FOR HER RELATIVES WAS APPROVED, SUBJECT TO DEPOSIT OF A GUARANTEE AND TO COMPLIANCE WITH THE MINISTRY OF HEALTH'S GUIDELINES. AFTER THE GUARANTEE WAS DEPOSITED, THE POPULATION AND IMMIGRATION AUTHORITY PROVIDED THE NECESSARY DETAILS TO THE MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS, WHICH SAW TO IT THAT THE ENTRY VISAS WERE DELIVERED TO THE RELATIVES.

THE INVESTIGATION ALSO REVEALED THAT THE REQUEST WAS HANDLED QUICKLY THROUGHOUT ALL ITS STAGES, WITH THE RELEVANT BODIES TAKING INTO CONSIDERATION THE UNUSUAL CIRCUMSTANCES OF THE CASE AND WITH COORDINATION BETWEEN THE MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND THE POPULATION AND IMMIGRATION AUTHORITY, AS NEEDED IN HUMANITARIAN CASES.



The request was handled quickly throughout all its stages, with the attending entities taking into consideration the unusual circumstances of the case and with coordination between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Population and Immigration Authority, as can be expected in humanitarian cases



THE OUTCOME

THE REQUEST FOR ENTRY VISAS WAS APPROVED, THE REQUIRED PERMITS WERE ISSUED TO THE COMPLAINANT'S RELATIVES, AND THEY ARRIVED IN ISRAEL ON TIME TO MEET WITH HER, IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE MINISTRY OF HEALTH'S GUIDELINES.

POPULATION AND IMMIGRATION AUTHORITY, MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS (1096208)



Arrived in Israel to settle his status in the IDF and got stuck without a settlement and without possibility to leave



THE COMPLAINT

THE COMPLAINANT, AN ISRAELI CITIZEN LIVING IN AUSTRIA WITH HIS FAMILY, ARRIVED IN ISRAEL IN EARLY MARCH 2020 TO SETTLE HIS STATUS IN THE IDF DUE TO MEDICAL ISSUES. FOLLOWING THE OUTBREAK OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC, THE IDF NOTIFIED THE COMPLAINANT THAT IT IS NOT POSSIBLE AT THIS TIME TO SCHEDULE AN APPOINTMENT FOR A MEDICAL EXAMINATION AT THE INDUCTION CENTER. THE COMPLAINANT WAS UNABLE, THEREFORE, TO SETTLE HIS STATUS IN THE IDF ON THE ONE HAND, AND ON THE OTHER HAND HE WAS UNABLE TO LEAVE ISRAEL AND RETURN TO AUSTRIA DUE TO A STAY OF EXIT ORDER WHICH THE MILITARY AUTHORITIES HAD ISSUED AGAINST HIM.

THE COMPLAINANT'S FATHER COMPLAINED ON HIS BEHALF TO THE OFFICE OF THE OMBUDSMAN AND ASKED THEM TO HELP HIM SETTLE HIS IDF STATUS IN ORDER TO ENABLE HIM TO RETURN TO HIS FAMILY IN AUSTRIA. THE FATHER

CLAIMED THAT HIS SON WAS EXPERIENCING MENTAL DISTRESS AND WOULD NOT BE ABLE TO REMAIN IN THE COUNTRY ON HIS OWN FOR LONG.



THE INVESTIGATION

IMMEDIATELY UPON RECEIVING THE COMPLAINT, THE OMBUDSMAN'S OFFICE CONTACTED THE IDF, AND CONSEQUENTLY AN EXCEPTION WAS MADE AND THE COMPLAINANT WAS SCHEDULED FOR A MEDICAL EXAMINATION AT THE INDUCTION CENTER. INDEED, THE FATHER NOTIFIED THE OFFICE THAT HIS SON HAD UNDERGONE THE EXAMINATION AND HAD BEEN ISSUED AN EXEMPTION FROM MILITARY DUTY.

HOWEVER SHORTLY THEREAFTER THE FATHER CONTACTED THE OMBUDSMAN'S OFFICE AND CLAIMED THAT HE CHECKED WITH THE BORDER POLICE AND FOUND THAT THE STAY OF EXIT ORDER ISSUED BY THE IDF AGAINST HIS SON WAS STILL IN FORCE.

