

# Plan calls for state to fund first-aid stations for drug users at rave parties

**Josh Breiner**

A pilot program calls for the Public Security Ministry, which oversees the Israel Police, to fund safe areas at authorized rave parties, in the wake of a rise in the number of raves in Israel and the use of recreational drugs at these large, outdoor parties.

If the program is approved, the state would allocate about 200,000 shekels

(\$60,000) for the nonprofit organization ELEM -Youth in Distress to operate and staff safe areas at legally authorized raves. Trained counselors will be on hand to talk to and supervise attendees who are having bad reactions to drugs.

Safe spaces or chill-out areas have been proved effective in caring for rave attendees, whether or not they have used drugs, particularly in Europe, where

they often receive government support, but the idea is often less popular with police authorities.

Under the pilot plan, led by Tali Yogeve, the head of the ministry's prevention, treatment and rehabilitation division, safe areas would operate at two raves per month for the next two months. If the plan is approved, ELEM is expected to contribute half of the funding for it.

The pilot grew out of the recommendations of a team comprising representatives from government ministries, including the health, social services and public security ministries, the Israel Police and organizers of raves. In light of the widespread use of recreational drugs such as cannabis and psychedelics at these parties, the team recommended

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The Midburn festival in 2021.

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making harm reduction a new goal.

That goal, and the decision to operate safe areas at raves, constitutes a recognition of the seriousness of the situation by the state. The report issued by the Public Security Ministry noted that while "Most revelers will feel the affect of recreational drugs as a relatively positive experience, some will experience difficult and complex emotional and physical experiences, including loss of orientation, panic attacks, flashbacks to traumatic events and even situations of dehydration and in extreme cases, of death."

The report went on to say that early intervention has been shown to be critical to recovery and to preventing a worsening of the person's condition. In addition, studies carried out abroad show that at raves with interventions aimed at harm reduction, there are fewer referrals for medical attention, fewer incidents

of violence and fewer mental-health crises.

The team found that an average of 20 raves with police approval are held each month in Israel, alongside dozens more that have not received permits.

"There are drugs at all of these parties, and the role of the police is to enforce the law, but at this time the goal is to focus on harm reduction, just as the state gives assistance to drug users," a senior Public Ministry official said. "Sometimes the revelers simply need someone to listen to them, to talk to them, or simply a bottle of water. The goal is for these young people to return home safely."

According to ELEM, the police take overt and covert action to curb crime at raves, including crime associated with illegal drugs, but the safe areas enjoy immunity because of their therapeutic function. Officials in the charity for at-risk youth say the police have respected the boundaries of these spaces for years.

Roy Homary, the head of street fieldwork at ELEM, says the pilot is in effect the first time the state is "taking responsibility" for the

consequences of drug use at outdoor raves.

He explains that the safe spaces will be tents staffed by professionals from the organization who have been trained to deal with crisis situations brought on by the use of psychedelic drugs. If needed, they will be able to refer individuals for treatment in the community - for example, if they believe a person is dealing with post-traumatic stress. "The state has an enforcement arm and a treatment arm, and treatment doesn't have to be neglected in every situation where there's enforcement," he said.

In the past several years a few rave attendees have suffered injury or even died as a result of ingesting illegal drugs without supervision. In 2018 three people were charged with manslaughter in the death of Tohar David, a 20-year-old woman, at an outdoor rave, in part because they delayed seeking medical care for her for five hours after she collapsed. Two people died that year in similar circumstances at Neverland Festival, which operated with a permit from the police.