

Israel's Report on the Implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995) and the Outcome of the 23rd Special Session of the General Assembly

SECTION 1: Priorities, achievements, challenges and setbacks

The State of Israel was established in 1948 by force of the Declaration of Independence, which promises full social and political rights to all of Israel's citizens, regardless of religion, ethnicity or gender.

The Equal Rights for Women Law 5711-1951 was enacted only three years after the establishment of the State of Israel. Ever since, Israeli women have continued to make significant, if not always steady or linear, progress towards gender equality. Even as the State continued to struggle for its very existence during its early decades, and even as Israel continues facing existential threats today, legislation promoting gender equality and human rights has been and remains a central tenet of Israeli society. (See sub-heading "Examples of institutional, constitutional and legislative developments ", page 3).

Under Government Resolution No. 36 (May 26, 2015), the Government of Israel (hereafter the GOI) established a designated Ministerial Committee on Social Equality. The Chair of Committee is the Minister of Social Equality, and its members are: the Ministers of Justice, Labor, Social Affairs and Social Services (MOLSASS), Industry and Economy, Religious Services, Culture and Sport and Science, Technology and Space. The Committee is charged with promoting gender equality in various aspects of life.

In 2017 the annual budget allocated to the Authority for the Advancement of the Status of Women (hereafter the AAW) was increased dramatically- from 1,864,000 NIS (503,783 USD) in 2016 to **17,000,000 NIS (4,594,594 USD) in 2017. The AAW annual budget has multiplied by 4.35 since 2011.**

In 2017, Israel's UN Human Development Index (HDI) value was 0.903, positioning Israel in the 'very high human development' category, ranking 22nd out of 189 countries and territories. Between 1990 and 2017, Israel's HDI value increased from 0.792 to 0.903, representing an average yearly increase of 0.49%. In terms of Gender development, Israel's HDI value for 2017 was 0.975.

Israel's Gender Inequality Index (GII) value in 2017 was 0.098 as opposed to 0.133 in 2012, representing a decrease of 0.035 in five years. Israel ranked 22nd out of 189 countries.

Israel's Gender Development Index (GDI) value in 2017 was 0.975, representing an increase from 0.971 in 2012.

According to the Israel's Central Bureau of Statistics (hereafter CBS), in 2017 the life expectancy for women was 84.6 and for men 80.7. It also noted that 89% of women in Israel reported they were generally content with their lives.

Education for both boys and girls (extended to age 18 in 2007) has been compulsory since the establishment of the State, and according to the CBS, in 2017, 70.9% of girls received high school diplomas, as opposed to 59.2% of boys, and 59% of students attending higher education institutions in the academic year 2017/2018 were women.

Both government and civil society have been working to reduce gender-based violence. One example of the increasing involvement of civil society is the wide-spread protest against gender-based violence that took place in December 2018, organized by a coalition of Israeli humanitarian and feminist organizations, in which thousands of women and men participated across the country. Following this protest the GOI approved an increase in the budget for the domestic violence program in 2019 from 30 to 50 million NIS. This budget is part of the NIS 250 million allocated to deal with this issue over the next five years.

Israel has a very active civil society which includes an assertive feminist movement, including hundreds of feminist and women's organizations. Israel sees itself as a one of the leading countries in the struggle for women's equality, with multi-pronged programs of legislation, increasing awareness and consciousness, numerous institutional mechanisms to promote gender equality, many international cooperation programs promoting women's empowerment and a leading role in the effort to promote gender equality in the international arena, including in the United Nations and many programs led by Israel's National Development Agency MASHAV.

In government and in the Knesset, as well as in the written and electronic media, debates are increasingly gender-oriented. Women are speaking out, demanding gender equality in all aspects of public and private life. Human rights awareness as well as awareness of the need for gender perspectives has increased in the public sphere and social debates in Israel are increasingly more inclusive and less hegemonic. Women in minority groups and lower economic echelons are increasingly participating in public debates as well.

Given the important role of civil society in Israel, the government introduced, in 2017, a series of "Round Tables". This project entailed six discussion sessions in academic

institutions located throughout Israel to facilitate diverse participation. The sessions offered a unique platform for free discourse between civil society, academics and government representatives on core human rights issues related to women's rights as well as several other issues such as, *inter alia*: LGBT Rights; Israelis of Ethiopian descent; the local Bedouin population; rights of persons with disabilities; and social and economic rights in the periphery. One of the aims of this project was to allow grass roots organizations, which usually do not have the resources to submit shadow reports to the general treaty bodies and UPR process, to participate in the UN HR reporting mechanism.

Examples of institutional, constitutional and legislative developments:

Israel's unwavering dedication to gender-based equality has not faltered—from the enactment of the *Equal Rights for Women Law 5711-1951* just three years after the establishment of the State of Israel, until now.

The laws that directly promote gender equality in Israel are the Women's Equal Rights Law, 1951, and the Authority for the Advancement of the Status of Women Law, 1998. The objective of the Women's Equal Rights Law is to determine principles for ensuring full equality between men and women. The Authority for the Advancement of the Status of Women Law is designed “to advance equality between men and women in Israel, lead to coordination between the bodies dealing with the status of women in Israel, advance the education, legislation and enforcement in these fields, ensure that the implications of proposed legislation on equality between men and women be examined as part of legislative proceedings, advance activity for the prevention of violence against women, make the tools and information required for achieving the aforesaid objectives available to the government, and establish a central authority that will act to implement these principles.”

The Authority for the Advancement of the Status of Women- The responsibility of the Authority is to coordinate, advance, advise and review the government's activity in the aforesaid subjects; gather information, initiate studies and advance the establishment of activity and services frameworks in the Authority's fields of activity; act for the implementation of the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women; and maintain contacts with international bodies and parallel bodies in foreign countries. The AAW endeavors to create a change in the public narrative with respect to the perception of beauty and general perception of the body by such means as public campaigns that target youth, aiming to serve as an agent of change. Support is also provided for the creation of a nationwide hotline to combat the exclusion

of women with the intention of operating it together with relevant NGOs specializing in assisting women in this field. Furthermore, the Authority promotes training such as self-defense workshops designated for women and girls, especially teenagers. The purpose of these workshops is to empower women from the psychological, conscious and physical aspects. In addition, the Authority is aiming to introduce a new databank relating to sexual harassment complaints at the higher education level (universities and post-high school institutions). This step follows a government plan for reducing the current levels of sexual harassment cases within government. A public campaign will be launched to highlight and bring this topic to the attention of the general public. Currently the Authority is also targeting 217 designated supervisors within higher education institutions and will intensify and promote training programs to increase their effectiveness.

Beyond the two laws mentioned above, pertaining to the direct promotion of gender equality, additional equality laws are of relevance, including the Prohibition of Discrimination in Products, Services and Entry into Places of Entertainment and Public Places Law, 2000, and the Employment (Equal Opportunities) Law, 1988. These laws prohibit discrimination on varied grounds including, among others, gender and sexual orientation, and in the Employment (Equal Opportunities) Law, pregnancy and fertility treatments as well. Prohibited discrimination under these two laws can constitute both a civil wrong and a criminal offense. Recently steps have been taken to increase the effectiveness of enforcement of these laws, including, inter alia, formulating work procedures, concentrating efforts and re-thinking the enforcement of the law by the Israel Police and the State Attorney's Office. Current discussions focus on instituting changes in the police procedure for dealing with complaints under the Law. In order to expand and streamline the variety of tools in the fight against discrimination under the Law, it was also decided to create an interface between the criminal enforcement parties and the parties at the State Attorney's Office who are in charge of administrative-civil enforcement.

Israel has also focused efforts on facilitating greater access to justice by women, particularly minority women. In recent years, the Southern District of the Legal Aid Administration (hereafter the LAA) identified some challenges, primarily cultural and economic ones, regarding the ability of women, including women from the Bedouin population, to access courts.

