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## **The Corona Crisis: Systemic Recommendations for Social Policy**

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**Following the containment stage of the corona pandemic, Israel will be called upon to launch an economic and social recovery. That stage must be based on differential, nonlinear, and flexible management of the “emergency routine,” while gradually expanding functional continuity according to the sectors and population groups who from a health perspective can return to work, even if in limited format. While this policy incurs many risks, including a descent into uncontrolled infection, intelligent management through precise planning, meticulous implementation, focused public information, and operational flexibility will make it possible. Risk management is also required on social and economic levels, in order to facilitate and bolster national resilience, create the necessary basis for emergence from the crisis, and enable renewed future growth.**

### **Basic Assumptions**

- a. The COVID-19 virus is here for the long term. Therefore, Israel must prepare to deal in a prolonged manner with its widespread damage to the economy and to society. Reducing infection is essential for achieving the goal of flattening the curve, but the relaxation of restrictions is expected to prompt higher levels of infection.
- b. Overall, the Israeli public has so far displayed impressive capabilities in coping with the crisis and adhering to the government’s guidelines within the “contain and constrain” policy. Most of the public believes that the lockdown policy is correct. The perception of self-resilience and self-efficacy are still quite high.
- c. Inasmuch as the current policy becomes more restrictive, it creates significant damage for the economy and society. The continuation of the strict lockdown over time will create “psychological fatigue” and the public will have difficulty accepting the imposed restraints. This may even lead to cases of hazardous behavior. The use of fear-mongering in order to increase compliance with the guidelines is effective in the short term, but not in the long term. Tightening the lockdown will increase the public’s sense of vulnerability, certainly among the weaker sectors, and may have a negative impact on continued voluntary compliance.
- d. The State of Israel is heterogenic by nature. It has many weak population groups, and therefore requires a differential approach to each of them. It is not only the right

- of the weak to receive proper and equal assistance from the state; without a focused response to at-risk population groups, the risk to the health of others increases greatly.
- e. Against this background, there is no alternative but to prepare now for the moderate and differential relaxation of the lockdown policy. Systemic and meticulous preparation and focused implementation of research-based interventions are important.

### **Social Policy in “the Presence of Corona”**

The essence of the proposed policy is the gradual construction of a differential “emergency routine,” which balances public health concerns with the need for rapid economic bouncing back. The aim is to enable low-risk population groups to return to work (with limitations) and to help jumpstart the functional revival – economic and social – of the entire national system, in parallel with the continued isolation of high-risk population groups.

This strategy must include critical benchmarks, with precise definition of the “released” population groups, the industries that will return to activity, the indices for determining the policy and its success, the stages of removing the limitations, and the conditions for transitioning from one stage to another. To a large extent these depend on the availability of a reliable database. Variable management of the crisis may lead to volatility in numbers of infected and in damages. For instance, the opening of schools – even in a controlled manner – is expected to lead to a new rise in infection levels. Risk management, e.g., ensuring that senior citizens remain protected and there is no contact between students and the elderly, is therefore imperative.

### **Managing the Risks of the New Policy**

The main problem in the proposed differential model is the expected decline in the public’s staunch posture vis-à-vis the risks of the disease. This can easily lead to the “slippery slope” of greater public interaction and a return to mass infection.

The lockdown cannot be eased successfully in any way over time solely on the basis of government guidelines and police enforcement. “Self-enforcement” is also necessary as a basis for public behavior. In other words, a re-division of responsibility between the state and the citizen is necessary, with responsibility expected from the individual, his self-discipline, and his involvement. Voluntary compliance is important in the management of prolonged and complex crises: maintaining self-motivation and personal responsibility, whereby the public does what it thinks is correct. This approach is based on the theory of “regulation of good people,” which assumes that most of the population comprises “good people” who, informed by an adequate combination of clear and precise data and the threat of more severe coercion in the background, will cooperate with government directives.

As a response to these risks, preparedness for the implementation of the differential approach, particularly on the social plane, must be accompanied by the following main steps:

*Planning:* A designated professional committee should be established within the “corona cabinet” to design the social processes and gradually implement them. This requires lateral cooperation between government ministries (finance, welfare, education, health, and others), as well as vertical cooperation in planning and implementation with the local authorities and civil society, through leading NGOs, that must be assisted in view of current difficulties. Planning must be based on a differential approach, flexibility, public involvement, and proper budgeting.

*Implementation* must be gradual (in terms of easing of the lockdown) and flexible, according to cumulative healthcare data and variables. It requires precise regulations by economic sectors, and division by region and population group, taking into account the needs of weaker groups with less access to information. It must be done with maximal use of all national resources, including the IDF, the local authorities, and civil society groups. Most of the supervision of the implementation of the government guidelines must be done by workplaces and under their responsibility. At the same time, special attention must be paid to particular sectors, such as the ultra-Orthodox, Arabs (including Bedouin in the Negev and residents of eastern Jerusalem), individuals with special needs, and people in care-providing institutions. Groups that will remain under lockdown for a longer time are of special importance in this regard, as their particular physical and emotional needs must be addressed.

*Public information:* The implementation of the proposed model requires an end to the policy of intimidation and a transition to targeted and precise public information for citizens, based on scientific data, under the heading: “Protect yourself for the sake of your family.” What is permitted and what is prohibited in each area and for each population group must be explicitly defined. The campaign must target both the general public and the individual. Where a differential policy is used, the campaign must be targeted according to distinct sectors, which requires particular skills. Professional spokespeople are needed to convey the messages to the public successfully. Both public leaders at the local level and heads of economic systems have an important role to play in the campaign, as a key to maintaining the public’s trust in the political system, which is critical to the success of the new policy.

The public health strategy, which has so far been the primary prism for managing the corona emergency, is now coming under broad criticism. That life must go on in the

presence of the virus, while minimizing the serious damage that the crisis may cause the economy and society in the long term, is now understood. One assumption in planning the exit strategy is that a social crisis is a time bomb that must be at the forefront of public discourse and decision making. The concern is not that the corona pandemic may change the socioeconomic situation in Israel over time, but that it may aggravate the existing situation. Inequality and socioeconomic gaps are expected to grow to very serious proportions since the economic ramifications will first and foremost hit the weaker layers of society, the self-employed, and the salaried workers who join the widening circle of the unemployed every day. Therefore, in planning the exit from the corona predicament, along with economic issues, attention must be directed to the social crisis and the need to strengthen the social safety nets. In this framework, a support and social assistance program must be formulated, and the psychological assistance system must be reinforced. This approach can already help individuals and families in dealing with the ramifications of the emergency, and help them develop the necessary resilience to deal with the consequences of the pandemic now, and even more strongly on the “day after.”

The proposed differential policy is a basis for a chance for rapid recovery of the national system after the pandemic subsides. It is a clear expression of the societal resilience strategy that relies on the human capital in the national system. Israeli society, rich in economic, social, and moral capital, has displayed this wealth at every serious disruption and the diverse challenges it has weathered repeatedly. There is no reason that the corona crisis should be any different. The risks inherent in the model proposed here are not insignificant, but they can be overcome; progress in growth can be channeled toward a return to normal life. The successful handling of the crisis will also provide an opportunity to establish new patterns of public thought, decision making, and creative use of human capital.

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