THE FATHER ADDED THAT THIS MATTER HAD TO BE RESOLVED WITH THE UTMOST URGENCY SINCE HIS SON WAS SUPPOSED TO FLY TO AUSTRIA THE NEXT DAY AT 1:00 PM ON A SPECIAL REPATRIATION FLIGHT ORGANIZED BY THE AUSTRIAN MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS.

THE OFFICE CONTACTED THE IDF ONCE MORE AND ASKED THEM TO ATTEND TO THIS MATTER URGENTLY. THE IDF ANSWERED THAT THEY WOULD ALLOW THE COMPLAINANT TO EXIT THE COUNTRY AND EVEN PROVIDED THE DETAILS OF THE CONTACT PERSONS AT THE AIRPORT WHO COULD ASSIST HIM, SHOULD ANY PROBLEM ARISE.



THE OUTCOME

DUE TO THE OFFICE'S INTERVENTION THE COMPLAINANT'S STATUS WAS RESOLVED AND HE CAUGHT THE SPECIAL REPATRIATION FLIGHT. HIS FATHER THANKED THE OFFICE FOR THE QUICK AND EFFICIENT HANDLING OF THE CASE.

THE OMBUDSMAN'S OFFICE WOULD LIKE TO COMMEND THE MEITAV UNIT IN THE IDF FOR THE WAY THEY GOT INVOLVED AND TOOK EFFECTIVE, SWIFT ACTION TO RESOLVE THE COMPLAINANT'S CASE.

IDF (1092464)

ISRAEL

PRISON

SERVICE

THE OFFICE OF THE OMBUDSMAN RECEIVES COMPLAINTS FROM CONVICTS ABOUT THE CONDITIONS OF THEIR INCARCERATION, ABOUT THE TREATMENT THEY GET AND ABOUT THE WAY THE REQUESTS THEY FILE ARE HANDLED.

DURING THE REPORT PERIOD, THE OFFICE RECEIVED A NUMBER OF COMPLAINTS AGAINST THE ISRAEL PRISON SERVICE CONCERNING ITS CONDUCT DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC. CONVICTS COMPLAINED ABOUT THE WAY THE MINISTRY OF HEALTH GUIDELINES WERE IMPLEMENTED WITHIN THE PRISON, ABOUT THE FAILURE TO PREVENT GATHERINGS AND

ABOUT THE FAILURE TO OBSERVE THE SOCIAL DISTANCING INSTRUCTIONS INSIDE THE PRISONS AND WHILE UNDER ARREST. OTHER COMPLAINTS CONCERNED THE PROVISION OF PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT TO THE PRISONERS, SUCH AS DISINFECTANTS, MASKS AND GLOVES.

THE ISRAEL PRISON SERVICE NOTED IN THEIR RESPONSE THAT IN ORDER TO COPE WITH THE CORONAVIRUS, A UNIFORM POLICY WAS ESTABLISHED REGARDING DISINFECTION, INCLUDING DEFINING THE DIFFERENT RISK LEVELS FOR VARIOUS WARDS AND FACILITIES, ACCORDING TO WHICH THE FREQUENCY OF DISINFECTION WAS DETERMINED IN THE PRISONS, AT THE DIFFERENT STAFF OFFICES AND IN THE UNITS. FURTHERMORE, ALL THE ISRAEL PRISON SERVICE UNITS WERE PROVIDED WITH SUITABLE PROTECTIVE GEAR, WIDESPREAD INFORMATIVE ACTIVITIES WERE PROVIDED IN VARIOUS LANGUAGES, AND PLANS OF ACTION WERE PREPARED AT THE MEDICAL, OPERATIONAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE LEVELS.

DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC, THE ISRAEL PRISON SERVICE DECIDED TO FREEZE TRANSFERS OF INMATES BETWEEN PRISONS, EXCEPT UNDER CERTAIN UNUSUAL OR LIFE-THREATENING CIRCUMSTANCES. IN BOTH COMPLAINTS DESCRIBED BELOW, THE CONVICTS COMPLAINED THAT DESPITE THEIR MEDICAL CONDITIONS, WHICH REQUIRED THEM TO BE TRANSFERRED TO A DIFFERENT PRISON, THE ISRAEL PRISON SERVICE WAS REFUSING TO APPROVE THE TRANSFER REQUESTS. FOLLOWING ARE THE COMPLAINTS:

The prisoner asked to be in a hypoallergenic room and, due to intervention of the Ombudsman's Office, he was transferred to a different prison