The LAA took several steps to address these issues, including: establishing a Legal Aid Branch in Rahat (the largest Bedouin city in the Negev) in June 2016; strengthening cooperation between the LAA and NGOs as well as with the Authority for Development

and Housing of the Bedouins in the Negev (hereinafter: *the ADBM*) in order to make legal aid more accessible to Bedouin women; enhancing the accessibility of legal aid for women who are victims of prostitution – a joint project of the Southern District of the LAA with “*Bishvilech*” (For You) NGO; providing legal assistance to women who are victims of domestic violence; arranging for legal assistance for victims of trafficking; presenting “Access to Justice Stand”- an LAA counter which is located inside the court and aims to provide *ad hoc* legal aid (at the first stage). This counter provides access to preliminary legal counsel to unrepresented people from different populations; legal assistance to victims of sexual offences - according to a recent amendment, free legal representation is to be provided by the LAA to victims of sex offenses according to the *Limitations on the Return of a Sex Offender to the Surroundings of the Victim of the Offence Law 5765-2004* (hereinafter: *The Limitations on the Return of a Sex Offender to the Surroundings of the Victim Law*), which stipulates that these victims are exempted from the economic eligibility test laid out in the *Legal Aid Law*; guidance and representation for victims of fatal offences.

Access of women to judicial courts regarding child support and custody: The eligibility tests under the LAA Law and LAA Regulations distinguish between civil legal proceedings and family matters proceedings, so that in matters of personal status, the financial eligibility test depends only on the financial state of the person applying for legal aid, and not according to the income of the family unit as a whole as is the case in civil proceedings. As a result, many single parent women are eligible for legal assistance by the LAA in such proceedings.

Law for the Prevention of Sexual Harassment - 2018 marked 20 years since the adoption of Israel's Law for the Prevention of Sexual Harassment. In Israel, the laws regarding sexual harassment are quite extensive. The act of sexual harassment is considered both a civil and criminal offence. A few years ago, the law was extended so as to recognize public distribution and dissemination of sexually explicit videos, without consent, as sexual harassment. This change represented a breakthrough because it grew from an appreciation of the gravity of this phenomenon and an understanding of the significant role media and technology have come to play in all aspects of our daily lives, both good and bad.

The understanding that sexual harassment is most prevalent in the workplace, and therefore employers must play a key role in its elimination, brought about the initiative to create of a voluntary code of conduct for businesses and organizations in Israel. Four years ago, the Association of Rape Crisis Centers in Israel won a tender from the Israeli Ministry of Economics to draft a voluntary code that will give managers a more exact

tool for preventing and handling sexual harassment in the workplace. The association turned to the Israel Standards Institute to help with definitions and explanations to the laws in Israel pertaining to sexual harassment. The Association then proceeded to develop tailor-made prevention programs for organizations who opted to participate in the voluntary code. This effort is still ongoing.

Prostitution- In July 2017, the Knesset preliminarily approved two bills that make paying for sexual services a punishable crime and provide rehabilitation services to survivors of prostitution. In December 2018 a law on this issue was approved by the Knesset. The law criminalized sex-clients, not prostitutes, it introduces a fine for offenders, repeat offenders within 3 years. The law provides a sum of money to assist prostitutes in changing careers. It will go into effect in July 2020. (for further elaboration see sub-heading "Human Rights of Women", page 27).

In recent years Israel adopted the following legislative reforms pertaining to gender equality and the empowerment of women:

- (a) Adoption of Amendment No. 6 to the Marriage Age Law, which raised the minimum age of marriage from 17 to 18 years for both women and men, in 2013;
- (b) Amendment No. 57 to the Women's Employment Law 5714-1954 which extends the maternity leave period from 14 to 15 weeks, in 2017;
- (c) The amendment to the Prevention of Sexual Harassment Regulations which provides for measures to combat sexual harassment in higher education institutions, in 2014;
- (d) Amendment No. 26 to the Religious Judges Law (Dayanim) which requires that at least one of the two representatives of each body (the Government, Knesset and Israeli Bar Association) appointed to the Committee responsible for the appointment of judges of the Religious Jewish Courts should be a woman, in 2013;
- (e) The amendment of the Rabbinical Courts Law (Implementation of Divorce Judgments) 5755-1955 ("Sanctions Act") in 2012;
- (f) The amendment to the National Health Insurance Law No. 5754-1994 which provides for fertility preservation treatments for women and girls who are supposed to undergo chemotherapy or radiation treatments, in 2011.

In recent years Israel has made efforts at improving its policy and institutional framework aimed at accelerating the elimination of discrimination against women and promoting gender equality, such as the following:

- (a) The adoption of an Action Plan for the Implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325, in 2015;
- (b) The establishment of Community Courts which became operational in 2014;

- (c) The establishment of a joint Inter-Ministerial Committee on Preventing Domestic Violence, in 2014;
- (d) The establishment of a Gender Equality Unit in the police service, in 2013;
- (e) The establishment of a joint inter-ministerial team, headed by the Deputy Attorney General, tasked with the review and implementation of concluding observations of human rights treaty bodies, in 2011.

Israel has ratified or acceded to the following international treaties: (a) The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, in 2014; (b) The Private Employment Agencies Convention, 1997 (No. 181) of the International Labour Organisation (ILO), in 2012.

Examples of Israel's International cooperation for the promotion of women's rights and the empowerment of women and girls, in compliance with the Sustainable Development Goals with an emphasis on SGD 5:

Violence against women and children is a scourge on societies and remains an obstacle in protecting their fundamental freedoms and human rights. Israel spearheaded a UN Resolution on Preventing and Eliminating Sexual Harassment in the Workplace, adopted within the framework of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW). The Resolution condemns all forms of sexual harassment, especially against women and girls, affirming the need to take all necessary prevention measures. The Resolution, the first of its kind in the UN, emphasizes the important role of member states in eliminating this phenomenon, and places the primary responsibility upon employers. The Resolution also lays out several methods through which countries can combat and handle sexual harassment, including legislation, policies, education, awareness-raising programs and research. Furthermore, Israel's Permanent Mission to the UN in New York collaborated with the International Peace Institute to organize the first side event on the subject of combating sexual harassment in the United Nations in 2018, sponsored by the Permanent Missions of Kenya and Colombia. Following the success of the event Israel initiated and co-founded the "Group of Friends to Eliminate Sexual Harassment" alongside France, Kenya and the Netherlands in the United Nations HQ in New York. Israel continues to be a leader and advocate of this topic in several UN bodies **(SDG 5.2, 8.8)**

Within the framework of the CSW (March 2019), Israel's Permanent Mission to the UN in New York organized a side event on "Private Sector Wisdom to Crack Gender Equality" in the presence of Israel's Minister for Social Equality and the Head of the Gender Partnerships Division of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). The event, organized in cooperation with the NGO Parliament 51, featured panelists from the private sector (INTUIT, WEBPALS) and civil society

(WE POWER), saw discussions on the glass ceiling preventing women from attaining senior management positions and discussed steps needed to bridge employment disparities. **(SDG 5.5)**

On the global scene, Israel is advocating the promotion of gender-responsive policies, and advancing the principle of equal opportunity and the empowerment of women and girls, especially from rural areas. It is a member of the Executive Board of UN Women, and within this framework, MASHAV signed an agreement with UN Women for the advancement of joint projects promoting gender equality. **(SDG 5.5)**

In cooperation with the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), MASHAV holds an annual International Course on Combating Violence against Women and Children for professionals from developing and least developed countries. **(SDG 5.2, 16.3)**

Within the UN system, Israel cosponsored the following General Assembly Resolutions: Intensifying of Efforts to Prevent and Eliminate All Forms of Violence against Women and Girls; The Girl Child; Intensifying Global Efforts for the Elimination of Female Genital Mutilation; Intensification of Efforts to End Obstetric Fistula. **(SDG 5.2, 5.3)**

