Tel Aviv-Yafo Municipality’s Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic

Updating Document
April 2020
Preface: A snapshot of the current situation

The first coronavirus patient in Israel was diagnosed on February 27, 2020. During the month of March, the Israeli Ministry of Health gradually issued instructions and restrictions, starting from banning large crowd events and reducing the number of people allowed to gather in one place; moving on to limiting the number of employees permitted to continue working in the public and private sectors, shutting down the school system and cutting back public transportation; and then announcing a mandatory stay-at-home order for all Israelis except those defined as essential workers.

Like other municipalities throughout the world, the Tel Aviv-Yafo Municipality was forced to cope with instructions that changed on an almost daily basis, affecting its ability to provide suitable and timely responses to its residents. And like the rest of Israel’s citizens (especially the urban dwellers), Tel Aviv-Yafo residents found themselves confined to their homes, with many unable to get to their workplaces and many others fired, receiving partial wages or sent out on unpaid leave.

The Municipality was faced every day with new and unusual challenges: a major reduction in the number of municipal workers who were allowed to continue working and responding to residents’ needs; changes in its cash flow resulting from the freeze on many of its activities, coupled with the additional cost of new activities; the disruptions in the educational system, ranging from complete shutdown to partial operation to distance learning; a significant expansion in the number of residents requiring social services and deepening dependency of those who were already receiving these services; a leap in the number of residents seeking information and guidance; and more.

This report is being written while the crisis is still raging. This challenging period is characterized by frequent changes and moving rapidly to take steps that can be learned from and corrected on the fly. As in other moments of crisis, each day feels like a month, each week feels like forever. More than a month has passed and we can already share some of our observations and experiences.

The following report describes the steps taken by the Tel Aviv-Yafo Municipality since the crisis erupted; it is intended to help other cities in Israel and across the globe deal with similar challenges.
It should be noted that this document **does not** deal with the ongoing operations of local authorities, whether in routine times or in times of emergency. Rather, it focuses on the unique “delta” resulting from the coronavirus crisis, that is, on the actions the Municipality has taken that are tailored precisely to suit this unprecedented situation. This report (including the comparative statistical data presented in Appendix 3) will be updated from time to time as circumstances change, in the belief that peer learning can speed up response times and assist in coping strategies, thus improving the ability to deliver high-quality services and a sense of wellbeing to city residents.
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Section I – The Municipality’s emergency management structure

1) The Municipality’s operations during emergencies

The Tel Aviv-Yafo Municipality’s emergency management structure operates both in routine times and in emergencies in order to prepare the city and its residents for a wide array of threats, terror attacks and emergency events (such as flooding or earthquakes). This ensures, as much as possible, the smooth functioning of the Municipality during any emergency situation that is liable to occur.

In accordance with instructions from the Israel Defense Forces Home Front Command and the National Emergency Authority, during emergencies the Municipality will operate under a streamlined organizational structure made up of seven divisions with 25 units (see Appendix 2), which is based on the Municipality’s regular structure (see Appendix 1). The Municipality is set up to respond to a range of threats, each of which has its own protocol that includes specific plans, procedures and operational routines for each of its departments and/or units. With the aim of optimizing its responses and increasing its preparedness, the Municipality periodically conducts relevant exercises and training sessions.

In addition, as part of its security and emergency structure, the Municipality operates a municipal Command and Control Center known as Mabat that uses monitoring and security methods including cameras, emergency call buttons and an alarm network in public spaces. Particular emphasis is placed on sites that the city and the emergency services organizations have defined as sensitive. Endowed with high analytical capabilities, the technological control system provides updated indications of atypical events occurring throughout the city. Thus, the control center is used for spotting indicators, managing events, observation, recording and investigation. It is a vital tool in the management of both routine and emergency events, and its use during the coronavirus crisis will be discussed in detail below.

Click here to access the Municipality’s emergency website
2) **Management and intraorganizational work during the coronavirus crisis**

a) **Work routines**

Unlike other scenarios for which the Municipality is prepared, the current crisis pits us against an invisible and highly infectious enemy that requires a response for which it had no previous experience. In the blink of an eye, Tel Aviv-Yafo transitioned from its worldwide reputation as “the Nonstop City” to become “the city that stopped,” and the Municipality was faced with a situation far different than anything it had ever dealt with before.

The primary management of the city’s activities during this period is coordinated by the Mayor and the Director General by means of a forum of the Municipality’s most senior managers. The Director General’s Forum is made up of director general deputies, division directors, administration directors and several department directors. The forum, whose work is extremely intensive, focuses on devising and implementing strategies for the city’s activities.

**Following are the city’s working routines:**

- Convening the Director General’s Forum (via Zoom) twice a day, in the morning and the afternoon. After the initial assimilation period, these meetings were reduced to once a day, in the morning. A summary of each meeting is distributed to all participants and to the City Council members, for their information;
- Convening a weekly meeting (via Zoom) of the CEOs of all municipal corporations with participation of the Mayor, the Director General and the municipal officials entrusted with the corporations’ activities.
- Convening a weekly meeting (via Zoom) that includes the Mayor, the deputy mayors and the heads of the factions in the City Council.
- Convening a daily meeting (via Zoom) of representatives of the divisions and the IDF Home Front Command to assess the city’s current situation. The assessment focuses on the residents, especially those older than 65, families in distress, pupils with special needs and the community of foreign workers.
- Producing a report by the Municipality’s Mabat Command and Control Center about the city’s activities. This is compiled from reports from the divisions detailing their tasks, as well as various data that reflect the city’s operations.
The report is distributed daily to the Director General’s Forum and the Emergency and Security Services division.