THE COMPLAINT

THE COMPLAINANT, A CONVICT SERVING A LIFE SENTENCE, CLAIMED THAT HIS REQUEST TO BE TRANSFERRED FROM THE PRISON WHERE HE WAS CURRENTLY INCARCERATED TO A DIFFERENT PRISON WAS NOT RECEIVING THE PROPER, SATISFACTORY RESPONSE. THE COMPLAINANT CLAIMED THAT DURING HIS INCARCERATION HE HAD BEEN HOSPITALIZED FOR A LONG PERIOD AND HAD BEEN DIAGNOSED WITH LATENT TUBERCULOSIS; FURTHERMORE, HE SUFFERS FROM A RESPIRATORY DISEASE, HYPERTENSION AND OTHER MEDICAL PROBLEMS. HE CLAIMED THAT HIS INCARCERATION TOGETHER WITH SIX OTHER PRISONERS IN ONE CELL, WHO COOK AND SMOKE, WAS HARMING HIS HEALTH, THAT HE WAS SUFFERING FROM RECURRING ASTHMA ATTACKS AND THAT HE WAS IN CONSTANT NEED OF AN INHALER.

THE COMPLAINANT ADDED THAT IN THE DISCHARGE LETTERS FROM HIS HOSPITALIZATION, WHICH HE RECEIVED SEVERAL YEARS AGO, THERE WERE EXPLICIT INSTRUCTIONS TO PLACE HIM IN A HYPOALLERGENIC CELL AND TO AVOID EXPOSING HIM TO SMOKE, GLUES AND DETERGENTS; AND THAT IN VIEW OF HIS PRE-EXISTING MEDICAL CONDITIONS, DURING THE CORONAVIRUS PERIOD HE IS AT ELEVATED RISK.

THE COMPLAINANT CONTACTED THE COMMANDING ECHELONS IN THE PRISON ABOUT HIS TRANSFER REQUEST, WHICH WAS FORWARDED TO ANOTHER DISTRICT AFTER THE COMMANDING ECHELONS AT THE PRISON APPROVED IT. HOWEVER HE WAS TOLD THAT DUE TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ALL TRANSFER REQUESTS FROM PRISONERS HAD BEEN FROZEN.



THE INVESTIGATION

THE OMBUDSMAN'S OFFICE ASKED FOR THE ISRAEL PRISON SERVICE'S RESPONSE TO THE COMPLAINT, NOTING IN PARTICULAR THE MEDICAL DOCUMENTS THE COMPLAINANT HAD PROVIDED.



THE OUTCOME

FOLLOWING THE OFFICE'S INQUIRY, THE ISRAEL PRISON SERVICE EVALUATED THE COMPLAINANT'S REQUEST AND BROUGHT IT BEFORE THE NATIONAL TRANSFERS COMMITTEE. AFTER CONSIDERING THE REQUEST, THE COMMITTEE DECIDED TO TRANSFER THE COMPLAINANT TO THE REQUESTED PRISON.

THE OFFICE FOLLOWED UP THE CASE AND FOUND THAT THE COMPLAINANT HAD BEEN PLACED IN A CELL WITH ONE OTHER PRISONER. THE COMPLAINANT THANKED THE OFFICE FOR ITS ASSISTANCE .

(1093008)

The convict claimed his condition had deteriorated - and only after a repeat examination was his request for a transfer approved



THE COMPLAINT

THE COMPLAINANT, A CONVICT SERVING A LIFE SENTENCE, CALLED THE OMBUDSMAN'S OFFICE BY PHONE AND CLAIMED THAT HIS REQUEST TO BE TRANSFERRED FROM THE PRISON WHERE HE WAS CURRENTLY INCARCERATED TO A DIFFERENT PRISON WAS REJECTED WITHOUT HAVING BEEN CONSIDERED ON THE MERITS. THE COMPLAINANT STATED THAT HE SUFFERS FROM ASTHMA AND THAT AFTER HAVING BEEN TRANSFERRED TO A PRISON IN NORTHERN ISRAEL HIS SITUATION TOOK A SEVERE TURN FOR THE WORSE DUE TO THE CLIMATE IN THE AREA WHERE THE PRISON IS LOCATED, TO THE EXTENT THAT HE IS UNABLE TO LEAVE THE CELL, TO WORK²⁸ OR TO TAKE PART IN GROUP ACTIVITIES. HE ALLEGED THAT HIS TRANSFER REQUEST HAD BEEN TURNED DOWN AMONG OTHER REASONS DUE TO THE FREEZE ON PRISONER TRANSFERS DURING CORONAVIRUS, WITH THE EXCEPTION OF SPECIAL LIFE-THREATENING CASES, WHILE IT WAS DECIDED THAT HIS CASE DID NOT FALL WITHIN THE EXCEPTION.