Israel is advocating for agreed UN language focusing on the eradication of sexual harassment in the UN system through a UN General Assembly resolution. Israel, France, Kenya and the Netherlands established (2018) a Group of Friends to promote this initiative. Israel recently sponsored the third meeting (2019) of the Group of Friends, with the participation of representatives from multilateral organizations including the International Labor Organization (ILO) and UN Women. **(SDG 5.2)**

Furthermore, Israel is involved in discussions held by the ILO on the proposal for a convention, supplemented by a recommendation, concerning Violence and Harassment in the World of Work. During discussions, Israel suggested amending the text to clarify the explicit inclusion of the issue of sexual harassment. **(SDG 5.2)**

The Permanent Representative of Israel to the UN in Geneva is a Champion in the International Gender Champions, a leadership network that brings together female and male decision-makers determined to break down gender barriers and make gender equality a working reality. **(SDG 5.c)**

Additional steps were taken to advance the equal rights of women in the work force when Israel joined the Equal Pay International Coalition (EPIC), a multi-stakeholder coalition for "equal pay for work of equal value," led by the ILO, UN Women and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). **(SDG 5.a, 8.5)**

Acknowledging the fact that human trafficking disproportionately affects women and girls, MASHAV, in cooperation with OSCE, UNODC, ILO, NATU, Israel's Institute of Advanced Judicial Studies and the United States Embassy in Jerusalem conducted the 4th International Seminar for Judges on The Critical Role of the Judiciary in Combating Human Trafficking. Issues discussed included patterns of trafficking, forms of exploitation, psychological challenges facing victims, rights of victims in criminal proceedings including non- criminalization/non-punishment, and the importance of international cooperation. **(SDG 5.2, 8.7)**

At the 4th Committee of the 73rd UN General Assembly, Israel declared its support for the UN Office on Space Affairs (UNOOSA) as the sole organ in the UN system dealing with the peaceful uses of outer space and the implementation of relevant treaties. Moreover, as a member of the current Bureau of the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (COPUOS), Israel reaffirmed its steadfast commitment to the implementation of the Committee's SPACE 2030 Agenda and provided a financial contribution (\$20,000) to the Women for Space Project. This contribution allows for the construction of a centralized UN platform 'Dedicated Webpage' for the Space for Women Project, and a framework for coordination and exchange in the STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) sectors. In addition, it will promote the idea of the Champions Network to create a "Role Models" platform for girls and young women interested in pursuing a career in STEM. **(SDG 5.b, 9.5)**

The empowerment of women and girls in science related fields and opportunities for equal access are vital for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda. According to UNESCO Data (2014-16), women make up approximately 30% in science related fields in higher education. In a panel discussion on Women in Space, conducted within the framework of the 56th Session of the COPUOS Scientific and Technical Subcommittee (2019), Israel introduced the She – Space Project, a collaborative initiative between the Remote Sensing and Planetary Thermodynamics Laboratory at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev and Beit Yatziv in Beer-Sheva. The Project focuses on encouraging women and girls to study science, technology and space. The She –Space Project, funded and assisted by Israel's Space Agency (ISA) in the Ministry of Science and Technology, is carried out in Israel and is underway globally in collaboration with Brazil, Germany and

the United States. Furthermore, COPUOS expressed interest in facilitating future joint initiatives on the She – Space Project between Israel and member states. **(SDG 5.5)**

Furthering efforts to engage women and girls in STEM, Israel supported the adoption of the UN General Assembly Resolution (70/212) declaring 11 February as International Day of Women and Girls in Science. In 2019, the occasion was marked by the participation of an Israeli expert as a panelist in a side event held within the framework of the COPUOS Scientific and Technical Sub-Committee (Vienna). The Space Generation Advisory Council (SGAC) – Israel likewise commemorated the occasion.

The empowerment of women and girls and gender mainstreaming are integral components in Israel's overseas development assistance, focusing on inclusive economic growth, strengthening entrepreneurial skills, ICT capabilities, financial literacy, and leadership skills in political, socio-economic and environmental decision-making processes. A recent study by the World Bank entitled Women, Business and the Law 2018 found that the importance of women's entrepreneurship and employment had increased significantly, as had the understanding of the relationship between legal gender equality and women's economic outcomes. Focusing on the role of smallholders, particularly women, Israel and the UN Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) are carrying out a program of cooperation relating to agricultural entrepreneurship and the empowerment of women in rural areas. **(SDG 5.b, 8.3)**

As women in Africa face momentous challenges on the path to leadership positions, MASHAV, UN Women, and Kenyatta University established the Africa Center for Transformative and Inclusive Leadership (ACTIL) in Nairobi. ACTIL seeks to raise transformative leaders and build competencies especially among women and youth. The goal is to provide necessary skills through professional capacity-building and mentorship, while promoting innovation and social transformation to facilitate the emergence of a regional network of Leadership Institutes, creating high standards and, eventually, accreditation in leadership development. Activities include joint workshops organized in Israel in collaboration with the UN Women Regional Office for Eastern and Southern Africa and dispatching Israeli experts to conduct periodic consultancy missions in Kenya to provide technical advice and support in setting up efficient systems of operation, structure and design of training programs to maximize ACTIL's impact and ensure sustainability. **(SDG 5.5, 10.2)**

Highlighting the importance of equal access of women to leadership roles on the international, national and local levels, MASHAV hosts a biennial International Women's Leadership Conference attended by high-ranking women from developed and

developing countries representing the political, socio-economic and environmental segments of their societies. **(SDG 5.c)**

Gender biases in local governance present challenges to the equal participation of women in all spheres of life. MASHAV's program on Building Sustainable Communities: Leadership, Gender, and the Environment focuses on the interconnection between gender and local governance, stressing the critical role of gender in urban planning, environmental protection, access to land rights, basic urban services, housing, budgeting, economic development, and safe and secure cities. **(SDG 5.a)**

Israel's international development cooperation programming supports collaboration with its neighbors in the Middle East/North Africa region. An example of this collaboration includes a MASHAV workshop conducted in Israel on Women's Leadership and Social Entrepreneurship tailor-made for a seven-member delegation from Morocco representing women's NGOs and the private sector. The delegation was acquainted with Israel's social entrepreneurship spirit, emphasizing the economic empowerment of women. **(SDG 5.5)**

Alongside Israel's achievements in progressing towards gender-equality and promoting the empowerment of women, some challenges and setbacks remain:

The Gender Index, a tool developed by WIPS – The Center for the Advancement of Women in the Public Sphere at the Van Leer Jerusalem Institute – examines gender inequality in Israel according to numerous indicators. In 2017 it consisted of 12 domains, assessed by 73 indicators. The domains are: education, labor market, gendering professions, poverty, power, family status, time, violence against women, health, culture and communications, Arab society, and the periphery. Over the years, the Gender Index has improved by some 10%, although it has remained stable in the past few years. In 2017, despite laws legislated to promote equal rights and gender equality, the Index clearly indicated a persistent trend of male disproportional representation, reflected by men's leading roles in social, economic and political areas. While progress has been achieved on many fronts, the male prevalence in senior positions remains significantly higher than their percentage in the population. These social gender arrangements affect the differential abilities of men and women to earn a living, to impact the social, economic and political agenda, and to achieve status, prestige and financial well-being.

One of the major challenges in promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women in Israel is bridging the gaps when it comes to women and girls in minority populations, such as Arab/Muslim communities including the Bedouin communities,

religious Jewish communities and migrants. The nature of these communities and their cultural differences often present challenges that require innovative solutions. Following are a few examples:

- 1) **Integrating the Negev's Bedouin population into the workforce**- This is a national goal of the highest importance. A number of barriers prevent Bedouin women from entering the workforce, resulting in their lowest employment rate of all Israeli populations. Initiatives and progress in this regard are detailed below under sub-heading "Women and the Economy" (page 19).
- 2) **Polygamy**: The practice of polygamy deleteriously impacts women and children and the status of women in society in general, and as such, Israel continues to struggle to eliminate the practice. However, Israel, like other countries with traditional communities, encounters opposition. According to recent findings of the National Insurance Institute, in 2016, there were 1,762 cases of polygamy in Israel, most of them within the Bedouin population in the south of Israel.

