

Israeli Sociological Society (registration no. 50016954)

March 24, 2020

Board Statement Regarding the CorVid-19 Crisis

On behalf of all members, the Board of the Israeli Sociological Society applauds the academic community for its rapid enlistment to transition to online teaching and to recuperate the academic year. All parties in universities and colleges collaborated in this effort: management, senior and junior teaching staff, administrative and technical staff, and students. Tech personnel deserve our particular appreciation for rapidly training both faculty and students to operate under emergency conditions and to hold lessons with technologies that we unfamiliar to them. We also wish to applaud students, who took part in the efforts to participate in online lessons in spite of the economic hardship that befell them because they hold those temporary jobs that are unlikely to receive appropriate compensation by the State.

We regard the enlistment of the academic community to salvage the academic year as an important contribution to the economy, seeing that dissipating this academic year would have deprived the economy of a cohort of young and well-trained employees who shall be essential to its recovery following the crisis. Dissipating the academic year would have injured State finance, due to reimbursement of tuition fees for the year.

In spite of this unique contribution, we condemn the actions of the Ministry of Finance, for coercing universities and colleges and their employees to take unnecessary and drastic cutbacks. Rather than encouraging universities and colleges to continue holding the academic year, MoF injured employees and their income, primarily the administrative and technical staff and junior academic staff who were forced to go on unpaid leave. Coercion into unpaid leave for 70% of all administrative and technical staff and of junior academic staff, as well as prohibition on work from home, inflicts severe harm both economically and in terms of morale and is injurious to the operations of universities and colleges in delivering online, home-based study. Such harm is imposed exactly as the higher education system has harnessed itself, though an impressive collaborative effort, to salvage the academic year and thus to offer its contribution to the economy and promote chances for its post-crisis recovery.

We emphasize that all workers are necessary for appropriate operation of academic activity from home, in teaching, research and administration. The higher education system as a whole can adjust to operate from home under emergency conditions. We are concerned that the MoF is using these emergency times to execute old plans of cutbacks in funding for higher education.

We determine that the CorVid-19 crisis is not to be taken as an opportunity for enforcement of funding cutbacks and injury to employees' salary or budgets, forced upon universities and colleges. On the contrary, this is time to funnel funding, rather than execute cutbacks and injure the system's weakest employees. This is time to encourage enlistment of the

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community and its solidarity, rather than to drive a wedge between academic staff and all other employees.

We call upon MoF officials and the Prime Minister to recognize the enormity of the situation and to reconsider the injury it inflicts, to cancel the cutbacks in funding and human resources, and to enable the higher education system to continue working at the same level of excellence that we are accustomed to during normal times. These are indeed not normal times, surely not times for exploitation of dependence on the State, and we sincerely wish to enlist in the fight against the real danger facing us, which is surely not the workers but rather the rapid and deadly spread of CirVid-19.