[28] CONVICTS HAVE THE OPTION OF WORKING IN THE PRISON AND EARNING A SMALL SUM OF MONEY WHICH THEY CAN USE FOR PURCHASES OF FOOD OR OTHER BASIC ITEMS IN THE CANTEEN OR TO PAY OFF DEBTS.



THE INVESTIGATION

DUE TO THE OFFICE'S INQUIRY, AN ISRAEL PRISON SERVICE PHYSICIAN EXAMINED THE COMPLAINANT AND DETERMINED THAT THERE WAS NO CONNECTION BETWEEN THE LOCATION OF THE PRISON AND HIS MEDICAL CONDITION. THE OMBUDSMAN'S OFFICE ASKED TO SEE THE COMPLAINANT'S MEDICAL FILE, FROM WHICH IT APPEARED THAT THE ASTHMA ATTACKS AND THEIR SEVERITY HAD INCREASED DRAMATICALLY SINCE HE HAD ARRIVED AT THE PRISON IN THE NORTH. UNDER THESE CIRCUMSTANCES THE OFFICE REQUESTED THAT ANOTHER PHYSICIAN EXAMINE THE COMPLAINANT. THE COMPLAINANT WAS EXAMINED BY A DISTRICT PHYSICIAN, WHO RECOMMENDED INCREASING THE INHALER TREATMENT AND WHO REFERRED THE COMPLAINANT FOR FURTHER EXAMINATIONS TO DISCOVER THE REASON FOR THE DETERIORATION IN HIS CONDITION. AT THE SAME TIME, THE ISRAEL PRISON SERVICE REFUSED TO APPROVE THE TRANSFER OF THE COMPLAINANT TO ANOTHER PRISON, SINCE THEIR POSITION WAS THAT ACCORDING TO THE MEDICAL OPINION HIS CONDITION DID NOT QUALIFY AS AN "EXCEPTIONAL CASE" JUSTIFYING HIS TRANSFER DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC.

INITIALLY, FOLLOWING THE ADDITIONAL MEDICAL TREATMENT HE RECEIVED, THE COMPLAINANT'S CONDITION IMPROVED SLIGHTLY, BUT LATER ON HE LOST CONSCIOUSNESS AND WAS HOSPITALIZED. UPON HIS DISCHARGE FROM HOSPITAL HE CONTACTED THE OMBUDSMAN'S OFFICE AGAIN, AND THE OFFICE CONTACTED THE ISRAEL PRISON SERVICE AGAIN ON HIS BEHALF.

SUBSEQUENT TO THIS SECOND REQUEST, THE ISSUE WAS REVISITED, AND THEY ACCEPTED THE COMPLAINANT'S CLAIMS THAT HIS MEDICAL CONDITION WAS SEVERE AND THAT THE CLIMATE WHERE THE PRISON WAS LOCATED HAD INDEED INDUCED A DETERIORATION IN HIS MEDICAL CONDITION.



THE OUTCOME

DUE TO THE INVESTIGATION, THE REGIONAL PHYSICIAN RECOMMENDED THAT THE COMPLAINANT BE TRANSFERRED TO A DIFFERENT PRISON AND THE NATIONAL TRANSFERS COMMITTEE DECIDED TO TRANSFER HIM TO A PRISON IN THE CENTER OF THE COUNTRY. THE COMPLAINANT CONTACTED THE OFFICE FROM THE PRISON TO WHICH HE HAD BEEN TRANSFERRED, THANKED THEM FROM THE BOTTOM OF HIS HEART FOR THEIR ATTENTIVENESS, THEIR CONSCIENTIOUSNESS AND THEIR HANDLING OF HIS CASE. HE REPORTED THAT HIS CONDITION HAD IMPROVED CONSIDERABLY SINCE THE TRANSFER.

(1091452)

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POSTAL

SERVICES

ISRAEL POSTAL COMPANY LTD.