Several efforts have been made to confront this challenge. First, in January 2017, the GOI adopted Resolution No. 2345, which established an Inter-Ministerial Committee tasked with handling the issue of polygamy and called for the development of a strategic plan to address this phenomenon. Second, the Attorney General published Guideline No. 4.1112, entitled "The polygamy offence" on January 23, 2017. The goal of the Guideline is to enhance effective enforcement of the polygamy offence under Section 176 of the Penal Law and to augment its punishments. The Guideline describes the destructive implications that polygamy has on women and children, including its impact on a child's well-being and development; its economic and emotional implications upon women; and its general negative effect on the status of women in society.

- 3) **The Women's Lobby and challenges in the public sphere** -The cultural and religious differences amongst various parts of the Israeli population can also present challenges in the public sphere. For the past two years the "Women's Lobby" in Israel has been amongst the leaders of the fight against gender discrimination and the exclusion of women in the public sphere, as well as in the IDF. The Women's Lobby runs a hotline for women who suffer or witness gender-based discrimination to attain advice, assistance and representation.

During the first decade of the 21st century, Israel saw an increase in the number of incidents related to gender segregation in the public sphere, not only amongst religious communities but also within public institutions and public spaces. Such instances

included, inter alia, enforcement of "modest clothing" in certain areas, restrictions on the participation of women on stage at public events, gender segregation at public events etc.

In a 2011 case brought before the Supreme Court regarding gender-segregation on busses, the court ruled against forced segregation in public transportation. This ruling and the consequential report of the Ministry of Justice were important stepping stones in putting an end to such phenomena. However, although progress has been made, gender-segregation and gender-based discrimination has not been rooted out and there is more work to be done. The Women's Lobby claims to have received almost 100 complaints in the past year pertaining to gender segregation and enforcement of "rules of modesty" in the public sphere. According to the Women's Lobby, one of the major challenges in the past two years has been overcoming such issues within local authorities and municipalities which often receive special funding from the Department of Jewish Culture at the Ministry of Education, and from the Ministry for the Development of the Periphery in the Negev and the Galilee, in order to hold events for certain segments of the population, or for one gender only.

Currently there are a number of ongoing court cases related to this topic, some put forth by the Women's Lobby and others by civil society organizations and academia.

On the 25 of July 2019 the Ministry of Labor published guidelines for all Ministries of the Government. The guidelines clearly state that the Ministries are not allowed to prevent representations of women in the public forums or in advertisements, prohibition of participation of women or showing of figures or voices of women is prohibited discrimination and is prohibited under the Prohibition of Discrimination in Products, Services and Entry to Entertainment Establishments and Public Places Law.

During the last two years the Women's Lobby has been operating an additional hotline for women serving in the IDF and has released a comprehensive report on the matter of gender-based discrimination and segregation in the military.

SECTION 2: Progress across the critical areas of concern

A. Women and poverty

Israel has been promoting the continual integration of women into the economy as a means to help them and their families escape and avert poverty. For more information please see sub-heading "Women and the Economy" (page 19).

B. Education and training for women

Israeli society is very education-oriented and as such, free education is provided from age three through 12th grade. The GOI also partially subsidizes universities across the country making higher education more accessible and affordable. According to Israel's Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS), in 2017, 70.9% of girls received high school diplomas (as opposed to 59.2% of boys) and 59% of students attending higher education institutions in the academic year 2017/2018 were women.

There are currently several programs in place to promote women's education, including as a means to integrate greater numbers of women, especially from minority communities, into the economy. The following is an example of one such project:

Higher Education for Arab Women: The Israeli Council for Higher Education (hereafter the CHE) has started the process of establishing and operating a state-funded academic college in an Arab locality in northern Israel. The CHE invited the submission of proposals in December 2015. This institute will render higher education more accessible to the Arab population living in northern Israel, especially to women.

For further examples, please see sub-heading "Women and the Economy" (page 19).

C. Women and health

Food fortification: A study conducted in Israel showed that 60% of children and more than 80% of women suffer from iodine deficiency. This is partly due to the very extensive use of desalinated water in Israel, which lacks magnesium, fluoride, iodine and other minerals. A committee on the formulation of food fortification policy was established and its recommendations will be implemented shortly for vitamin D in milk, iodine in salt, magnesium and fluoride in water, and in the future for folic acid and vitamin B12 in flour.

Maternal and child health: Israel is a child-oriented society characterized by strong family ties, universal monthly child benefits, universal rights to health services guaranteed by the National Health Insurance (NHI) Law, and strong community-based

primary care with dedicated preventive care services. Infant and maternal mortality rates are below the OECD average (3.1/1,000 and 2.0/100,000 respectively).

Israel has already exceeded the developed regions' target for the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for the year 2030 for the following goals: maternal mortality ratios and neonatal, infant, and under-five mortality (UFM) in all population groups. The annual decrease in the rate of UFM between the years 1990-2015 was 4.3%, as compared to 3.7% for MDG developed regions and 3.0% for the world. In 2015, Israel's maternal mortality ratio was 2.0/100,000 and the stillbirth rate was 5.9/1,000 births. These rates exceed the SDG targets for reduction of child mortality and improvement of maternal health for the year 2030.

Israel's total fertility rate in 2015 of 3.1 is more than 30% greater than that of the next ranked country in the OECD. This high rate persists despite high rates of maternal education and ready access to modern contraception. More than 99% of births occur in hospitals, and all are attended to by skilled birth attendants. In 2016, 15.8% of births were by caesarian section, placing Israel among the lowest-ranked countries in the OECD. The rate of low birthweight (LBW) births was 8.1% in 2013, as compared to 6.6% in OECD countries.

The breastfeeding initiation rate in Israel is 88%. Concerted efforts to train all public health nurses in basic breastfeeding skills, increase the availability of certified lactation consultants, and require obstetric units to provide a certified nurse lactation specialist have resulted in improved duration of breastfeeding. In 2016 the rate of exclusive breastfeeding at 6 months was 17%, and overall breastfeeding rates at 6 months were 51%, as compared with 38% in 2002.

Early diagnosis of Breast Cancer: Although breast cancer can occur in both women and men, women are predominantly more likely to suffer from this disease. According to the Israel Cancer Association (ICA), every year the percentage of people who die from breast cancer in Israel is reduced by approximately 2% and the general percentage has gone down by 25% since 2005. The rate of those cured of breast cancer in Israel is among the highest in the OECD- 89.7% of Jewish women and 84.4% of Arab women. Israel has joined many other countries in the world in initiating "Breast Cancer Awareness Month" held in October each year.

D. Violence against women

In December 2018 tens of thousands of women and men in Israel participated in a general strike across the country, which included mass demonstrations, in protest of violence against women. The protesters, mobilized by local human rights organizations and social media campaigns were encouraged to walk out, demonstrate, and block roads for 24 minutes in memory of the 24 women and girls murdered during 2018 in various acts of domestic and gender-based crime. The demonstrations took place in various cities across the country including Tel Aviv, Jerusalem and Haifa, in universities across Israel, as well as in Palestinian cities and villages. The strike garnered the support of hundreds of organizations and institutions, including municipalities, unions, and corporations. Many local celebrities and politicians took to social media to proclaim support of the cause under the Hebrew hashtag “state of emergency.” Several local authorities, workers organizations, and companies expressed their support of the cause. Following the strike and wide-spread protest, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu approved an increase in the budget for the domestic violence program in 2019 from 30 to 50 million NIS. This budget is part of the NIS 250 million allocated to deal with this issue over the next five years.

