



**The Knesset
Research and
Information Center**

Holocaust Survivors Living in Israel

– Data and Characteristics –

Submitted to the Finance Committee

Written by: Eliezer Schwartz

Approved by: Ami Tzadik, Budgetary Supervision

Department Manager

Edited by: “Dvarei HaKnesnet” editorial board

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**The Knesset, Research and
Information Center,**

Kiryat Ben Gurion,

Jerusalem 91950

Tel. 02-6408240/1

Fax: 02-6496103

www.knesset.gov.il/mmm

This document is submitted to the Knesset's Finance Committee in preparation for a discussion on the subject of: **the case of Holocaust survivors who immigrated to Israel after 1953 under the Victims of Nazi persecution Act**, which is held as part of the commemoration of the International Holocaust Remembrance Day in the Knesset. The document contains data regarding the number of Holocaust survivors currently living in Israel, and the pensions and benefits that are currently being provided to the different groups of Holocaust survivors. As detailed in the document, the year of immigration to Israel is an important variable in determining the right to pensions and benefits. Holocaust survivors who immigrated before October 1953 may be entitled to benefits under the Victims of Nazi Persecution Act, 5717 – 1957, including a monthly pension; survivors who immigrated after 1953 are not entitled to benefits by power of this act, but they may be entitled to other benefits, as detailed below.

1. Holocaust survivors currently living in Israel – background and general data

In current Israeli legislation there is no uniform definition regarding who is to be considered a Holocaust survivor.¹ In laws benefitting this population there are different definitions, and the benefits granted to survivors are determined accordingly. Therefore, there are differences between the different groups of Holocaust survivors in terms of the benefits they are entitled to, including entitlement for a monthly pension. The main government entity responsible for treating Holocaust survivors living in Israel is **the Holocaust Survivors' Rights Authority** at the Ministry of Finance (hereinafter: the authority).²

According to the authority's data,³ towards the end of 2013 approximately 140,000 to 160,000 Holocaust survivors lived in Israel according to the broad definition. The entitlement of these Holocaust survivors to a monthly pension is influenced by a number of variants, and these will be detailed below, including the year of their immigration to Israel, their medical and economic condition, and the experiences of the survivors during the Holocaust. Table 1 below presents the

¹ The broadest definition for Holocaust survivors (which is not anchored in legislation) includes refugees of the Holocaust (as detailed below). For expansion see: [Inter-Office Committee Report to Consolidate Solutions for the Plight of Holocaust Survivors](#), headed by the Director General of the Ministry of Welfare and Social Services Mr. Nachum Itzkowitz, 15 May 2007, as well as a document by the Research and Information Center, [a Historic Review of the Term "Holocaust Survivor"](#) written by Yuval Bogeisky, 24 January 2013.

² In addition to paying pensions and benefits by power of the Victims of Nazi Persecution Act, 5717 – 1957, and by power of the Holocaust Survivors' Benefits Act, 5767 – 2007, the authority is responsible for the payment of pensions and benefits by power of the Victims of the War Against the Nazis Act, 5714 – 1954, which are currently being paid to approximately 4,500 victims and their survivors.

³ Ms. Ofra Ross, Director of the Holocaust Survivors' Rights Authority, Ministry of Finance, letter, 28 November 2013.

distribution of Holocaust survivors living in Israel who are entitled to a monthly pension based on the type of pension and the entity responsible for paying it.

Table 1 – Holocaust survivors Entitled to a monthly pension⁴

Type of Pension	Paying Entity	Number of Beneficiaries
Pension by power of the Victims of Nazi Persecution Act	the Holocaust Survivors' Rights Authority	Approximately 56,000
Pension by power of the Holocaust Survivors' Benefits Act	the Holocaust Survivors' Rights Authority	Approximately 2,500
Article 2 fund	The Claim Committee	Approximately 20,000
Pension according to the German Compensation Law (BEG)	German Government	Approximately 13,000
Pensions from Western European Countries	Various foreign Governments	Approximately 3,000 ⁵
Total		Approximately 94,500

From the data displayed in the table it arises that approximately 94,500 of the Holocaust survivors in Israel, meaning about 60% to 68% of all Holocaust survivors in Israel, receive a monthly pension from one of the aforementioned entities. About 60% of those entitled to a pension receive it by power of the Victims of Nazi Persecution Act, and this is paid through the Holocaust Survivors' Rights Authority, which is also responsible for paying pensions by power of the Holocaust Survivors' Benefits Act; the other beneficiaries receive pensions from the Claims Conference or other countries.