THE ISRAEL POSTAL COMPANY LTD. PROVIDES NATIONWIDE POSTAL SERVICES IN ACCORDANCE WITH A LICENSE GRANTED BY THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATION. THE ISRAEL POSTAL COMPANY'S SERVICES HAVE BEEN DESIGNATED AS ESSENTIAL SERVICES²⁹, AND AS SUCH THE ISRAEL POSTAL COMPANY CONTINUED TO PROVIDE SERVICE EVEN WHILE SUBSTANTIAL RESTRICTIONS HAD BEEN IMPOSED ON THE ECONOMY DUE TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC.

HOWEVER, SOME OF THE POSTAL UNITS ARE LOCATED IN MALLS AND SHOPPING CENTERS WHICH HAD BEEN CLOSED TO THE GENERAL

PUBLIC, AND THEREFORE THESE UNITS WERE UNABLE TO OPEN DURING THE CRISIS. MOREOVER, MANY POSTAL ITEM DELIVERY CENTERS ARE LOCATED IN PRIVATE STORES, WHICH HAD ALSO BEEN CLOSED.

IN THOSE POSTAL UNITS WHICH REMAINED OPEN TO THE PUBLIC, THE PROCEDURE FOR SERVING CUSTOMERS HAD TO BE ADAPTED TO THE GUIDELINES ESTABLISHED BY THE MINISTRY OF HEALTH. THE OPENING HOURS OF SOME UNITS HAD BEEN CHANGED, AND SOME UNITS WERE CLOSED DOWN FOR CERTAIN PERIODS FOR VARIOUS REASONS.

THE OMBUDSMAN'S OFFICE RECEIVED COMPLAINTS REGARDING THE CHANGES AND ADJUSTMENTS THE POSTAL COMPANY HAD MADE IN ITS PRACTICES AT THE SERVICE CENTERS DUE TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC.

THE BATTLE AGAINST THE VIRUS HAD A SEVERE NEGATIVE EFFECT ON SENDING OUTGOING MAIL ABROAD AND THE RECEIPT OF INCOMING MAIL FROM ABROAD. THE SHIPPING OF MAIL, IN BOTH DIRECTIONS, IS DONE MOSTLY VIA REGULAR COMMERCIAL FLIGHTS. DUE TO THE WORLDWIDE DROP IN THE NUMBER OF FLIGHTS AND THE DISRUPTION OF THE OPERATIONS OF POSTAL ADMINISTRATIONS ABROAD, MAIL FROM ABROAD WAS DELAYED AND THE SHIPPING OF MAIL FROM ISRAEL ABROAD WAS SIMILARLY AFFECTED.

[29] THE EMERGENCY EMPLOYMENT SERVICE LAW, 5727-1967 STATES THAT POSTAL SERVICES ARE "EXISTENTIAL SERVICES" AS PER THE DEFINITION OF THIS TERM IN THE LAW.

THE OFFICE OF THE OMBUDSMAN RECEIVED MANY COMPLAINTS ABOUT THESE DELAYS BUT WAS UNABLE TO DETERMINE IN EACH CASE WHETHER THERE HAD BEEN A FAULT IN THE WAY THE POSTAL COMPANY OPERATED, SINCE IT IS POSSIBLE THAT THE DELAY IN MAIL ARRIVAL IN ISRAEL WAS A RESULT OF THE DISRUPTION OF THE GLOBAL MAIL TRANSPORT NETWORK DUE TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC.

FOLLOWING ARE SEVERAL EXAMPLES OF COMPLAINTS AGAINST THE POSTAL COMPANY WHICH WERE INVESTIGATED DURING THE REPORT PERIOD.

The parcel waited at one Post Office branch but the recipient was sent to a different branch



THE COMPLAINT

THE COMPLAINANT RECEIVED NOTIFICATION THAT AN ITEM OF MAIL WAS WAITING FOR HIM AT THE POST OFFICE BRANCH AT WHICH HIS POST OFFICE BOX WAS LOCATED. THE COMPLAINANT WENT TO THE BRANCH, BUT TO HIS SURPRISE HE DISCOVERED THAT IT WAS INOPERATIVE DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC. THE COMPLAINANT CONTACTED THE POSTAL COMPANY'S CALL CENTER AND WAS DIRECTED TO A DIFFERENT BRANCH; HOWEVER WHEN HE GOT THERE HE WAS TOLD THAT THE ITEM WAS NOT THERE.