- Preparing a twice-daily report (morning and afternoon) from the Emergency Information Division that includes updated data about the functioning of the municipal call center (106 Plus); an analysis of residents’ requests; data from residents’ discussions on Facebook; municipal messaging and more. This report is widely distributed.
- Producing a daily update sheet from the Spokesperson’s Office that includes data about the Municipality’s operations.
- Maintaining ongoing contact between the city’s Security Division and the various emergency organizations, government ministries and the Home Front Command’s Local Authorities Contact unit, whose representatives are located in City Hall to optimize coordination and communication. The operational instructions are taken from the guidelines issued by the government ministries and emergency organizations, paying strict attention to ensuring the frequent transmission of information from the field to the decision-makers.

b) Pooling and conserving resources

- Reevaluating all of the Municipality’s operations and their suitability in an emergency situation: This includes, for example, closure of community and cultural institutions, a freeze on non-essential services, reevaluation of the budget for organizations supported by the Municipality.
- Human capital: In accordance with the Health Ministry’s directives, about 70% of municipal employees were sent out on leave. Essential workers continue to come to their workplaces, amid strict adherence to the ministry’s guidelines regarding social distancing and meticulous hygiene. Relevant technology was installed for essential workers who got approval to work from home, so they could maintain their work routine (details below).
- Updating the Municipality’s workplans and budget: In light of the expected decrease in municipal revenues and the unexpected increase in expenditures related to the pandemic, the City Comptroller and the Budget department revised the city’s workplans and budget for 2020-2021. They defined a new
order of priorities and determined the budgetary adjustments required to meet
the new reality.

- **Saving on operational overhead such as lighting, cleaning and maintenance:** Due to the Health Ministry’s directives on restricting movement, there has been a significant decline in the number of residents and visitors out in the streets, sports venues, places of entertainment, parks and playgrounds. This led to an immediate reduction of spending on these services.

c) **Actions taken to preserve the Municipality’s operational continuity**

- **Improving the workers’ ability to link up from home:** For remote connection of its computer system, the Tel Aviv-Yafo Municipality uses Token software developed by Check Point, a Tel Aviv-based global company recognized as a world leader in cybersecurity. When the coronavirus crisis erupted, the Municipality’s management immediately purchased hundreds of laptops equipped with valid Token licenses and distributed them among the city’s essential managers and workers. Concurrently, it also increased its bandwidth so that many people would be able to work remotely at the same time. To facilitate rapid assimilation of the new software, the Municipality supplied these workers with written guidebooks and an explanatory video.

- **Conducting meetings via video conferencing:** The Municipality uses the Zoom platform for most of its meetings. This includes meetings of the City Council, the various municipal committees, the Director General’s Forum, the CEOs of Municipal Corporations Forum, as well as internal divisional discussions and work meetings.

- **Enabling call center workers to work from home:** The Municipality’s call center system runs on Cisco technology. By placing dedicated telephones in the homes of call center staff that connect them to the Municipality’s central switchboard and allows remote access to the municipal mainframe computer, the service representatives are able to work efficiently from home. Many of the city’s call centers are run from the workers’ homes, including those dealing with technical issues, municipal taxes, parking, building permits and supervision, business licenses and the 106 Plus call center, which operates 24/7 to respond to requests from residents, business owners and visitors.
Maintaining continuous contact with municipal workers: The Municipality’s human capital is made up of 10,000 workers. To preserve a strong connection with those who are staying at home, the Municipality set up a dedicated Facebook page called The Tel Aviv-Yafo Municipality’s Family of Workers. The page features messages to the workers, information on wages and rights, ongoing updates and so on.

The Spokesperson’s Office circulates daily videos by the Mayor that relay messages to workers and/or residents, both on Facebook and by personal emails. [Click here to watch an example.](#) The Director General posts a weekly video with messages to the workers, both on Facebook and by personal emails. [Click here to watch an example.](#) Videos with messages for the workers are also posted on the dedicated Facebook page by the Senior Deputy Director and Head of the Operations Division; the Deputy Director for Planning, Organization and IT; and the Deputy Director for Human Resources and Administration. In addition, managers were instructed to maintain daily telephone contact with their workers.
Section II – Initiatives and projects

1) Technology and innovation in the service of city residents
   a) The Municipality’s technology platforms

Tel Aviv-Yafo is a global breeding ground for the development of innovative technologies. The Municipality uses some of these digital tools, as well as developing applications on its own to support cutting-edge work methods. In routine times, the Municipality operates a variety of technological platforms to maintain direct and continuous contact with city residents. At the onset of the coronavirus crisis, several dedicated functions were added to these platforms to enable timely updating of residents with all relevant information, while also providing the Municipality with a credible, up-to-the-minute picture of the status of the city’s residents and businesses.

- **DigiTel:** Developed by the Tel Aviv-Yafo Municipality, this groundbreaking mobile app provides direct, personalized contact with city residents. The success of DigiTel was a key factor in gaining Tel Aviv-Yafo the title of World’s Smartest City at the Smart City Expo World Congress in Barcelona in 2014. DigiTel started off as a traditional resident card and was replaced by a comprehensive digital service that enables the Municipality to communicate directly with residents using a variety of digital means (its own website, text messages to residents’ phones and personal emails). The service provides residents with discounts, essential information and personalized information based on their definition of their own characteristics and interests; it also allows residents to carry out certain actions, such as reporting hazards.

