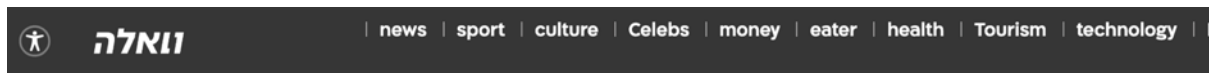


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First-of-its-kind pilot to identify victims of trafficking and slavery launches in Israel

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The Task Force on Human Trafficking and Prostitution is launching a first-of-its-kind program to train professionals in the field to recognize signs of trafficking, slavery, and exploitation - with the phenomenon worsening since the outbreak of the Iron Sword War. A criminologist from the field says: "It was only when I received the tools that I realized that my patients were actually experiencing slavery"



In video: Police arrested 10 suspects for sex offenses and prostitution of a minor / Photo: Police spokeswoman, editing: Assaf Drori

The Task Force for Human Trafficking and Prostitution has launched a first-of-its-kind innovative pilot in Israel, which aims to significantly increase the chance of identifying victims of trafficking and slavery in real time and saving women from a cycle of violence, coercion, and ongoing exploitation. "I didn't know how to identify women who were trafficked," says Ma'an Price Zohar, a clinical criminologist at Sal'it

who helps women in the cycle of prostitution. "I didn't know what the difference was, both legal and criminal and emotional, between women who were trafficked and women in prostitution. I know the population of women in prostitution, but suddenly they connected it to human trafficking, including being held in slavery, and then I realized that I had patients who had experienced it - I was really shocked."

Human trafficking means the transfer or possession of a person, under circumstances of threats, coercion, or deception, for the purpose of exploitation. In Israel, the main trafficking patterns are for the purpose of sexual exploitation or slavery, but there are also other patterns. Anyone who has fallen victim to trafficking or being held in slavery can receive recognition, move to a shelter with a holistic basket of services, or receive assistance from the Day Center for Trafficking Survivors in Tel Aviv, receive a residence visa, and other rights and protections.

Therefore, the pilot focuses on providing knowledge to professionals in the field who may encounter victims of trafficking, so that they can identify signs of trafficking and slavery and refer them for help.

Where sometimes one woman tries to send a distress signal that no one knows how to decipher, the pilot gives professionals the tools to identify suspicious signs.

The serious phenomenon of human trafficking, and in particular trafficking in women for sexual purposes, has not disappeared from the field and has even worsened since the outbreak of the war. Behind closed doors and in the dark, women are forcibly held, exploited and cut off from an entire society that ignores their existence. The new pilot is designed to put an end to the hope of the headquarters and all those who share this silence and to turn every encounter with professionals into an opportunity for rescue.

The initiative focuses on sensitive identification nodes where victims of trafficking may be found - emergency rooms and especially women's departments, police stations, encounters with law enforcement officials on the street, social workers and aid organizations. In a place where sometimes one woman tries to send a distress signal that no one knows how to decipher, the pilot gives professionals the tools to identify suspicious signs, ask the right questions and create an immediate connection to professional and life-saving assistance. In addition, it strengthens municipal cooperation between all parties for the first time, so that no woman will remain invisible in a system that can and should reach out to her. As part of the pilot that began in the Tel Aviv Municipality, specialized workshops are being held on this topic.

"In the workshop, they explained to us how to identify this," says Price Zohar. "There are all kinds of criteria. And suddenly, while treating women, cases of women who said they worked in prostitution started to come up, but from what I learned, I understood that they were actually victims of trafficking. I even found an old report from one of them that says she had already been recognized as such in the past. It really sharpened my understanding."

How are trafficking victims identified?

- Humans exercise control - denying identification documents (ID, passport), preventing medical treatment, restricting movement, restricting communication, and employing people under conditions of slavery and threats.
- The victims do not speak Hebrew - they lack status, they are accompanied by a dominant figure who does not let them speak. Serious injuries caused by man-made means and they claim that it happened from a fall or some other accident.
- Following the money - someone who has been in Israel for years, but she doesn't work, so try to find out where the money comes from, what she's famous for. If she lives with another person, who is that person? What is the nature of their relationship? How is she doing in Israel?
- The red light is on - follow the money, and once the conditions accumulate, suspicion of being a victim of trafficking rises.



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Price Zohar describes a situation in which she was able to identify a case of trafficking after the workshop from a random conversation with a friend who is a medical student: "She told me about someone who came to the hospital accompanied by several people, and they wouldn't let her have any peace. Then a red light went off in my head. I asked her to talk to the social worker at the hospital. Thanks to what I learned, I knew how to connect the dots and offer the most appropriate help."

One of the important emphases for Price Zohar is the changed way of approaching the women themselves. "We learned how to introduce ourselves, to say, 'I'm a clinical criminologist, I'm not from the police, I'm here to help you and you have rights.' These are very therapeutic things but also critical for creating trust. To make it clear that this is not an enforcement agency, but a person who has come to support."