THE INVESTIGATION

THE INVESTIGATION REVEALED THAT THE POST OFFICE BRANCH WHERE THE COMPLAINANT'S POST OFFICE BOX IS LOCATED HAD BEEN CLOSED, SINCE THE OPERATORS OF THAT BRANCH BELONGED TO A HIGH RISK GROUP. ACCORDINGLY, THE ITEMS FROM THAT BRANCH HAD BEEN REROUTED TO DIFFERENT POSTAL BRANCHES. AS FOR THE COMPLAINANT, DUE TO AN ERROR HE WAS MISINFORMED AS TO THE BRANCH TO WHICH HIS ITEM OF MAIL HAD BEEN REROUTED.

THE OMBUDSMAN'S OFFICE FOUND THAT THE POSTAL COMPANY'S DOCUMENTATION REGARDING THE ROUTING OF THE ITEM WAS WRONG AND DID NOT INCLUDE CORRECT INFORMATION ABOUT THE POST OFFICE BRANCH TO WHICH THE ITEM HAD BEEN TRANSFERRED. FURTHERMORE, THE COMPLAINANT HAD NOT BEEN INFORMED OF THE TRANSFER.



The Israel Postal Company's services have been designated as essential services, and as such the Israel Postal Company continued to provide service even while substantial restrictions had been imposed on the economy due to the COVID-19 Pandemic

**THE OUTCOME**

AFTER SOME TIME THE ITEM WAS FOUND AND DELIVERED TO THE COMPLAINANT. DUE TO THE DELAY IN THE DELIVERY, THE WRONG DOCUMENTATION REGARDING ROUTING OF THE ITEM AND THE ERRONEOUS MESSAGES GIVEN TO THE COMPLAINANT, THE OFFICE OF THE OMBUDSMAN FOUND THAT THE COMPLAINT WAS JUSTIFIED AND ADVISED THE POSTAL COMPANY OF THE NEED TO LEARN LESSONS FROM THIS INCIDENT AND TO INSIST ON CORRECT AND UP-TO-DATE REGISTRATION OF TRANSFER OF MAIL ITEMS IN ORDER TO PREVENT SUCH INCIDENTS FROM RECURRING.

(1093113)



She complained that she was in a high risk group - and the mail item was routed to a delivery center close to her home

**THE COMPLAINT**

THE COMPLAINANT RECEIVED NOTIFICATION OF A MAIL ITEM WAITING FOR HER AT A DELIVERY CENTER LOCATED FAR FROM HER HOME. THE COMPLAINANT CLAIMED THAT SINCE SHE DID NOT OWN A CAR SHE WOULD BE ABLE TO REACH THE SAID DELIVERY CENTER ONLY BY PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION. HOWEVER SINCE SHE BELONGS TO A HIGH RISK GROUP, SHE IS UNABLE TO USE PUBLIC TRANSPORT TO REACH THE DISTANTLY LOCATED BRANCH.

**THE INVESTIGATION**

THE OMBUDSMAN'S OFFICE CONTACTED THE POSTAL COMPANY AND RAISED THE COMPLAINANT'S CLAIMS THAT SHE WAS HAVING DIFFICULTIES REACHING THE DELIVERY CENTER DUE TO HER BELONGING TO A HIGH RISK GROUP.

**THE OUTCOME**

SUBSEQUENT TO THE OFFICE'S INQUIRY, AND DUE TO THE SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES OF THE CASE, THE POSTAL COMPANY REROUTED THE MAIL ITEM TO THE DELIVERY CENTER CLOSEST TO HER HOME AND THE ITEM WAS DELIVERED TO HER THERE.

(1092653)

A private store owner who had contracted with the Postal Company closed his store - and required the complainant to pay for delivering a mail item

**THE COMPLAINT**

IN ORDER TO IMPROVE ITS SERVICE TO THE GENERAL PUBLIC, THE POSTAL COMPANY CONTRACTS WITH PRIVATE BUSINESS OWNERS FOR THEIR BUSINESSES TO SERVE AS DELIVERY CENTERS FOR ITEMS OF MAIL. THE BUSINESS OWNERS GET PAID BY THE POSTAL COMPANY FOR EACH ITEM OF MAIL THEY DELIVER. THIS ADDED SERVICE ALSO INCREASES THE POTENTIAL CUSTOMER TRAFFIC BY BRINGING MORE PEOPLE INTO THE STORE TO COLLECT THEIR MAIL.