The platform also facilitates segmentation of the local population according to district, age and areas of interest, making it possible to deliver targeted, efficient services.

During the current crisis, the platform is being used to update residents on the latest government guidelines, as well as relevant activities undertaken by the Municipality.
- **106 Plus call center**: In addition to its normal role as the Municipality’s 24/7 hotline, the app is also being used for rapid reporting to the call center. When the outbreak started, the city immediately added new functions to the call center’s capabilities, including:
  - Sending urgent messages to residents
  - Receiving reports from residents regarding older people who need help
  - Serving as a panic button for elderly residents

- **The GIS mapping system**: In normal times, the Municipality offers a wealth of information on its innovative GIS mapping system, an interactive platform that shows the locations of educational institutions, parking lots, pharmacies, public shelters, hotels and other categories of places throughout the city. When the crisis broke out, the Municipality built upon these existing layers of information, adding a function that demarcates the extent of outdoor movement permitted to residents. This helps people observe the government directive not to go any farther than 100 meters from their homes.

  [Click here to access the GIS system.](#)

- **Managing the city in real time**: One of the most important tools for efficient management of a city is the ability to present a reliable real-time situation report. In Tel Aviv-Yafo, updated situation reports are based on residents’ reports to the 106 Plus municipal hotline (via telephone and application), reports from municipal inspectors and workers, and various IOT systems. To improve the accuracy of situation reports during the pandemic, the city expanded its reporting system to include events that are specific to the coronavirus crisis, such as forbidden gatherings of more than two people, businesses that are operating in contravention of the Health Ministry’s directives and similar situations. This allows the Municipality’s management to quickly identify an irregular event and take action accordingly.
Locating the elderly population in need of assistance: By processing and cross-referencing the information already stored in municipal databases, the city was able to identify members of its elderly population who live alone and/or are not mobile and/or have other limitations, and to verify their addresses and telephone numbers. This information, which is used routinely by the municipal Social Services Administration, now enables the city to maintain continuous contact with its older residents and extend a helping hand by regularly sending them food, assisting them in obtaining medications and other necessities.

In the event that a directive is issued requiring mandatory confinement at home for people aged 65 years and older, the Municipality is already prepared to add their names to the existing database of housebound residents.

b) Coronavirus DASHBOARD
The city’s Computer and IT department developed a dedicated internal worktable to serve the Municipality by surveying the general situation report in Israel (number of sick, number of critically ill, number of recovered patients, etc.) and also the Tel Aviv-Yafo situation report (number of sick people in the city, number in quarantine, hotspots of exposure to the virus, division into statistical districts, number of elderly in each district, segmentation of calls to the city’s coronavirus hotline and more). This tool provides the municipal management with an up-to-the-minute situation report in real time that helps decision-makers in fields such as population, operations, public health and other relevant issues. Click here to access the DASHBOARD system.

c) International virtual hackathon
Recognized as a global hub of innovation, Tel Aviv-Yafo has the world’s largest concentration of startup companies per capita. Given that new and innovative solutions are urgently needed to deal with the challenges posed by the pandemic and given the willingness of entrepreneurs and students of all ages who are confined to their homes to pitch in and help, the Municipality held the first international virtual hackathon dedicated to this mission. The hackathon, which sought new ways to help businesses survive and aid communities in distress, was
held in collaboration with the Global Network of Resilient Cities (GNRC), of which Tel Aviv-Yafo is a member.

Click here to access the hackathon website.

d) Apps for managing volunteers

The Municipality works on a regular basis with the vibrant startup community that is based in Tel Aviv-Yafo. Now, more than ever, the city had a need to connect with initiatives dealing with volunteering in the community:

- **Help is on the Way**: This startup comes from the Generation to Generation organization, which operates a network of volunteers to assist the elderly population. The organization specializes in occasional volunteering, that is, people who want to volunteer but cannot commit to do so on a regular basis. The startup won the Municipality’s 2018 hackathon and since then, it has worked in partnership with the city’s social services. These days, the system is handling 100 calls a day, 20 times more than before the crisis began.

- **TRIBU**: This app enables people to volunteer in a wide variety of activities that benefit the city’s residents. This nonprofit app connects those who want to help with those who need help. The Municipality publicized its need for volunteers in the following fields: packing kits that help alleviate loneliness, helping to bring medications to the elderly and families, distributing prepared meals and staffing telephone helplines. In the app’s first three days of operation, more than 600 volunteers signed up to help with various activities. Coordinators manage the lists of volunteers and their placement.

2) Contact with residents

a) Maintaining contact with city residents

Upon the outbreak of the coronavirus crisis in Israel, the Mayor identified one of the Municipality’s most critical missions as maintaining continuous and intensive contact with city residents – transmitting information about government guidelines, listening to residents, imparting strength and encouragement and receiving requests for assistance from those in distress. To accomplish this vital task, the Municipality uses the following platforms:
• DigiTel (see Section II, 1a above): This service enables the Municipality to maintain direct contact with residents via email and text messages. During the crisis, the platform is used to deliver segmented mailings on various topics to specific target audiences (the elderly, families, young people, residents of certain districts, etc.). The mailings include updates on guidelines, municipal activities, the Mayor’s daily message and more. All information is also posted on DigiTel’s dedicated Facebook page.

