

## Resilience Centers: Welfare State Budgeting in Settlements Only

Zulat wishes to express its opposition to the government's selective budgeting of resilience centers, which will leave the residents of northern Israel without proper mental health care.

### Background

The right to health is defined by the World Health Organization as a state of physical, mental, and social well-being.<sup>1</sup> The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, ratified by Israel in 1991, recognizes "the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health" and compels its signatories to take steps to achieve the full realization of this right.<sup>2</sup>

The shocking massacre perpetrated by Hamas in Israel's southern border communities on 7 October 2023 and the ensuing state of war in the south and north of the country have led to a sharp increase in the mental distress of Israel's citizens,<sup>3</sup> for which the state is duty-bound to provide a response.

Since 2009, the Health Ministry has been operating "resilience centers" whose purpose is to promote the civil fortitude of residents of communities facing a security threat. The ministry's directive governing their operation defines a resilience center as follows: "A center providing professional-organizational and therapeutic services that enables the authorities to provide a response to individuals, families, and communities in an emergency situation/special home front situation/emergency routine, as well as to strengthen their resilience in periods of calm."<sup>4</sup>

The directive specifies the need to establish resilience centers during a protracted security event: "Residents of communities with resilience centers face a situation defined as a protracted emergency routine. This routine creates the need for a frequent response to emergency events and for the subsequent rehabilitation of the population, in addition to the need to strengthen the mental and communal resilience of the residents, provide

<sup>1</sup> [Constitution](#), World Health Organization.

<sup>2</sup> [International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights](#), United Nations Office of High Commissioner of Human Rights, 16 December 1966.

<sup>3</sup> Ido Efrati, [One in Three Israelis Exhibits PTSD Symptoms a Month After Hamas' Deadly Attack, Study Shows](#), Haaretz, 3 December 2023.

<sup>4</sup> [Directive 30.008: Operation of Resilience Centers](#), Health Ministry's Mental Health Division, 23 October 2017 (Hebrew).

counseling, and improve their preparedness for times of emergency. Enhancing the preparedness of the National Emergency Management Authority (NEMA) requires the regular maintenance of local teams in municipalities, the education/welfare/health systems, and in third sector organizations. This maintenance allows the continuous provision of essential services in an emergency situation and optimal services in an emergency routine.”<sup>5</sup>

### **Budgeting of Resilience Centers**

The allocation to resilience centers in the 2023-2024 state budget presented by the current Israeli government is one of the most glaring examples of sectoral favoritism. It is a budget that gives blatant preference to the settlers in the territories and withholds minimal services from the residents of the State of Israel.

The under-budgeting of resilience centers has been on the public agenda for many years. The shortage of caregivers and funds for the centers in southern Israel was affirmed in the State Comptroller’s Annual Report for 2014-2015 and reiterated in the report for 2017-2019.<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, governments never followed up with additional funds or a strategy to meet the needs of residents living in a warzone, with intermittent rocket attacks and recurrent military operations.

The State Comptroller further pointed to the need to establish resilience centers in northern Israel, which did not exist at that time, in addition to the one in the Golan region that was operating without government budgeting, as well as the need to set clear criteria for opening and budgeting resilience centers. Indeed, two centers did open in 2021 in the Galilee,<sup>7</sup> but clear criteria have yet to be set for opening and budgeting such centers in response to the needs of communities.

It bears noting that in July 2023, only three months before the events of October 7th, representatives of the resilience centers in southern Israel warned at a meeting of the Knesset Health Committee that they urgently needed an additional 5 million shekels, but the government decided not to transfer a single cent to the centers either in the south or in north.

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> [Annual Report 71C|2021: Local Authorities Preparations to Deal With Anxiety Victims in Emergencies](#), p 281, *State Comptroller and Ombudsman of Israel*, May 2021.

<sup>7</sup> Adi Hashmonai, [Israel Fails to Fund Counseling Centers in Rocket-Torn North as Emotional Toll Rises](#), *Haaretz*, 13 April 2023.

Since it has not been allocated a budget, the resilience center in the Golan (whose annual budget stands at a mere 180,000 shekels)<sup>8</sup> is bound to be closed. This center, like others in the north, provided guidance and counseling services to local centers run by volunteers and operating alongside budgeted centers.

At the same time, as part of the allocations in the 2023 state budget stemming from the coalition agreements signed with the parties, the government decided to allot another 6 million shekels to the four resilience centers in West Bank settlements (as part of the scam "to cut back coalition agreement allocations," the sum was reduced by less than 2.5% and now stands at 5.860 million shekels), plus another 4 million shekels in the 2024 budget. It should be emphasized that as opposed to the evident shortage of resilience centers in the south and north, the aforementioned State Comptroller Report did not mention that those in West Bank settlements lacked funds or manpower.

Adding such a large budget to the settlers, while ignoring the residents of the north, is a mere extension of the Israeli government's decision to cultivate a welfare state in the settlements and further reduce the social rights of residents of the State of Israel.

This is a decision that cries to high heaven at a time when residents of northern Israel face warfare in their backyards, yet the state blatantly ignores their needs to evacuate their homes and the attendant distress to their mental health.

**Zulat calls on the Knesset to prevent the severe discrimination against the residents of northern Israel and to ensure that the resilience center in the Golan continues to function and to provide a response to those in need.**

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<sup>8</sup> See footnote 6.