DURING THE CORONAVIRUS LOCKDOWN SOME OF THESE BUSINESSES CLOSED AND THE POSTAL COMPANY WORKED TO REROUTE THE MAIL ITEMS TO OTHER BRANCHES OR DELIVERY CENTERS.

THE COMPLAINANT ALLEGED THAT THE OWNER OF A PRIVATE STORE, WHICH HAD SERVED AS A DELIVERY POINT FOR MAIL AND WHICH HAD CLOSED DOWN DUE TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC DEMANDED PAYMENT FROM HER DURING

THE PERIOD THE STORE WAS CLOSED IN ORDER TO DELIVER AN ITEM THAT HAD BEEN SENT TO HER.



THE INVESTIGATION

SUBSEQUENT TO THE OFFICE'S INQUIRY, THE POSTAL COMPANY INVESTIGATED THE COMPLAINANT'S ALLEGATION AND FOUND THAT THE STORE OWNER HAD INDEED MADE THE DELIVERY OF THE MAIL ITEM CONDITIONAL UPON THE COMPLAINANT PAYING FOR THE SERVICE. THE POSTAL COMPANY STATED THAT DEMAND FOR PAYMENT WAS UNACCEPTABLE AND THAT THE STORE OWNER HAD VIOLATED THE COMPANY'S INSTRUCTIONS.



THE OUTCOME

THE ITEM OF MAIL WAS DELIVERED TO THE COMPLAINANT FREE OF CHARGE AND THE POSTAL COMPANY'S REGIONAL MANAGER CONVERSED PERSONALLY WITH THE COMPLAINANT AND APOLOGIZED FOR THE INCIDENT. THE OMBUDSMAN'S OFFICE FOUND THAT THE COMPLAINT WAS JUSTIFIED AND DEMANDED THAT THE POSTAL COMPANY DETERMINE WHETHER THERE HAD BEEN OTHER CUSTOMERS WHO HAD BEEN UNLAWFULLY REQUIRED TO PAY IN ORDER TO RECEIVE MAIL. THE POSTAL COMPANY INFORMED THE OFFICE THAT NO OTHER SUCH CASES WERE FOUND WHERE CUSTOMERS HAD BEEN REQUIRED TO PAY IN ORDER TO RECEIVE AN ITEM OF MAIL.

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GLOSSARY

Complaint letter

A LETTER FROM A COMPLAINANT CONTAINING ONE OR MORE COMPLAINTS AGAINST A SINGLE BODY SUBJECT OF THE COMPLAINT.

Complaint

THE COMPLAINANT'S GRIEVANCES AGAINST THE BODY SUBJECT OF THE COMPLAINT. SOME OF THE LETTERS OF COMPLAINT MAY CONTAIN MORE THAN ONE COMPLAINT AGAINST A SINGLE BODY SUBJECT OF THE COMPLAINT.

Complainant

AN INDIVIDUAL FILING A LETTER OF COMPLAINT WITH THE OFFICE OF THE OMBUDSMAN (INCLUDING A MINOR OR A PERSON WHO IS NOT A CITIZEN OR RESIDENT OF THE STATE OF ISRAEL). A THIRD PARTY MAY FILE A COMPLAINT ON BEHALF OF A COMPLAINANT, PROVIDED THAT THE COMPLAINANT HAS, TO THE SATISFACTION OF THE OMBUDSMAN, GRANTED HIS OR HER CONSENT TO THE FILING OF THE COMPLAINT.

Resolved complaint

A COMPLAINT WHICH HAS BEEN RESOLVED TO THE COMPLAINANT'S SATISFACTION, AND THEREFORE A RULING ON THE MERITS WAS NOT RENDERED.

Body Subject of the Complaint

AN INSTITUTION AGAINST WHICH A COMPLAINT CAN BE FILED UNDER THE STATE COMPTROLLER LAW, 5718-1958 [CONSOLIDATED VERSION]. CLAUSE 36 OF THE STATE COMPTROLLER LAW STATES THAT A COMPLAINT CAN BE FILED WITH THE OFFICE OF THE OMBUDSMAN AGAINST ALL OF THE BODIES WHICH ARE SUBJECT TO THE AUDIT OF THE STATE COMPTROLLER UNDER CLAUSES 9(1) TO 9(6) OF THE LAW:

- ALL OF THE GOVERNMENT MINISTRIES AND THEIR AUTONOMOUS UNITS;
- ALL OF THE GOVERNMENT CORPORATIONS OR OTHER BODIES IN WHICH THE GOVERNMENT TAKES PART IN MANAGING;
- STATE INDUSTRIES OR INSTITUTIONS, SUCH AS THE NATIONAL INSURANCE INSTITUTE, ISRAEL POLICE, ISRAEL DEFENSE FORCES, AND THE ISRAEL LAND AUTHORITY;
- OTHER BODIES WHICH HAVE BEEN SUBJECTED TO STATE AUDIT BY LAW, PURSUANT TO AN ACT OF THE KNESSET OR AN AGREEMENT BETWEEN THE BODY AND THE GOVERNMENT.