• The Municipality’s website: The website set up a dedicated page that presents all information relevant to the pandemic, such as updates, where to turn for support and assistance, community activities, education, relief for business owners and more. The website is accessible in both Hebrew and English. Click here to access the website.

• The Tel Aviv-Yafo Municipality Facebook page: The city’s Facebook page serves as an additional way to access information and relay messages to residents and visitors who follow the page. Most of its content consists of information about activities in the city, updates and the Mayor’s daily message.

• The 106 Plus call center: As noted above (Section II, 1a), when the outbreak started, the city immediately added new functions to the call center’s capabilities, including: sending urgent messages to residents; receiving reports from residents regarding older people who need help; and serving as a panic button. These calls come in to the call center and are routed to the relevant social services officials. Another very significant change in the call center’s operations is the addition of social services representatives.

• The Mayor’s daily message: Each day, the Mayor delivers a new message on WhatsApp, which is also circulated on all municipal platforms (Facebook, the website, YouTube, emails and text messages). Click here to watch a sample message.

b) Surveys of resident satisfaction
The Municipality’s Social and Economic Research Center routinely conducts surveys and issues annual reports and summaries. Since the outbreak of the crisis, the center has been intensively conducting surveys among residents, business owners and families of children served by the special needs educational system.
The surveys’ aim is to monitor the level of resident satisfaction regarding the city’s handling of the crisis and to identify any gaps in the information and services it offers so that improvements can be made, if necessary. Analysis of the surveys helps the Municipality understand what is important to residents and what bothers them. It can then adapt its messages and the information it circulates on its various communications platforms accordingly.

c) **Information and enforcement**

- **Relaying guidelines issued by government ministries:** The Ministry of Health issues official statements with instructions on preserving good health in the following languages: Hebrew, English, Amharic, Russian, Ukrainian, Chinese, Thai and Tigrinya (the language of Eritrea). The Municipality distributes these messages to residents on all of its communications platforms.

- **Providing information in public spaces:** During the first days after the government recommended limitations on leaving the home, many residents went to the beach and the seaside promenade to get some fresh air. Although most residents observed the rules and went out alone or in couples, so many people were gathered there that crowds were formed. To counteract this crowding, the city’s Beaches Division hung up signs all along the seashore warning the public against being on the beach or using any of the beach facilities. In addition, announcements were broadcast on the public address system in three languages (Hebrew, English and Arabic) to prevent people from gathering on or near the beach. Public address systems are also being deployed in outdoor markets and parks for the same purpose, operating through loudspeakers that are part of the city’s camera infrastructure.

- **The Municipal Security Patrol:** Known by its Hebrew acronym Sela, the patrol’s main function is to increase residents’ and business owners’ sense of personal safety. In routine times, the patrol operates 24/7 in conjunction with the Israel Police, the city’s Inspection Division, the 106 Plus hotline and Mabat, the municipal Command and Control Center (See above, Section I, 1). In these times of crisis, the patrol also contributes to maintaining public order by patrolling public spaces to prevent vandalism and nuisances. The patrol is also called to various locations, for example, to break up gatherings or deal with
disorderly conduct. It is also at the disposal of residents who need individual assistance (with the emphasis on residents who are housebound, the elderly and those who live alone).

- **Enforcement and providing information in the Nave Sha’ananan district:** The neighborhood, which is adjacent to the Central Bus Station, is home to a very large concentration of migrant workers (as noted below, Section II, 4c). Beyond the social-economic distress in which they find themselves at this time, the foreign workers community suffers from a low level of awareness regarding the official government guidelines. Thus, focused efforts to raise awareness are being made by the Inspection Division; the Municipal Security Patrol (Sela); the Aid and Information Center for Foreign Workers and Refugees (Mesila); and the Community Administration. These bodies are working together in a combined effort that began with municipal teams going to central locations and enforcing the Health Ministry’s guidelines regarding the closure of businesses and the dispersal of crowds. At the same time, other teams were providing guidance about the virus and the protective measures required to prevent its spread. They hung up signs at key locations detailing the Health Ministry’s directives in English and Tigrinya, and put up banners bearing similar information in the same languages along the main streets in the neighborhood. The city also posted informative videos in the community’s WhatsApp and Facebook groups.

d) **Transportation**

- **Public transportation:** At the start of the crisis, the Health Ministry recommended reducing the use of public transportation as much as possible. Accordingly, the Municipality froze the operations of its weekend-only free public transportation system. Launched in November 2019, this system provides transportation in Tel Aviv-Yafo and its metropolitan area from sundown on Friday until sundown on Saturday, when most public transportation comes to a complete halt. On Shabbat, the Jewish day of rest, riding in motorized vehicles is forbidden by Orthodox Jewish law, leaving many thousands of secular residents with no way to get around aside from private cars and taxis.
• **Municipal means of transportation:** The recent reduction in public transportation on weekdays and its total stoppage on weekends increased the need for municipal-run means of transportation. These include AutoTel, the Municipality’s car-sharing service, and the free shuttle bus system that crisscrosses Jaffa, where the main roads are closed for the construction of the city’s light rail system. The Municipality is adamant about keeping these transport solutions going, while at the same time strictly observing the regulations concerning hygiene and sterilization.

e) **Parking**

As the virus-related restrictions become increasingly stringent and people are instructed to stay at home and limit their going out, city residents have raised an outcry regarding the lack of available parking spaces. Thus, the Municipality decided to ease its parking regulations as follows:

• **Permitting parking in spaces adjacent to educational institutions that are reserved for dropping off and picking up students,** even at the times when parking is normally prohibited there

• **Opening the parking lots** of schools and other city facilities for public use

• **Reducing the fee for parking at the municipal parking lots operated by Ahuzat Hahof.** Designated spaces at these lots are reserved for city residents who are healthcare workers.