In addition to this, there are approximately 50,000 to 70,000 Holocaust survivors who are not entitled to a monthly pension, and in the authority's estimation these are survivors who did not reside in ghettos or the camps during the Holocaust and immigrated to Israel after the month of October 1953. It is reasonable to assume that a large part of these survivors are Holocaust refugees, meaning people who escaped from countries occupied by the Nazis during the

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ From the data of the Holocaust Survivors' Rights Authority it arises that there are few thousand Holocaust survivors receiving pensions from Western European countries, but there is no exact number of them. From data publicized in 2009 it arises that the number of pension recipients from Western European countries was approximately 4,000. In light of the years that have passed since then and the age of Holocaust survivors we have assumed that this group has diminished to approximately 2,500 to 3,500 survivors.



Holocaust and whom are not recognized as Holocaust survivors according to existing legislation which regulates a monthly pension.

2. Pensions paid to Holocaust survivors

As stated, approximately 94,500 Holocaust survivors currently living in Israel are entitled to some fixed pension, most of them (approximately 60%) are entitled to a pension by power of the Victims of Nazi Persecution Act, which is financed by the state treasury. One of the terms for receiving this pension is immigrating to Israel before the month of October 1953, as detailed below, meaning there is a distinction between survivors who immigrated before this date and survivors who immigrated after it. We will detail the types of fixed pensions currently being paid to Holocaust survivors with reference to the relevancy of the year of immigration to Israel for each of them.

2.1. Pension by power of the Victims of Nazi Persecution Act

As part of the agreements between the Government of Israel and the Government of Western Germany, Israel has been placed in charge of compensating Holocaust survivors who had immigrated to Israel up to October 1953 and who do not have a direct link to Germany. The arrangement of compensations for these survivors was achieved through the **Victims of Nazi Persecution Act, 5717 – 1957** (hereinafter: the act), which determines a monthly pension and additional benefits to persons recognized as victims of Nazi persecution according to the terms and definitions stipulated therein. Over the years the number of persons entitled to compensation by virtue of this act increased, due to an amendment of the law, as well as following legal rulings on the issue of recognizing eligibility for compensation. The payment of compensation to those entitled to it by law was executed, as stated, through **the Holocaust Survivors' Rights Authority** at the Ministry of Finance. The sum of the monthly pension paid to each entitled person is determined based on the rate of disability determined for him or her. Likewise, a social supplement, beyond the main compensation, is paid to those who do not have additional income as determined by the law:



Main compensation: Compensation paid without having to meet any income test, and is currently paid to all survivors who meet the various terms of the law regarding persecution.⁶

Compensation by income:⁷ A pension paid to a person whose disability rate is between 25% - 49% and stands the income test.

Increased compensation by income:⁸ A pension paid to a person whose disability rate is higher than 50% and stands the income test.

Table 2 below presents the payment sums.

Table 2 – the monthly pensions paid by power of the Victims of Nazi Persecution Act⁹

Type of Compensation	Rate of Disability	Sum of monthly pension (compensation cap)
Main compensation	25%	1,825
	100%	5,405
Compensation by income	39%-25%	5,317
	49%-40%	5,800
Increased compensation by income	100%-50%	8,812

From the data presented in the table it arises that the basic monthly pension paid to disabled persons whose disability rate is 25% totals **approximately 1,825 ILS**; the monthly pension could reach as high as **approximately 5,405 ILS** for disabled persons whose disability rate is 100%.¹⁰

⁶ According to the law, the minimum disability rate which grants a pension stands at 25%. In recent years a compensation at this rate is almost automatically given to every disabled person who submits a request for recognition of a mental distress due to the persecution, after the case is examined by a medical committee with or without the survivor's presence – at the prosecutor's request.