One ubiquitous challenge in modern society that Israel must also face is combating gender-based violence. The Government has attempted to tackle the problem head-on both internationally by spearheading an initiative within the framework of the Committee on the Status of Women at the United Nations, and domestically via various legislative amendments and enforcement efforts. Among these are the following:

- (a) The UN Resolution on Preventing and Eliminating Sexual Harassment in the Workplace, which was introduced and primarily negotiated by Israel, was adopted in March 2017. The Resolution condemns all forms of sexual harassment, especially against women and girls, including harassment in the workplace, and emphasizes the need to take all necessary measures to prevent and eliminate such harassment. The Resolution, the first of its kind on this topic at the UN, emphasizes the important role of Member States in eliminating this phenomenon and places the primary responsibility upon employers to take measures to prevent such incidences. The Resolution also lays out several methods through which countries can combat and handle sexual harassment, including legislation, policies, education, awareness-raising programs and research.
- (b) Amendment No. 20 of 2017 to the *Legal Aid Law 5732-1972* entitles victims of serious sexual offenses to legal counsel from the moment an indictment is filed for the offense through the course of criminal proceedings and related administrative proceedings.
- (c) Amendment No. 122 of 2016 to the *Penal Law 5737-1977*, added Section 347B to the Law, which prohibits consensual sexual relations between a clergyman and a person above the age of 18 who sought counsel from the clergyman, when the consent was obtained through the exploitation of the individual's mental dependence upon the clergyman.

- (d) Amendment No. 14 of 2015 to the *Legal Aid Law 5732-1972* provides that legal aid, including representation in civil court proceedings, will be provided without a financial eligibility test to victims of sexual offences in civil proceedings under the *Limitations on the Return of a Sex Offender to the Victim's Vicinity Law 5765-2004*.
- (e) Amendment No. 5 of 2015 to the *Statute of Limitations Law 5718-1958* allows for the possibility of extending the statute of limitations if the defendant, or her/his representative, knowingly misled the plaintiff, abused her/his power, threatened or exploited the plaintiff, including by means of sexual abuse.
- (f) Amendment No. 10 of 2014 to the *Prevention of Sexual Harassment Law 5758-1998* provides that publishing a photograph, film or recording of a person that focuses on his/her sexuality¹, in circumstances in which the publication is likely to humiliate or degrade him/her, and without his/her consent, constitutes a sexual harassment offence, punishable by five years of imprisonment.
- (g) In July 2014 the *Prevention of Sexual Harassment Regulations 5758-1998* were amended to require higher education institutions to increase awareness to prevent sexual harassment, including by: notifying students and employees about the regulations and ways to file a complaint; appointing two sexual harassment prevention officers with relevant training in institutions with 2,000 students or more. These institutions are also obligated to file an annual report to the AAW, to the Knesset Committee for the Advancement of the Status of Women and Gender Equality (2014), and to the relevant regulatory body.
- (h) In 2012, the Attorney General appointed an inter-ministerial team to examine ways to handle incidents involving the exclusion of women in the public sphere in light of an increase in the number of reports of such incidents. The Attorney General adopted the team's recommendations in May 2013 and a team was appointed to implement the recommendations. Among others, the following steps were taken: a dedicated email account was designated for this type of complaint; the Ministry of Religious Services and the Attorney General issued circulars indicating that segregating burial plots in cemeteries by gender is prohibited; the Ministry of Health issued guidelines forbidding the exclusion and segregation of women at HMO branches and hospitals and demanding that modesty signs (signs calling, instructing, or demanding modest attire) be removed; the Ministry of Transport and Road Safety undertook extensive reviews to ensure that all public buses, even those operated in ultra-Orthodox communities, do not coerce segregated seating.

E. Women and armed conflict

¹ Forwarding any such material is also deemed a sexual harassment offense.

Implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325

Over the last 17 years, Israel has taken an active part in promoting the six UN Security Council resolutions that followed the principles originally declared in UN Security Council Resolution 1325, stressing the importance of equal participation and full involvement of women in all efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security. Israel has demonstrated repeatedly its commitment to the Women, Peace and Security Agenda at all levels of society, and was the first country to implement parts of UNSCR 1325 in its national legislation. Recently, Israel joined the UN Group of Friends of Women Peace and Security (WPS) led by Canada, to increase support for the implementation of UNSCR 1325.

The AAW continues to implement resolution 1325 inter alia through: Government Resolution No. 2331 which includes a full policy plan for the promotion of gender equality; the issuance of the Gender Mainstreaming Guide; an Inter-ministerial Team for National Action Plan, Gender Based Analysis of the State Budget, a campaign to urge women to run for office ("Titmodedi!") and more.

Civil organization Itach Ma'aki stands at the forefront of the effort to implement the resolution in Israel, promoting a comprehensive plan of action for the implementation of the resolution, created in collaboration with The Van Leen Institute for the Advancement of Women in the Public Arena and other women's and human rights organizations in Israel.

The Status of Women in the Israeli Defense Force, National Police and Prison Service

Israeli Defense Force (IDF)

The status of women in the IDF continues to improve. The most prominent example of this is in the infantry, where the number of women is steadily rising, and new opportunities have become available for women. This is true also with respect to technologically-oriented professions within the IDF. Due to concerns that the process of integrating ultra-Orthodox men into the IDF would lead to the exclusion of women in various positions in the IDF, Amendment No. 19 to the *Defence Service Law [Consolidated Version] 5746-1986* was passed in 2014, banning such exclusion.² The

² The Amendment (No. 19), stipulates that "The status and integration of a veteran woman in the defence service will not be prejudiced on account of the service of graduates of yeshivas and ultra-Orthodox religious institutions in the defence service under this chapter". Furthermore, the Amendment obliges the Minister of Defence to annually report on the effect of the implementation of this Amendment to the Knesset Committee of Foreign Affairs and Defense and the Committee for Advancement of the Status of Women and Gender Equality.

Amendment (No. 19), stipulates that “*The status and integration of a veteran woman in the defense service will not be prejudiced on account of the service of graduates of yeshivas and ultra-Orthodox religious institutions in the defense service under this chapter*”. Furthermore, the Amendment obliges the Minister of Defence to annually report on the effect of the implementation of this Amendment to the Knesset Committees of Foreign Affairs and Defense and the Committee for Advancement of the Status of Women and Gender Equality.

It is important to note that the IDF maintains a multiannual program for the expansion of women's integration.

Israel Police

In 2013 the Israel Police established a Gender Equality Unit with the objective of creating appropriate conditions and policies for the full utilization of the capabilities of women serving in the Police and enhancing a new gender mainstreaming reality. The AAW was involved in the process of establishing the unit. Currently, women account for 26% of the Police force.

Israel Prison Service (IPS)

Women constitute about 20% of the IPS personnel, serving in various roles of command, security, treatment and administration. The IPS encourages the integration of women in all of the organization's roles. The organization is headed by a female Commissioner and has, in senior positions in the unit level and in General Brigadier rank, four (4) officers commanding the fields of logistics, manpower, legal counseling and prisoner treatment.

F. Women and the Economy

According to Israel's Central Bureau of Statistics 90% of women in the workforce reported they were happy with their jobs but only 56% were reportedly happy with their salary.

Maternity Leave : Following the 2016 Amendment No. 55 to the *Womens' Employment Law 5714-1954*, either the mother or father of a newborn may be absent from work for one hour a day for the first four months following parental leave, without it impacting their salary. Civil servants that are parents of young children are granted even greater flexibility.³ Like the aforementioned parental leave amendments, this amendment

³ See Civil Service Bylaws Article 31.1 for more details.

promotes greater parental involvement in raising children and helps families adjust better to their work-life balance.

Reintegration of women into the work force after childbirth: Education facilities for children aged 0-3 are highly significant for the reintegration of women into the labor market. In 2014, the Ministry initiated a new method of resource allocation for the planning and building of daycare facilities, clearing hurdles for the construction of daycare centers in Arab localities. For example, certain Arab local authorities are now not required to match funding allocated by the authority, in order to rent land or facilities.