3) **Education in Tel Aviv-Yafo**

a) **The educational routine**

During the crisis, the Israeli Ministry of Education has been operating a national remote learning system for the country’s pupils. However, the system occasionally had to pause for days as it waited for educational activity to be arranged at the government level.

Even during the days when the national educational system was not functioning, the municipal school system provided an educational routine for the city’s pupils. Following a decision by teams of school staff members, homeroom teachers continued to maintain contact with their pupils and most schools went on
providing educational content, taught by teachers who volunteered their time out of a deep sense of commitment.

In addition, the city launched an initiative called Big Brother, in which high school students teach elementary schoolers as part of the Personal Commitment project. To ensure direct access for all pupils, the city distributed 750 laptops and more than 100 tablets to children who do not own devices suitable for remote learning. In addition to the city’s devices, Tel Aviv-based high-tech companies were recruited to lend computers so that more children would be able to benefit from studying at home.

b) Assistance and support for parents

The city’s educational-psychological service opened a hotline for parents to deal with a range of topics, including relationship issues, parenting and education at all age levels (from nursery school through the end of high school, in both the mainstream system and the special needs system). For the benefit of children with special needs, the city distributed tablets and creative activity kits. It also expanded its dedicated Facebook page called The Special Ones to include additional content, a question-and-answer section and more. Professionals are available to help parents find ways to help their children deal optimally with the new and complex reality.

c) Assistance for at-risk children and youth

The municipal Education Administration received permission to continue operating 12 clubhouses and two residential facilities designed to support and advance this population. Night patrols by youth counselors to locate and provide help for at-risk youth are also continuing.

d) Launching a childcare program for the children of healthcare workers

The Municipality opened 22 kindergarten classes of 10 pupils each for the children of people who work at the Tel Aviv-Sourasky Medical Center (also known as Ichilov). Sixteen further classes are set to open for the children of workers at Wolfson Hospital in Holon just south of Tel Aviv-Yafo and another six classes for the children of workers at Clalit Health Services, Israel’s largest healthcare
organization. The possibility of opening additional classes for the children of workers at other hospitals is being examined.

4) Social services

Social workers are at the forefront of the pandemic response, reinforced by Community Administration workers. Together they work to create and maintain telephone contact with elderly residents in quarantine throughout the city, both to ease their loneliness and to provide solutions for other needs, especially by obtaining necessary medications and supplying thousands of hot meals every day. The Social Services Administration’s normal response to populations with special needs (children and youth at-risk, cases of domestic violence, homeless people and substance abusers) has been substantially expanded during the past few weeks. The Administration also deals with employment issues and the utilization of social rights.

a) Food distribution

Each day, volunteer trucks set out to deliver food to the elderly and those in quarantine, as part of the Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs and Social Services’ food distribution program that is led by the Municipality’s Social Services Administration and Community Administration. As long as the government instructs people aged 65 and older to remain confined to their homes, the Municipality will gear up to expand its food distribution program to include all members of this population group. In addition, food vouchers and hundreds of meals are distributed daily to impoverished families at-risk with whom the Municipality maintains contact.

b) Volunteering by residents

The Municipality’s Social Services Administration and Community Administration established a network of volunteers to assist the elderly, people with special needs and fringe populations. Some of the volunteers are new, while others have worked with the Municipality for a long time. The large number of volunteers is to be commended. Management of the volunteers is handled by the TRIBU application (see above, Section II, 1d).
c) **Solutions for the city’s foreign worker population**

Tel Aviv-Yafo is home to thousands of foreigners (mainly undocumented migrant workers and asylum seekers), who are concentrated in the low-income neighborhoods of Nave Sha’anan and the Central Bus Station in the south of the city. These foreigners have no legal status, no health insurance and a socioeconomic profile that is far different from Israeli society at large. Many of them live in extremely crowded conditions. Thus, in this difficult period, they find themselves in severe distress and require special attention. The Tel Aviv-Yafo Municipality is active in public information campaigns on their behalf and also in providing social service assistance.

The city has extended the working hours of the social workers at the Aid and Information Center for Foreign Workers and Refugees (Mesila). The center’s social workers are in continuous contact with members of the community, both in person and via telephone. In coordination with third-sector organizations, the schools attended by the community’s children and the municipal social services offices, the Municipality has so far distributed some 1,400 food vouchers, hundreds of frozen prepared meals, packages containing staple foods and baby formula.

To ease the community’s deep financial distress, the Municipality has been working with the government to arrange the release of the mandatory deposits that are deducted from the workers’ wages and held in escrow until their departure from Israel. The government has prepared a draft bill to that effect which is now being circulated for comments. Upon completion of the draft bill, it will be brought before Israel’s parliament, the Knesset, for approval.