The Director General of the Task Force on Human Trafficking and Prostitution, Moriah Rodal Silfen, said that this is an innovative initiative that aims to locate women who are in the trafficking cycle. Sometimes even before they are aware of it

themselves, and to create an entire municipal system that is able to identify, report and refer for treatment. "There are two unique elements in this pilot," explains Rodal Silfen. "The first is the understanding that victims of trafficking can be identified in the early stages, before the harm is profound, and before the woman completely disappears under the radar. Sometimes it can be a social worker, a doctor or a municipal police officer who sees her at a critical moment, and that is precisely where the chain of violence can be interrupted."

"What's happening in Beersheba is not like what's happening in Tel Aviv or Jerusalem"

Another unique element of the initiative is the focus on one city at a time, and the building of a holistic urban network of professionals from the city's hospital emergency rooms, through welfare teams, to aid organizations. "The goal is for all the elements in the city to be coordinated among themselves. So that when a woman arrives at the emergency room, an aid organization or a police officer, someone on the way will be able to identify her, and the rest will know how to act together."

The pilot is currently operating in Tel Aviv, and is currently expanding to Jerusalem, where more than 20 workshops with welfare teams, hospitals and field associations are already planned. The activity is expected to reach Beersheva later, with a unique adaptation to the local profile of the phenomenon." Trafficking in Beesheva doesn't look like trafficking in Tel Aviv or Jerusalem, we are talking about different populations, different patterns of action. Therefore, the mapping must be local. People think that trafficking is just smuggling women across borders. But according to Israeli law, trafficking also includes being held in conditions of slavery."



"It's enough that someone in prostitution is locked in an apartment, can't leave, is completely controlled, that's trafficking. And many women in prostitution are in exactly that place," Silfen emphasized. According to her, the ultimate goal is to implement the model on a national level, and to make identifying and assisting victims of trafficking an integral part of municipal and state activities.

Attorney Eden Farber, Director of the Trafficking Prevention Division at the Headquarters for Combating Trafficking in Women and Prostitution, who is delivering the pilot workshop to participants, added: "The pilot focuses on identifying key patterns of human trafficking in Israel. We based the lectures on the long-standing experience of two leading organizations in the field - we and our partner from the association 'We Don't Stand By', along with Naama Sabatu, a social worker and director of the trafficking division at the association.

The model they developed includes four different types of lectures, tailored to diverse target audiences: populations at risk, women in prostitution, medical

professionals, and police and municipal supervision personnel. "The goal is not only to raise awareness, but to create local collaborations between the parties that encounter these populations in the field," she explains. The pilot began in Tel Aviv, where, she says, it was met with extraordinary cooperation from the municipality and many field organizations. "Social workers, municipal police, emergency room teams - everyone was involved. We recognize that it is precisely the people who encounter marginalized populations who can identify the victims, if only they are given the tools to do so."

According to Farber, it is difficult to estimate the scope of the phenomenon, but it is clear to her that this is only the tip of the iceberg: "Over 90 women were recognized as victims of trafficking last year, but that is only what we know. This is a sophisticated and organized crime, which often occurs in full view without anyone noticing. How can a victim of trafficking be identified? Farber explains: "It is not always physical signs. Sometimes it is a person who has lived here for years but does not know a word of Hebrew, it is not clear what he does for a living, always accompanied by a dominant figure who speaks on his behalf. This requires sensitivity and professional training."



"In most trafficking cases, I'm not the first person to meet the woman, I'm just the first to recognize what she's going through," said Naama Sabatu, a social worker and director of trafficking at the "We Don't Stand By" nonprofit. According to her, the main challenge is not necessarily treatment, but detection. "Women go through emergency rooms in hospitals, through institutions, sometimes even in hostels - but no one recognizes that they are being held in conditions of slavery. The trafficking takes place below the surface."

One of the harsh examples she mentions is the story of Marina Malinovsky, a foreign national from Ukraine who was murdered after falling victim to trafficking in women in Israel. "She came to hospitals more than once. No one recognized her as a victim of trafficking. It was only thanks to an incident in which she came to the hospital again, and one of the social workers contacted me, that we were able to identify her, recognize her as a victim, and rescue her, but it was too late. "It's a case that has haunted me to this day."

According to her, the training she provides is intended to break the cycle of systemic blindness. "Most therapists, even those who work with women in prostitution, or with those without status in general, are not familiar with the definition of trafficking. Even if they have heard of it, they don't know how to identify the characteristics. A woman can appear to be choosing prostitution, but in fact she is held in complete control, and that is precisely trafficking according to the law."

Delicate balance

"If a woman is recognized as a victim of trafficking, her rights are opened up, she can be admitted to a shelter, provided with medical, psychological and legal assistance. But if she is not identified, she has nothing. No protection, no address, no future. Many women who have experienced trafficking will say that everything is fine. Because this is their way of maintaining a sense of control, it is psychological protection," she emphasized. "Marina, for example, was bruised from head to toe and told me, 'If anything, I am taking advantage of them.' Only over time did she open up to us. That is why we teach not only identification signs, but also how to approach, how to build trust, how to question in therapeutic rather than interrogative language. It is a delicate balance, on the one hand, to provide security and maintain the woman's well-being, and on the other hand, not to miss the only moment when she might be rescued."

According to her, cooperation is critical to the success of the move. "We are bringing the social arm into this arena. Not only in retrospect, after the injury, but in the initial encounter. In identification. That is where the potential to save lives lies."