In March 2014, Amendment No. 3 to the Male and Female Workers (Equal Pay) Law 5756-1996 was adopted, which required public bodies that are obligated by law to submit reports regarding employees' salaries to include a gender-based wage index in order to expose discrepancies. Following a report by the Committee for the Advancement of Women in the Civil Service⁴, which was established in 2014, the Commissioner issued guidelines which include criteria for setting salary components (standards for vehicle allowance, overtime hours, and on-call-hours), thereby narrowing the potential for discrepancies in salaries between women and men in the same position. In addition, the guidelines also require the employer to report varied salary components to the Civil Service Commission, which not only improves transparency but also helps the CSC supervise and narrow salary gaps.

On March 21, 2017, the paid maternity leave period was extended from 14 to 15 weeks, in accordance with the criteria under Amendment No. 57 of the Women's Employment Law 5714-1954.⁵ Additionally, this Amendment and Amendment No. 54 to the same law extend the entitlement of parental leave to fathers; inter alia, a father may take paid parental leave for a period of one work-week immediately following the birth of his child. Furthermore, under the law, a father may opt to take another seven days of parental leave at any time during the mother's parental leave.

Freezing of the plan to raise women's retirement age: Women's retirement age was to be raised from January 1, 2017 from 62 to 64, but the measure has been deferred. There is consensus that raising the retirement age is economically desirable but discussions are still taking place on provisions to assist those who may be adversely affected. It was also decided that the eligibility of women for an old age pension (under the NII Law) would be the same as the retirement age under the Retirement Age Law.

⁴ This Committee is more commonly known as "The Stauber Committee".

⁵ Women who have worked for less than one year at their place of employment when they take maternity leave receive 8 weeks of paid maternity leave.

Concessions regarding income tests for self-employed mothers: In January 2017 the income tests determining eligibility for income supplements were eased. For self-employed mothers receiving a pension with an income supplement, the offset rate of income from-work against a given sum was decreased from 60% to 25% for a gross salary of up to NIS 3,270. Beyond this sum, the offset rate remained 60%. The program is to operate as a temporary order for two years in order to examine its impact on the rate of employment and income. The women may receive an employment grant from the tax authorities only if the addition to their benefit following this change is lower than the employment grant. The difference is to be paid as an employment grant by the tax authorities.

Employment Gap between Arab/Muslim and Jewish women: The employment rate amongst Arab women has been substantially lower than that of Jewish women over the years. In 2017, the employment rate of Arab women was 26.4%, compared to 63.2% for Jewish women. One of the major challenges is overcoming culturally sensitive barriers in order to promote inclusivity in the employment market. One example of a creative solution is an arrangement by which Muslim women are provided employment opportunities within a Bedouin community in the south of Israel (see example below).

Innovative Culturally Sensitive Solutions to Enable Work Opportunities for Muslim Women: The Bezeq telecommunications group, in cooperation with the Ministry of Economy and Industry runs a call center inside a mosque located in the Bedouin village of Hura. The call center, which provides assistance to Internet customers, was established by the Ministry of Economy and Industry in collaboration with the non-government organization JDC-Israel as part of the effort to enable work opportunities and address female unemployment in the Bedouin community in the south of Israel. The call center provides a solution for Hura's female residents, who seek to enter the job market without having to work outside the community. Integrating the Negev's Bedouin population into the workforce is a national goal of the highest importance. A number of barriers prevent Bedouin women from entering the workforce, resulting in their lowest employment rate of all Israeli populations. These include conservative traditions which discourage women from working away from home, high costs of child-care and lack of basic skills in computers, math and in Hebrew and English. In overcoming these barriers, a guiding principle was to assure that decisions and solutions are developed from within the community, acknowledging that the residents' understanding can best cater to the cultural sensitivities, needs and skills that are required. In addition to providing the necessary training, Bezeq located the call center inside a mosque, where workers use a separate entrance from the worshippers.

Moreover, a technological solution diverts calls from the call center to another center during calls for prayer.

In recent years there have been several significant Government measures to empower the Arab population and to reduce gaps between that population and Israeli society in general. These efforts have already led to positive trends, like the consistent growth in employment figures for the Arab population in general and especially Arab women.

Several programs have been designed to benefit Israel's minorities. The Authority for Economic Development of the Arab Population, including the Druze and Circassian (hereinafter: the "Authority"), within the Ministry of Social Equality is currently implementing many related measures including the following in relation to women:

As part of the implementation of Government Resolution No. 922, entitled "Government activities for the development of minority populations for the years 2016-2020", which implements a five-year plan (2016-2020) to further integrate Arab, Druze, Bedouin, Christian and Circassian populations in Israel through education including higher education; transportation infrastructure; commerce and trade and employment, The GOI has, inter alia, conducted training for Arab women as public transportation drivers and set up additional employment guidance centers called "Ryan centers" for the Druze and Circassian populations. As of May 2016, there were 21 such centers operating in Arab localities, providing vocational training and placement assistance. Since their establishment, these centers have served about 17,000 applicants, 60% of whom are women.

Due to the affirmative action measures described in Israel's last national report, there has been a steady increase in the employment rates of minorities in the Civil Service. As of October 2017, 10.1% of all Civil Service employees were Arabs, Bedouins, Druze and Circassians (compared to 8.4% in 2012 and 6.17% in 2007). Approximately 40% of these employees are women. These affirmative action efforts are ongoing and the government has designated hundreds of positions for these purposes.

Following are three more examples of programs in Israel aimed at bridging the employments gaps described above:

- 1) The "Eshet Hail" (Women of Valor) Program** aims to empower women through employment. The program is implemented in dozens of Jewish and Arab towns, working to help women of more religious and traditional cultural backgrounds to integrate into the workforce. It takes into account the specific needs of women in such communities as well as the effect their employment may have on familial, communal and social aspects of their lives.

The program is run by the Ministry for Labor, Social affairs and Social Services in collaboration with several other ministerial offices, the JDC (Joint Distribution Committee) and a non-profit organization called Be-Atzmi (On My Own). The program provides vocational training, workshops designed to teach skills that will enable the women to integrating into the workforce more smoothly, assistance in finding job opportunities and developing employment leadership groups amongst program participants. The program combines group training as well as individual guidance.

2) The Hadijda Program to promote employment among Arab women in the city of Rahat was developed by the Ministry for Labor, Social affairs and Social Services and implemented by the Municipal Authority of Rahat. The program aims to assist Bedouin women from the city of Rahat to integrate into the workforce by supplying them with professional training. The program provides a number of employment-supporting services, such as education, professional training, workshops providing Hebrew and Arabic studies, computer expertise and more. In addition, the program aspires to maintain a communal aspect by creating a faction of women leaders amongst the program's participants.

3) High-Tech Forum for Integrating Haredi women into the industry- This Forum was established by the Haredi Institute for Policy Studies, in cooperation with a number of Israel's leading high-tech companies and prominent figures in industry and the ultra-Orthodox communities. The Forum, announced on 1 January 2019, aims to train 2,500 Haredi women each year in computer science seminars and integrate them into the labor market. This is meant to improve the employment status of women from the ultra-Orthodox communities while also addressing the shortage of engineers in the high-tech industry. The Forum is working with the Ministry of Labor, high-tech industry officials, and the Haredi computer-science seminars themselves in order to create a comprehensive reform in the curricula offered to Haredi women in particular and make them more relevant for integration into the industry.

G. Women in power and decision-making

Women's participation in the public sphere is valued and encouraged by both the state and civil society. In the 20th Knesset, the proportion of women Members of Knesset grew to a record high of 27.5% (33 women MKs), from 22.5% in the 19th Knesset. Two of these women served as deputies to the Knesset Speaker, five serve as chairpersons of Knesset Committees, and two belong to the Arab minority. In the previous Government (before the recent elections), the percentage of women ministers grew from 9.7% to 16%.

There were four women Government Ministers and one female Deputy Government Minister. Of the high-ranking positions in the Civil Service, 40% are filled by women, and in government companies, the percentage of female directors rose to 43%, reflecting a 4% increase from 2011.