Regarding the community’s health situation, while the known statistics show no cases of illness and a very small number of people in quarantine, there are concerns that, given the community’s unique circumstances, these statistics are not reliable and the incidence of illness and the danger of contagion are higher than among the general population. Therefore, the Municipality has been in close contact with the Ministry of Health and more coronavirus testing has been taking place among the foreign community in recent days. To facilitate the testing process, the city has made available to the Sourasky Medical Center a municipal facility in the Nave Sha’anan neighborhood.
whose regular activities have been frozen due to the pandemic. So far, no confirmed cases of coronavirus have been reported there. The Municipality has also sought the opinion of the relevant government ministries regarding finding suitable alternatives to home quarantine because the large number of people living in one apartment makes it impossible to isolate anyone effectively, if this should become necessary.

5) **Community activities for city residents**

In emergencies as well as routine times, the Community Administration maintains ongoing contact with residents via social activists and neighborhood activists, some of whom have participated in training sessions provided by the Municipality to encourage greater civic involvement. During the crisis, these activists have helped the Community Administration with transmitting messages, locating people in distress and assisting residents. The coronavirus pandemic, with its restrictions on leaving the home, has imposed drastic behavioral changes on residents of the Nonstop City, which enjoys a worldwide reputation as the city that never sleeps. To alleviate their distress, the Municipality launched the “Stay at Home” campaign, urging residents to stay in their homes and offering a wide range of activities to stave off boredom. These include:

- **Favor Your Neighbor** – becoming closer to your neighbors while practicing social distancing: Together with involved city residents, the Municipality created a list of tips on being a good neighbor to encourage solidarity during these difficult days. The list offers suggestions for nurturing closer relationships among people who live in the same building. Among the ideas are joint purchasing of food and medications; celebrating the birthday of a child who lives in the building by decorating the exterior of the apartments with balloons and signs; and looking after and helping elderly neighbors. Other ideas include writing “letters to the coronavirus,” imagining what you would write to the virus if it could hear you and then hanging the letters on the building’s bulletin board; and “positive vandalism,” that is, decorating electrical circuit boxes, knitting around staircase railings and more.

- **Digital library**: Tel Aviv-Yafo library subscribers can read books online 24/7, free of charge. The libraries have added dozens of new digital titles.
• **Free online activities:** Offerings include virtual tours of the Tel Aviv Museum of Art, fitness classes, full-length theater presentations for children and adults, and more.

• **The entertainment channel:** To help families maintain a routine at home, the Municipality launched an array of community activities that are broadcast online, including a story hour, activities for children and more. The schedule is posted on the Facebook page of the city’s community centers.

• **Blossoming at Home:** The city is encouraging residents to cultivate a garden on the roof of their building or on their own balconies. Residents receive abundant tips and advice on planting and caring for a garden. Soon, the city will hold a competition for the best rooftop and balcony gardens. Such activities bring together parents and children as they actively participate in a project with no face masks, while at the same time beautifying their buildings and the city as a whole.

• **Every Balcony Needs a Sign:** The Municipality approached residents and suggested that they make signs declaring “We’ll Get Through This Together” or “Applauding Healthcare Workers” and hang them on their balconies. Residents are encouraged to take pictures of their signs and post them on Facebook and Instagram with the hashtag #Creating_Hope.

• **Podcast of “Stories in the Time of Coronavirus”:** Sponsored by the Open University, these radio plays brighten the days of book lovers and those seeking enrichment.

• **On Tel Aviv’s rooftops:** Open performances occasionally take place on the rooftops of buildings throughout the city. To prevent crowding, the performance venue is not announced in advance and is made known only to residents living in the vicinity, as identified by DigiTel’s direct segmentation.
6) Owners of businesses in the city

   a) Relief for business owners

   The spread of the coronavirus and the subsequent directives issued by the government have had a devastating effect on businesses throughout the city. Following the outbreak of the crisis, the Municipality spearheaded a relief package for business owners, which was also approved by Forum 15, the Israeli Forum of Self-Government Cities (municipalities that are fiscally autonomous and not dependent on national balancing or development grants). The relief package includes:
   - According to a decision by the Ministry of Finance, there will probably be an exemption from paying municipal taxes for three months (reflecting a 25% discount on the yearly tax bill), jointly funded by the government and the Municipality;
   - An exemption from the fees charged for placing tables and chairs and/or putting up a partition on the sidewalk;
   - An exemption from the fee charged for a nighttime operating license;
   - Postponement of the mandatory dismantlement of the glass-walled extensions used in wintertime by restaurants and cafes.

   b) Support for businesses

   The Tel Aviv-Yafo Municipality, in conjunction with the Ministry of Economy and the Small Business Association, opened a hotline for businesses that provides answers to questions pertaining to business activity during the coronavirus crisis.

7) Animals in the city

The spread of the coronavirus and the subsequent change in residents’ behavioral patterns have had grave implications for the city’s animal population.
   - Street cats: The continued confinement to home of many residents means that numerous stray cats that were used to being fed by the same people each day are not receiving food on a regular basis. Inspectors from the Inspection Division’s Department of Veterinary Services and volunteers from the organizations SOS Pets Israel and Let the Animals Live are arranging for the cats to be fed with food purchased by the Municipality.
Dogs: The municipal pound has taken in dogs from other cities that found it difficult to maintain them.

8) Seizing opportunities: Some advantages arising from the crisis

Taking a broad strategic view, it appears that the crisis presents opportunities as well as difficult challenges. This is an excellent time to accelerate the advancement of projects defined in normal times as disrupting city life and to implement procedures and working methods that are being tried out during the crisis period.

a) Construction and infrastructures

The coronavirus crisis is generating opportunities for construction and infrastructure projects, which are not only continuing but are actually being stepped up thanks to the empty roads and deserted public spaces. Particular emphasis is being placed on the accelerated construction of educational institutions, the paving of bike paths and the execution of works that until now could only be carried out at night.