⁷ In the past this compensation was named "Compensation for the indigent".

⁸ In the past this compensation was named "Compensation for the needy".

⁹ Ms. Ofra Ross, Director of the Holocaust Survivors' Rights Authority, Ministry of Finance, letter, 28 November 2013.

¹⁰ In this context it should be stated that there are two methods of calculating the monthly pension for regular compensation. In the Victims of Nazi Persecution Act it was determined that the rate of the pension from the identical determining wage is decided according to the disability rate determined by the disability rate decided for eligible persons, meaning that a disabled person at a rate of 100% will receive a pension equal to the determining wage as defined by law (linear correlation between the rate of disability and the sum of the pension). This sum is updated from time to time in accordance with the mechanism detailed in the act. In the discussions by the **State Investigative Committee on the Subject of Assisting Holocaust Survivors** headed by retired Justice Dalia Dorner, it was discovered that the pensions paid in Israel have eroded over time in comparison to the pension paid by the German government (mainly at the level of the relatively lower pensions), and it was recommended that the Israeli pension will be no less than 75% of the German pension. This decision was adopted by the government and thus a new method of calculation was formed (ranks in the pension funds in accordance with the ranks of the



Disabled persons whose income is low and whose rate of disability is more than 25% are entitled to a higher pension, up to the maximum sum of **approximately 8,812 ILS**.

In addition to the pensions paid to Holocaust survivors, it was determined by law that the spouses of survivors would also be entitled to a pension after their death, for a period of 36 months or for the rest of their lives (the duration of the survivors' pension and its sum vary from pension to pension), approximately 3,800 widows and widowers of survivors currently receive a monthly pension, generally for a period of 36 months.

In addition to the monthly pension, survivors are recognized by this law as entitled to benefits, including the financing of medical treatments for illnesses recognized as related to the war, annual convalescence pay, a refund of sales tax and VAT on electrical appliances, a discount on prescription medication included in the "health basket", special loans, assistance with at home help, and more. The value of these additional benefits amounts to several thousand more shekels every year.¹¹

2.2. Monthly pension from the German government or other European countries

As stated, the government of Israel had taken upon itself the responsibility for compensating Holocaust survivors who had immigrated to Israel up to October 1953 and who, had it not been for the reparations agreement, would have been entitled to compensation for their disability from Germany. On the other hand, there are Holocaust survivors who receive a monthly pension from the German government since they have, among other reasons, proven their direct link to Germany (affiliation to the German culture and language). Similar agreements were signed between the government of Germany and other countries in Western Europe, and survivors who lived in those countries receive a pension funded by their country of origin. It is possible that some of these people entitled to pensions immigrated to Israel after the year 1953. As stated, according to the authority's data, there are currently approximately 13,000 survivors in Israel who receive a monthly pension from the German government, and a few thousand more who receive a pension from other countries in Western Europe. The sum of the pension from the German government is between 492 Euros (approximately 2,337 ILS based on the current exchange rate) for a disability

disability rates, but not less than 75% of the German pension), and in practice the entitled persons receive the higher sum of the two according to one of the methods. Today, due to the strengthening of the Shekel exchange rate, the compensation based on the linear methods is higher for some disability rates than 75% of the German pension.

¹¹ The Holocaust Survivors' Rights Authority, Ministry of Finance, [Pensions and Benefits](#), accessed 19 January 2014.



of 25% to 39% and 1,213 Euros (approximately 5,762 ILS based on the current exchange rate) for a disability of 80% to 100%.¹²

In addition to the monthly pension the survivors are entitled to additional benefits from the German government, including convalescence pay, reimbursement of nursing expenses, and so on, as well as a discount in municipal tax and prescription drugs included in the “health basket”, financed by the government of Israel.¹³