In 2017, two women of Ethiopian descent were appointed as Magistrate Court judges, a groundbreaking moment in Israeli judicial history. On April 25, 2017, the first female Qadi (Judge of a Muslim Religious Court) was appointed to serve in a Muslim Religious Court. Notably, this Qadi received the support of all nine members of the Judicial Appointments Committee.

Data collected in 2017 suggests that out of the 725 judges presiding in different courts throughout Israel, 369 (51%) are women. In October 2017, Esther Hayut assumed the role of Supreme Court Justice, becoming the third female of the past four Chief Judges in that position. In January 2019, she ruled that the political party Agudat Yisrael, an Ultra-Orthodox party, must amend their charter within 21 days to remove all restrictions on women attaining party membership. This decision is historically significant and sends a clear message forbidding political parties to discriminate against women.

"Titmodedi!" (Run!) Campaign:

In an effort to promote equal representation, the AAW launched a campaign titled "Titmodedi!" which translates to "Run!", encouraging women to run for office in the municipal elections which took place in October, 2018. This campaign was the first of its kind in Israel, in which a governmental institution actively promoted the participation of women in the race for public office.

In comparison to the 2013 municipal election, the 2018 municipal elections saw a rise of 40% in the number of women running for mayor and a rise of 20% in women running for office in the local authority councils. The election results saw a significant growth in the number of women occupying seats on the city councils- 426 women were voted into office in 2018, as opposed to 327 women who held public positions since the elections in 2013.

In addition, before 2018 there had never before been more than 6 female mayors simultaneously (out of 256 local authorities). Following the "Titmodedi!" campaign, the 2018 municipal elections resulted in the election of 14 women mayors, representing an increase of 133.3% in the representation of women as heads of local authorities.

H. Institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women

As mentioned previously in this report, the establishment of the Authority for the Advancement of the Status of Women was a major step towards promoting gender-equality. Below are a few more examples of the kind of work the AAW does:

Combating the Exclusion of Women

On 3 August, 2017 the government declared decision 2913, directing the AAW to supervise and keep track of the governmental offices status on preventing exclusion of women. Thus, during 2018 the Authority conducted a report on women's exclusion in Israel, examining the issue from a broad and in-depth perspective. Out of 29 ministries, 22 answered the online survey provided by the Authority, collecting the data detailing the status of each ministry in this respect.

Collaboration with Civil Society

During September 2018, the AAW held a Round-Table meeting with civil society organizations and NGO's. This meeting constituted a first of many meetings, aiming at creating future collaborations, information sharing and strengthening the relationship between the Authority and the civil society as agents for change towards gender equality.

Public Appeal for Local Authorities

In September 2016 the AAW published a public appeal for local authorities which includes a range of programs promoting gender equality, gender mainstreaming and empowerment of women in local authorities. This project was unprecedented in its scope in providing operative tools to the gender equality advisors in the local authorities and strengthening the relations between them and the AAW.

Among the subjects covered in the public appeal: women's status in the workplace, financial empowerment, promotion of women to key positions, equal parenting, extermination of gender stereotypes, gender based healthcare, awareness for domestic violence, and more. These issues are being implemented into action via workshops, seminars, forums, courses and events.

Each municipality that joins the appeal receives budgetary participation of up to 250,000 NIS, according to the number of residents and the social-economic classification of the area. As of 2018, 184 local authorities have joined the public appeal (out of a total of 256 local authorities).

Madjiboj Committee: Prevention of Sexual Harassment in the Workplace

Recently, the #MeToo movement put a spotlight on the extent of sexual harassment in society. In order to address this issue, in 2018 the Ministerial Committee for Gender Equality decided that the AAW would establish a committee that would construct a national plan to combat sexual harassment in Israeli society. This committee, directed by Eva Madjiboj was assigned 10 million NIS for the execution of the plan of action over a period of three years.

In preparation for the establishment of the abovementioned committee, the AAW conducted a national survey in order to better understand the characteristics of this issue in Israel, and conducted a review of best practices used around the world to battle sexual harassment.

After the establishment of the Madjiboj Committee, it conducted research and engaged with many actors in all pillars of Israeli Society over a period of six months. The committee engaged in dialogue and "round tables" with NGOs, academics, representatives of the private sector, as well as government officials. The committee also reached out to civic organizations asking for position papers on this subject in order to gain as many perspectives as possible from different pillars of Israeli society.

Following much research, the Madjiboj Committee decided to focus its work on sexual harassment occurring in the work sphere, with a primary focus on prevention. At the end of six months' work the committee published its conclusions and recommendations in January 2019. The national plan contains many goals, which can be classified in 5 main categories: 1) Awareness and education; 2) Building employer's capacity to effectively prevent and respond to sexual harassment in the workplace; 3) Improving enforcement of the related laws; 4) Preventing sexual harassment in the civil service; 5) Developing better knowledge and research infrastructures for information-based policy development.

Gender based analysis of the state budget

The purpose of Gender based analysis of the budget is to dissect how funds are being distributed between men and women. The main objective of this project is to expose patterns of inequality in policy and resource distribution, improving the state services and examining how the budget distribution caters to the needs and priorities of men and women.

The decision to implement gender based analysis of the budget was legislated as part of the governmental decision 2084 from the 7th of October 2014, and was prioritized in the activity of the AAW.

By the year 2016 most of the ministries submitted a gender based analysis of their budget, working in collaboration with 'Adva Center', a non-partisan policy analysis institute. With the encouragement of the Ministry for Social Equality, gender based analysis of the budget was initiated in a number of governmental institutions, namely Israel Bank, the Knesset and the State comptroller. Moreover, an inquiry was sent to the Ministry of Interior to implement gender based budgeting on local authorities.

In May of 2018 the AAW held a seminar for the managers of the state ministries, in which relevant materials and new work tools on gender budgeting were presented. By 2018 all governmental ministries include a chapter on a gender based analysis of their budget.

I. Human rights of women

Israel is strongly devoted to the promotion and protection of women rights, and women's participation in the public sphere is valued and encouraged. Between 2010 and 2014 alone, Israel passed some 50 laws and amendments to further bolster gender equality and the empowerment of women. In fact, Israel was one of the first countries in the UN to officially recognize in its legislation the importance of the participation of women in all decision-making levels of national institutions and mechanisms.

Four recent court decisions highlight the judiciary's significant role in safeguarding women's rights:

- (a) On February 28, 2017, the High Court of Justice rejected two appeals that were merged together after being filed by two appellants who had refused to grant their respective wives a Jewish writ of divorce (Gett) for a lengthy period.⁶ The appellants (separately) appealed the decision of the Great Rabbinical Court to approve various social sanctions that the Rabbinical Courts had imposed upon them, based on Jewish religious law, including alienating them from their communities and shaming them in public to force them to agree to grant the writ of divorce.⁷ The Court ruled that due to the appellants'

⁶ One of the appellants had been ordered to give a Gett in 2011 and the other was ordered to do so in 2014. H.C.J. 5185/13 *Anonymous v. The Great Rabbinical Court in Jerusalem*, (28.02.2017).