Also under discussion is a plan to accelerate the progress of national infrastructure projects, such as electrification of the railway system and further construction of the light rail system and the highway system (Netivei Ayalon).

b) Environmental protection and food

The closure of restaurants due to the pandemic has imposed a major change on the eating habits of Tel Aviv-Yafo residents. The Municipality’s Environmental Protection and Sustainability Authority is taking this opportunity to stress the importance of cooking at home, sitting down together to family meals and involving children in food preparation. The message to residents is to enjoy these new habits and keep them up after the crisis ends. The authority is offering relevant online training and recommendations.

The authority is also taking advantage of the opportunity to send residents home farming kits and encourage them to grow and eat their own homegrown vegetables and herbs.
c) The Municipality’s budget
The crisis is generating a substantial drop in the city’s revenues, coupled with an increase in certain expenditures. Without any advance warning whatsoever, the Municipality was forced to deal with an instant change in its budget and cash flow. The Municipality’s management views this situation as an opportunity to reprioritize and fine-tune evolving needs, reflecting the realization that the budget for certain operations, which was taken for granted in the past, will have to be cut back for a certain period of time or cancelled altogether.

d) Municipal videoconferencing
Prior to the coronavirus crisis, the Tel Aviv-Yafo Municipality made little to no use of videoconferencing. However, social distancing restrictions required an immediate change in behavior to ensure that the Municipality, and particularly its management, could continue to function effectively.
Use of the Zoom platform was implemented immediately, initially in the work of the management (the Mayor’s Office, meetings of the Director General’s Forum, etc.). Within days, use of the platform had trickled down to all echelons of the Municipality. At first, assistance was needed from the Computerization Unit but operation of the platform very quickly passed into the hands of the managers and the staff themselves.
Today senior municipal officials are extremely satisfied with their ability to hold virtual meetings, so much so that it could be said that the crisis acted as a catalyst for introducing new working methods that will benefit the Municipality long after it ends.

e) Remote working
In the current circumstances, most of the Municipality’s staff members are working from home using tools for remote connection. As described above (Section I, 3), entire units such as call centers (106 Plus, requests from the public, etc.) were trained to adapt to working from home. Thanks to the means of remote
connection described above, work is continuing in the best possible way under the circumstances. The Municipality views this situation as an excellent chance to try out new tools and it plans to examine how these findings can be of use in the future.

9) National solidarity: Mutual support and knowledge-sharing among local authorities

To advance social equality in Israel and foster mutual responsibility, the Tel Aviv-Yafo Municipality regularly maintains, under instructions from the Mayor, a network of ongoing partnerships with other local authorities. The municipal Resilience and Social Equality Authority is responsible for managing these connections, which include sharing knowledge and services, as well as strengthening solidarity between residents of central Israel and those living in outlying areas.

Tel Aviv-Yafo’s partner local authorities are the local councils of Usifiya, Bet Jann, Daliyat al-Carmel, Dimona, Sderot, Shlomi, Rahat and Lod; the regional councils of Eshkol, Hof Ashkelon and Sha’ar Ha’Negev; and, of course, the local authorities that make up Forum 15.

During the current crisis, the Municipality has provided hygiene products and personal protection equipment to two of its partner local authorities. Naturally, it has also been sharing knowledge related to municipal management, including community assistance, support for the elderly, transmission of information to the public, remote cultural events, tension-releasing activities for children, etc.

There is also general knowledge-sharing with all the local authorities in Israel through the Ministry of the Interior, the Union of Local Authorities and National Initiative 265 for Development and Knowledge-sharing to Advance the Digitization of Local Authorities. This website was developed in collaboration with the Ministry of the Interior.

Additional forums devoted to inter-local authority topics operate on an informal basis for exchanges of information and joint projects. This includes the advisory group of strategic planning and workplan managers in local authorities, which holds frequent consultations.
10) **International relations**

a) **International solidarity**

The rapid spread of the coronavirus has created a sense of identification and international solidarity among local authorities throughout the world.

- **Global Resilient Cities Network (GRCN):** This group, which was founded with support from the Rockefeller Foundation, has been holding weekly international knowledge-sharing webinars to help cities deal with the challenges of the crisis, in partnership with the World Bank. As a member of GRCN, the Tel Aviv-Yafo Municipality participates in these online seminars, where it presents what it has been doing during this difficult period and, of course, also learns from its colleagues.

- **The C40 Cities Climate Leadership Group:** Tel Aviv-Yafo is a member of this cities network leading the world in climate change policy and climate action. At the end of March, the organization launched a series of international webinars about the crisis and its consequences, with the participation of senior officials (mayors, deputy mayors and managers) from the world’s leading cities, including representatives of Tel Aviv-Yafo.

- **Bloomberg Philanthropies:** The foundation, in conjunction with the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health and the Bloomberg Harvard City Leadership Initiative, launched a program to support mayors in their local responses to the coronavirus crisis. Since Tel Aviv-Yafo is a member of this network, the Mayor and a small group of senior municipal managers were invited to join a weekly discussion devoted to various aspects of the crisis, such as emergency preparedness and response, leadership and media management, provision of services to residents, etc.