2.3. Pension from the Claims Conference (article 2 fund)

In 1992, after the fall of the Berlin wall and the reunification of Germany, an agreement was signed (article fund 2) between Germany and the Claims Conference. This agreement allows Holocaust survivors who lived in Eastern European countries and could not submit claims according to German law, to submit a request to receive compensation. Persons entitled to the pension by virtue of this agreement receive a monthly pension of **310 Euros (approximately 1,473 ILS)** based on the current exchange rate) which is paid once every three months (930 Euros).¹⁴ This pension is paid to survivors who resided in countries occupied by the Nazis or their allies and imprisoned in ghettos or camps, or living in hiding or under a false identity for a period as defined in the agreement (at least three months and generally more). As stated, the authority estimates that there are currently approximately 20,000 Holocaust survivors in Israel who receive a regular pension from the Claims Conference. Additionally, over the years many Holocaust survivors have receive one-time grants from the Claims Conference’s various funds. In fact, the majority of Holocaust survivors living in Israel who are entitled to this fixed pension immigrated to Israel after 1953.

In addition to the monthly pension, Holocaust survivors are entitled to benefits, some from the Claims Conference and others from the Israeli government (the Holocaust Survivors’ Rights Authority). The Holocaust Survivors’ Benefits Act determines rights financed by the state treasury for recipients of a pension from the Claims Conference, including annual convalescence pay,

¹² Ms. Ofra Ross, Director of the Holocaust Survivors’ Rights Authority, Ministry of Finance, letter, 28 November 2013.

¹³ The Center of Organizations of Holocaust Survivors in Israel, [The rights of Holocaust survivors in Israel 2013](#), February 2013.

¹⁴ Claims Conference, [compensation – article 2 fund](#), accessed 19 January 2014. It should be mentioned that this pension is subject to the income test in principle, but the test is fairly lenient and it is in fact likely to assume that the majority of Holocaust survivors will meet it (a monthly income of less than 6,500 ILS net, not including incomes from retirement funds, old age pensions, and so on).



discount on municipal taxes, discounts on prescription drugs, a partial refund of sales tax and VAT for the acquisition of electrical appliances, and more. Approximately 16,000 survivors who receive a pension from the Claims Conference are recognized by the authority and receive the accompanying benefits. The Holocaust survivors who receive a pension from the claims and are entitled to a supplemental security income from the National Insurance Institute due to their low incomes are also entitled to an annual benefit grant (**of approximately 4,743 ILS**) and increased assistance in housing.¹⁵

2.4. Pension by virtue of the Holocaust Survivors' Benefits Act, 5767 – 2007

In 2008 the Needy Holocaust Survivors' Benefits Act, 5767 – 2007 was amended and became the Holocaust Survivors' Benefits Act. This act determined the benefits detailed above for recipients of pensions from the Claims Conference, and a new pension was established for Holocaust survivors who were not entitled to a monthly pension. This pension is paid to Holocaust survivors imprisoned in ghettos or camps and who for various reasons were not entitled to a monthly pension, not according to the Victims of Nazi Persecution Act (usually because they immigrated to Israel after October 1953) and not from the Claims Conference (for example, because they did not reside in a ghetto or a camp for the minimal periods of time determined in the article 2 fund terms).¹⁶ The sum of the monthly pension currently stands at **approximately 1,238 ILS**, and about 2,500 survivors receive this pension from the authority.¹⁷

In addition to this, these survivors are entitled to additional benefits, similar to the benefits granted to persons entitled to pensions from article 2 fund, as well as to a rechargeable services voucher valued at approximately 600 ILS a month. Survivors entitled to supplementary security income from the National Insurance Institute are also entitled to an annual benefits grant and increased housing assistance, similarly to the article 2 fund recipients. About 5,600 of all survivors who receive this pension or a pension from the article 2 fund are recognized by the authority as recipients of supplementary security income and entitled to additional benefits.¹⁸

¹⁵ Holocaust Survivors' Rights Authority, Ministry of Finance, Pensions and Benefits, accessed 19 January 2014.

¹⁶ According to the explanatory statements for [the plan to increase supplementary security income payments to needy elderly and assist Holocaust survivors bill \(legislative amendments\), 5768 – 2008](#).

¹⁷ Ms. Ofra Ross, Director of the Holocaust Survivors' Rights Authority, Ministry of Finance, letter, 28 November 2013.

¹⁸ Ms. Ofra Ross, Director of the Holocaust Survivors' Rights Authority, Ministry of Finance, letter, 28 November 2013.