ACCORDING TO CLAUSES 9(7) AND 9(8) OF THE LAW, BODIES IN WHICH MANAGEMENT IS SHARED BY ONE OF THE BODIES LISTED ABOVE, OR WHICH RECEIVE SUPPORT FROM ONE OF THESE BODIES, SHALL BE BODIES SUBJECT OF THE COMPLAINTS ONLY ON CONDITION THAT THE OMBUDSMAN OR THE KNESSET STATE AUDIT COMMITTEE HAVE SO DECIDED.

A Complaint as to which a ruling has been rendered

A COMPLAINT WHICH HAS BEEN FULLY INVESTIGATED AND A RULING HAS BEEN REACHED ON THE MERITS AS TO WHETHER OR NOT IT IS JUSTIFIED.

Justified Complaint

A COMPLAINT WHICH HAS BEEN FULLY INVESTIGATED AND WHERE THE DECISION WAS THAT THE CONDUCT OF THE BODY SUBJECT OF THE COMPLAINT WAS IN VIOLATION OF THE LAW, OR DEVOID OF LEGAL AUTHORITY, OR CONTRARY TO GOOD GOVERNANCE PRACTICES, OR EXCESSIVELY HARSH OR INVOLVED EGREGIOUS INJUSTICE.

Unjustified Complaint

A COMPLAINT WHICH HAS BEEN INVESTIGATED IN FULL AND THE DECISION HAS BEEN THAT IT IS NOT JUSTIFIED UNDER THE ABOVEMENTIONED DEFINITIONS.

Complaint the Office is not Authorized to Investigate

A COMPLAINT AGAINST AN ENTITY NOT SUBJECT TO THE OMBUDSMAN'S AUTHORITY UNDER SECTION 36 OF THE LAW, A COMPLAINT ABOUT A SUBJECT NOT WITHIN THE PURVIEW OF SECTION 37 OF THE LAW OR A COMPLAINT AS TO WHICH ANY OF THE PROVISIONS OF CLAUSES 38 TO 40 OF THE LAW APPLY.

Percentage of Justified Complaints

THE PERCENTAGE OF COMPLAINTS, OUT OF THE TOTAL COMPLAINTS AS TO WHICH A RULING HAS BEEN RENDERED, WHICH THE OFFICE HAS DECIDED ARE JUSTIFIED.

Percentage of Justified Complaints and Complaints which were Rectified

THE PERCENTAGE OF COMPLAINTS OUT OF THE TOTAL COMPLAINTS THE OFFICE IS AUTHORIZED TO INVESTIGATE, WHICH HAVE BEEN CONCLUDED, WHETHER BECAUSE THE SUBJECT OF THE COMPLAINT WAS RESOLVED WITHOUT THE NEED TO RENDER A RULING OR WHETHER BECAUSE THE OMBUDSMAN'S OFFICE HAS RULED THAT THE COMPLAINT WAS JUSTIFIED.

Indication of a deficiency

NOTIFICATION BY THE OMBUDSMAN TO THE BODY SUBJECT OF THE COMPLAINT THAT THE COMPLAINT AGAINST IT HAS BEEN FOUND TO BE JUSTIFIED. THROUGH THE INDICATION OF A DEFICIENCY, THE OMBUDSMAN IS AUTHORIZED TO CLARIFY THE MAIN POINTS OF THE FINDINGS TO THE BODY SUBJECT OF THE COMPLAINT AND TO INDICATE THE NEED TO RECTIFY THE DEFICIENCY WHICH HAS BEEN EXPOSED THROUGH THE INVESTIGATION. THE BODY SUBJECT OF THE COMPLAINT MAY ALSO BE GIVEN AN INDICATION OF THE WAY THE DEFICIENCY SHOULD BE CORRECTED AND A DEADLINE FOR MAKING THE CORRECTION.





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