⁷These sanctions included: preventing them from receiving passports and drivers' licenses, limiting their bank activities, instructing Israeli consulates abroad to refrain from assisting them, approving the publication of the appellants' photograph and details, public shaming (tagging them as "criminals") in the community, prohibiting the community from assisting them, visiting them in hospitals, seating them in synagogues, trading with them,

behavior, including the violation of judicial decisions obligating them to grant their wives a Gett, the Rabbinical Courts had the authority to impose all of these sanctions, except one recommendation (in one of the appellants' cases) to prohibit the performance of a Jewish burial for him.⁸

- (b) The Supreme Court upheld a regional rabbinical court ruling which approved a divorce for a woman whose husband is in a vegetative state, and reversed a Great Rabbinical Court ruling which allowed a third party to appeal this decision. The Supreme Court emphasized that such an effort to try and make the woman an Aguna, a Jewish woman unable to re-marry (after the lower Rabbinical Court granted her a divorce) violates her basic right of human dignity, as enshrined in the *Basic Law: Human Dignity and Liberty* 5752-1992 and deprives her of her liberty. The Court concluded that this would be unconstitutional.⁹
- (c) In December 2015, the Supreme Court upheld the right to file a class action lawsuit and grant damages in the wake of an ultra-Orthodox radio station's ban on women broadcasters.¹⁰
- (d) On June 21, 2017, the Jerusalem Magistrate Court approved an agreement between El Al Airlines and a female passenger who had been asked to move from her assigned seat when an ultra-Orthodox male passenger refused to sit next to her. According to the agreement, which the court incorporated into its decision, an airline crew member may not, under any circumstances, ask a passenger to move from his/her assigned seat when the adjacent passenger will not sit beside him/her because of his/her gender.¹¹

Knesset Subcommittee on Combating Trafficking in Women and Prostitution: Israel has made remarkable progress in recent years in the continuing struggle to eliminate trafficking in persons. With regards to women specifically- the Knesset Subcommittee on Combating Trafficking in Women and Prostitution was reestablished in February 2016. The Subcommittee collaborates with relevant government entities and civil society organizations. The various authorities and NGOs know they may turn to the Subcommittee for help in resolving specific problems or in advancing various urgent matters in legislation.

showing them respect, and even performing a Jewish burial for one (1) of the appellants (when he ultimately passes).

⁸ H.C.J. 5185/13 *Anonymous v. The Great Rabbinical Court in Jerusalem*, (28.02.2017).

⁹ H.C.J. 9261/16 *Anonymous and "Dead End" (Mavoy Satum) NGO v. The Great Rabbinical Court et. al.*

¹⁰ Rq.C.A 6897/14 *Radio Kol Berama v. "Kolech" - Religious Women's Forum* (9.12.2015).

¹¹ Cc 14588-03-16 *Rabinowitz vs. El Al Israel Airlines Ltd.*

In July 2017, the Knesset preliminarily approved two bills that make paying for sexual services a punishable crime and provide rehabilitation services to survivors of prostitution. In December 2018 a law on this issue was approved by the Knesset. The law criminalized sex-clients, not prostitutes, it introduces a fine for offenders, repeat offenders within 3 years. The law provides a sum of money to assist prostitutes in changing careers. It will go into effect in July 2020.

In 2016, after several years of efforts, the National Survey Regarding Prostitution, a collaboration of the Ministry of Public Security and the Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs, and Social Services, was completed. The survey yielded important and sometimes surprising findings that explained the phenomenon and may help improve existing services for persons formerly involved in prostitution and create new ways to handle the issue. As the result of the study, an additional 1,000,000 NIS was allocated to expand the services rendered to prostitutes and further budget increases are expected in the coming years.

In December 2016, Amendment No. 127 of the Penal Law entered into effect, amending Section 203C of the Penal Law and increasing the penalty for the offence of procuring an act of prostitution from a minor from three years to five years' imprisonment. While receiving commercial sexual services from minors has been an offence since 2000, this amendment increases the severity of the punishment for the offense, thereby changing its status to a felony. The amendment, also in accordance with a CRC Committee recommendation to the GOI, further enhanced the rights and protections afforded to victims.

The State Attorney's Office, together with the National Anti-Trafficking Unit, recently conducted an examination of cases relating to the prostitution of minors which were closed for lack of evidence, in order to understand the evidentiary difficulties involved. The State Attorney has reiterated the need to enhance and prioritize enforcement efforts to the Head of the Investigations and Intelligence Division in the Police. The Police have been improving enforcement efforts with regard to minors involved in prostitution, through ongoing efforts to improve cooperation between the Police, the Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs, and Social Services, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Education and the ELEM¹² NGO. Plans are underway to expand the protection programs for minors in prostitution, and to establish ten more centers for the treatment of minors and young people in prostitution, beyond the existing five.

¹² ELEM- Youth in Distress is an Israeli NGO working for youth and raising awareness of their distress onto the social/national agenda. ELEM helps youths in all of Israel's communities, including the Haredi orthodox community and the Arab community.

The new inter-ministerial forum comprised of representatives from the legal departments of all relevant Government Ministries discussed above in connection with the fight against Trafficking in Persons, is also tasked with the prevention of prostitution and related law enforcement.

One of the challenges Israel still struggles to overcome is related to the rights of LGBTI women. Due to the lack of separation of religion and state, and the consequent interpretation of religion, in most cases, in accordance with the strictest sub-streams, it can be difficult to reconcile with the promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women, including amongst LGBTI.

The NGO Bat Kol, committed to advancing religious queer women's rights and to supporting inclusive development for women regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity and sex characteristics, provides an example of the way in which a religious orthodox establishment interprets Jewish religion to achieve the social and religious recognition of their rights as religious queer women. This has been also become a highly symbolic political achievement for women struggling with the religious establishment over its monopoly on standards for Jewish conversion, marriage, divorce and burial, which has significant impact on women.

Bat Kol is the only organization in Israel for religious queer women and is amongst the leaders of the Israeli religious LGBTI community's response to religious queer women's rights violations and abuses. Bat Kol is working with civil society partners to maximize support for women fighting for acceptance and equality in the most challenging religious environments.

Bat kol promotes social inclusion of religious queer women's by: advocating equal rights for religious queer women in Israel; Building bridges and constructive dialogue and cooperation with fellow organizations such as "Havrutah" (religious queer women gay men), "Shoval" (education for tolerance) and "Kirzono" (religious trans people), coordinating joint actions of the advancement of rights of the religious LGBTI; Gathering support and public awareness for religious LGBTI and providing a safe place for Queer religious women.

J. Women and the media

"Women and the Media" conference in collaboration with Israel's Government Press Office- In December 2018 the AAW held a conference in collaboration with

Israel's Government Press Office on Women, Gender and Media in the digital age. The conference discussed issues regarding the status of women in the Israeli media and of the media's treatment of women and women's issues. 150 journalists were invited to the conference, as well as new-media and opinion leaders, spokespeople and ground breaking women, who participated in the discussion on the relations between media and gender, the image of women presented in the media, the significance of having a variety of women's voices heard in the Israeli media and the way to shattering the glass ceiling.

K. The girl-child

Marriage Age Law: Amendment No. 6 of 2013 to the *Marriage Age Law 5710-1950* raised the minimum age for marriage from 17 to 18. Anyone who marries a minor, officiates at a minor's wedding, or enables the marriage of a minor under his/her guardianship may be sentenced to two years of imprisonment or a fine.

The Child Online Protection Bureau- In January 2016, the GOI resolved to establish a national integrated civilian-police authority to prevent cybercrime and online violence against minors. The Child Online Protection Bureau consists of professionals, a national hotline, and a designated police unit to fight crimes against minors on the web. It does so by raising awareness of safe internet browsing, policing the internet to increase deterrence against internet crime, creating a safe online environment with the help of volunteers, and operating a national, round-the-clock hotline.

The Bureau is a joint civilian-police authority combining law enforcement with education and treatment to ensure the safety of children and teens online. Police officers and civilians from the Ministry of Public Security, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs and Social Services and the Ministry of Justice work together to keep Israel's children safe on the web. The Bureau recently established a unique **national hotline** that coordinates all calls and information on harm done to children online. The hotline is staffed 24/7 by police officers with special training, as well as representatives of the partner government ministries. The hotline is set up to handle calls and reports on harm, violence, and crime aimed at children and adolescents in cyberspace, categorize them, and direct them to the appropriate follow-up channels. It deals with the full range of online threats to children and adolescents, from criminal acts, such as pedophilia, virtual rape, and the distribution of sexual contents, to acts that are not necessarily criminal, but whose effect might be devastating to a young person, such as shaming, exclusion, and ostracism.