3. Assistance granted to Holocaust survivors who immigrated to Israel after 1953

As stated, the year of immigration to Israel is an important variable in determining the eligibility for a monthly pension of Holocaust survivors. Survivors who immigrated to Israel before October 1953 may be entitled to a pension by power of the Victims of Nazi Persecution Act, which as stated is relatively high compared to the other pensions paid to survivors residing in Israel. At the same time, it is also possible that survivors who immigrated after this date would be entitled to receive a monthly pension – from the Claims Conference, from the authority (according to the benefits act) or from other European countries, mainly Germany. These pensions are usually paid to survivors who resided in ghettos, camps, or in hiding during the Holocaust. In this context it should be mentioned that an amendment to the Holocaust Survivors' Benefits Act (amendment no. 4) (increasing assistance to Holocaust survivors), 5774 – 2013 is currently being discussed by the Knesset, after being submitted by the government.¹⁹ This proposal suggests increasing the monthly pension paid by power of the benefits act by about 600 ILS so that it stands at **1,850 ILS**, instead of the benefits voucher currently being awarded which is valued at 600 ILS. Additionally, it is suggested that the annual benefits grant which is currently paid to recipients of supplementary security income, will be given to all person entitled to a monthly pension according to the benefits act or from the article 2 fund.

As stated, the authority estimates that **about 50,000 – 70,000 Holocaust survivors who are not entitled to any monthly pension currently reside in Israel**, and it estimates that most of them did receive a one-time compensation (valued at 2,556 Euros – about 12,000 ILS based on the current exchange rate) from the Claims Conference's Hardship Fund or from the Claims Conference's other funds. As stated, it is reasonable to assume that these are mostly survivors who escaped their homes due to the German occupation and became refugees, since as stated, survivors of camps and ghettos are included in the benefits act. Since these survivors are not recognized as Holocaust survivors under existing legislation, they are not entitled to the accompanying benefits granted through the authority, and therefore are also not entitled to the benefits given to Holocaust survivors recognized by the other organizations, such as the Company for Location and Restitution of Holocaust Victims' Assets.

¹⁹ [Proposed amendment to Holocaust Survivors' Benefits Act \(amendment no. 4\) \(increasing assistance to Holocaust survivors\), 5774 – 2013.](#)



At the same time, it is possible that these survivors are entitled to benefits from the Holocaust Victims' Welfare Fund and additional organization, including dental procedures, additional nursing hours, and more. It should be mentioned that Holocaust survivors entitled to a monthly pension can also receive assistance from the fund.²⁰ Likewise, these days the authority, following a decision by the Finance Minister, is acting to expand the discount granted to Holocaust survivors in the purchasing of prescription medication included in the "health basket" so that survivors who had not been entitled to it thus far would also be entitled to it. The discount will be granted to survivors who had received one-time compensation from Germany, from the Claims Conference, or from other European countries. As stated, the authority estimates that the majority of survivors living in Israel who do not receive a monthly pension have received a one-time compensation in the past, and therefore would be entitled to this benefit. For this matter the authority is acting in cooperation with the Claims Conference, and it is due to transfer the list of survivors who had received a one-time payment from the Hardship Fund to the authority, so that it may approach all of these individuals and present them with the new benefit. Likewise, it is worth mentioning that the authority is currently working to increase the realization of rights (the rights granted by the government of Israel and rights from other entities) among all Holocaust survivors living in Israel by approaching them, and a unique rights calculator was developed for this purpose, to be used by the information center and the general public.²¹

In 2007 the Israeli government established an "Inter-office Committee to Consolidate Solutions for the Plight of Holocaust Survivors". The committee's report presented data and assessments regarding the number of Holocaust survivors under the broad definition, and some amendments were also proposed to legislation so that it would apply to all Holocaust survivors, including refugees. Though the government did not adopt the committee's recommendations regarding a broad definition of in legislation regarding Holocaust survivors – meaning the provision of pensions and benefits²² - on 4 November 2007 the government decided on "the Government

²⁰ For more on this see the "Kol Zchut" website, [Holocaust survivors not receiving a monthly pension](#), accessed 19 January 2014.