- **Strengthening ties of friendship:** The Mayor is routinely in contact with other mayors, ambassadors and senior officials throughout the world. During these difficult days, the Mayor takes care to keep up contact with international colleagues, especially those in partner cities. by way of telephone calls, videoconferencing and letters of support. These efforts are greeted with great enthusiasm.
• **Strengthening international relations:** Letters from the Mayor’s Office were sent to ambassadors located in Tel Aviv-Yafo, inviting the diplomatic corps to call the emergency hotline with any questions or concerns.

• **Illuminating City Hall:** In a show of solidarity and identification with the countries on the front lines of the struggle against the pandemic, Tel Aviv-Yafo, in collaboration with Israel’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs, lit up City Hall in the colors of the flags of these nations (including, for example, China, Italy, Spain, the United States and the United Kingdom).

b) **Fundraising**

The Tel Aviv Foundation routinely engages in fundraising from philanthropies and individual donors for the benefit of the city and its residents. Following the outbreak of the crisis, a special fund was established to raise money for several projects, including:

- The purchase of food vouchers for families served by the Social Service Division and the families of asylum seekers who live in Tel Aviv-Yafo
- Transportation of residents who require medical treatment
- The purchase of essential household items for the elderly and families who lack the resources to buy them
- Emergency grants to families and individuals who are facing financial difficulties due to the crisis
- Establish an Artists Fund to allocate grants to artists whose livelihoods have been hit hard by the pandemic

[Click here for additional information from the Tel Aviv Foundation website.]
11) The Day After

The Municipality’s management and the municipal corporations are investing considerable time, thought and energy in preparing for the day after the crisis ends. The Planning, Organization and IT Division is spearheading the drive to revise the city’s long-term strategic plan and immediately update the work plans for 2020-2021, to suit the changing circumstances in the near term and certainly in the distant future. While all is still shrouded in fog, the teams are rethinking the future city and the role of local government in the post-crisis era.

For further information please contact global_city@mail.tel-aviv.gov.il
Appendices

1) Tel Aviv-Yafo Municipality: Organizational structure
2) Tel Aviv-Yafo Municipality: Emergency organizational structure
3) **Comparative statistical data on the Tel Aviv-Yafo Municipality’s operations during the coronavirus crisis**

1) **General data – The city of Tel Aviv-Yafo (as of December 2018)**

- **Population:** 451,000
- **Education:**
  - Number of students: 58,954
  - Elementary school pupils: 31,714
  - High school pupils: 22,047
  - Pupils with special needs: 4,500 (of whom 2,000 are in special education schools)
  - Pupils at other schools: 3,193
  - Children and youth at-risk: About 900 in dedicated programs
- **Social services:**
  - Households known to and cared for by the Social Services Administration: 22,293
  - Elderly residents: 69,971
  - Households below the poverty line: 18,141 (35,106 people)
  - Homeless people: 611
  - Substance abusers: 176
- **Foreign population:** 38,500 (this includes documented foreign workers, undocumented foreign workers, tourists without valid visas, asylum seekers and refugees)
- **Businesses in the city:** 73,745
- **Residents registered with DigiTel:** about 200,000
- **International partner cities:** 43
2) Data on the Municipality’s activities during the coronavirus crisis (as of April 7th, 2020)

- **Digitel:** 2,143,127 notifications were sent to residents since March 13th, 2020 (compared to 159,000 in the parallel period last year)
- **106 Plus app:**
  - 56,007 calls received in March 2020 (compared to 51,727 in March 2019)
  - 7,431 calls referred to the coronavirus crisis in the following categories:
    - 2,382 requests for food baskets
    - 1,577 Health Ministry directives
    - 1,173 reports of gatherings that violate government directives
    - 971 requests for assistance for an older person
    - 478 reports on businesses operating in violation of the directives
    - 315 inquiries regarding feeding street cats
    - 202 requests for assistance with medications
    - 150 inquiries regarding gatherings directives
    - 135 requests for accompanying an adult
    - 48 requests for vouchers from Social Services
  - About 200 users in the 106 plus app and the panic button

- **Surveys of resident satisfaction:** most of the responses dealt with performances in public spaces; requests to volunteer; accessibility of information on the Municipality’s website; building a study plan for schools in the city.

- **Information and enforcement:** 6,117 incidents were handled by the Municipal Security Patrol (Sela) since the crisis began (compared to 3,893 in the parallel period last year)

- **Education:**
  - 750 pupils received laptops
  - 400 teenagers helped about 600 elementary school pupils with their studies, as part of The Big Brother project
  - About 900 children and youth are using municipal clubhouses and residential facilities:
  - About 50 calls received in the hotline for assistance and support for parents
- **Social services:**
  - 23,019 elderly residents were contacted by phone
  - 100,000 meals were distributed to the elderly
  - 6,400 families received about 6,700 food vouchers
  - 1,400 foreign worker’s families received food vouchers
  - In total, food vouchers worth of about 2 million NIS were distributed
    (jointly funded by the Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs and Social Services, and the Tel Aviv-Yafo Municipality)
4) **Scenes from the Tel Aviv-Yafo Municipality’s activities during the coronavirus crisis**

The Mayor of Tel Aviv-Yafo, Mr. Ron Huldai, during a City Council online meeting (30 March, 2020)

New functions of the 106 Plus mobile
The Municipality’s coronavirus DASHBOARD

Food distribution by municipal staff members and volunteers
Every Balcony Needs a Sign

On Tel Aviv-Yafo’s Rooftops