²¹ Ms. Ofra Ross, Director of the Holocaust Survivors' Rights Authority, Ministry of Finance, letter, 28 November 2013.

²² In this context it should be mentioned that from the data presented in the inter-office committee's report and from an examination conducted in the past by the Research and Information Center, it arises that the cost of granting a monthly pension to all Holocaust survivors would come to several billion ILS a year.



Program to Assist Needy Elderly and Holocaust Survivors”.²³ This program entailed an increase of the old age pension paid to the elderly 80 and over (at a monthly value of approximately 86 ILS in 2014), as well as an increase in the supplementary security income pension paid to elderly 70 and over (at a sum of up to 200 additional ILS). At the basis of this decision stood the assessment that most Holocaust survivors who are not entitled to a monthly pension are included in this population, and at any rate their condition will improve thanks to the government decision. From an examination conducted by the Knesset’s Research and Information Center it arises that the rate of households of immigrants from Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union who were born before 1945 and immigrated after 1953 and receive supplementary security income is about 60% of all recipients of old age pensions among this group (among recipients of special old age pensions the rate of supplementary security income recipients is higher than 90%).²⁴ Since some households contain couples who immigrated after this date it is reasonable to assume that most Holocaust survivors who immigrated to Israel after 1953 who do not receive a monthly pension are indeed entitled to supplementary security income from the National Insurance Institute. Entitlement to supplementary security income may grant additional benefits to the beneficiaries from various organizations, including as discount in municipal taxes, assistance with rent, a discount on electricity, and so on.²⁵

The government program also includes an amendment to said benefits act, which determined a pension for survivors of ghettos and camps and additional benefits for Holocaust survivors who receive a pension. Likewise, an increase of the government’s budget for non-governmental organizations providing services to all Holocaust survivors. Additional government decisions have been made over the years regarding the increase of budgets to assist Holocaust survivors in various frameworks. In this context it should be mentioned that **in 2014 the budget of the Holocaust Survivors’ Rights Authority** (original budget), **the governmental budget of assistance and support to Holocaust survivors, stands at approximately 3.38 billion ILS**, and most of it is allocated for the application of the Victims of Nazi Persecution Act. In 2013 the authority’s original budget totaled approximately **3.14 billion ILS** (and the budget including changes and

²³ Government Decision no. 2534 of 4 November 2007, on subject of: [Holocaust survivors’ assistance program – program to change and improve old age pensions and supplementary security income pensions for the needy elderly](#).

²⁴ Processed by the Research and Information Center from information by the National Insurance Institute; Gabriella Hailborn, Research and Planning Department, National Insurance Institute, 24 November 2013.

²⁵ For more on this see a document by the Knesset’s Research and Information Center, [description of supplementary security income pension and assessment of the accompanying benefits’ value for pension recipients](#), written by Anat Levi, 10 November 2013.



additions of surpluses stood at approximately 3.17 billion ILS). The budget intended to support nongovernmental organizations, that also assist Holocaust survivors who are not entitled to a monthly pension, will stand in 2014 at approximately 160 million ILS, which is similar to the 2013 budget.²⁶

Many bills had been submitted over the years by members of the Knesset who wished to expand the eligibility to receive benefits and to also apply it to Holocaust survivors who are not currently entitled to them, including a proposal that asked to do away with the condition of immigrating to Israel before October 1953. From an examination the Knesset's Research and Information Center had conducted in the past it arises that if the stipulation regarding the year of immigration is indeed cancelled, it is reasonable to assume that most Holocaust survivors living in Israel who do not receive a pension (about 50,000 to 70,000 survivors) would be recognized as eligible,²⁷ in light of the flexibility that has been introduced to this recognition in recent years. Most of these bills have not yet matured to approval, among other reasons due to their high costs.

²⁶ Guy Harmeti, Welfare referent, Finance Ministry Budget Branch, Telephone call, 20 January 2014.

²⁷ The Knesset's Research and Information Center, victims of Nazi persecution bill (amendment – cancelling the date of immigration to Israel as a condition for eligibility to receive benefits) 5769 – 2009 – cost assessment, written by Eliezer Schwartz, 23 March 2010.

