



State of Israel

Office of the State Comptroller and Ombudsman

Local Government Audit
Report 2020



Jerusalem | July 2020



Foreword

This Report presents the results of the audit of local government for 2020, and it includes the findings of both systemic and detailed audits regarding a variety of subjects.

When I began my tenure, I formulated my vision for the Office of the State Comptroller and Ombudsman. That vision is as follows:

The Office of the State Comptroller and Ombudsman carries out constructive, objective and respectful audits. The audits are directed at future challenges and encourage greater accountability among audited bodies; the audits improve the audited bodies operations, promote the fulfillment of their objectives, and increase the benefit that the public receives from those entities.

The Office of the State Comptroller and Ombudsman works to achieve its objectives as prescribed established by law – professionally, efficiently, independently and with organizational transparency, while striving toward excellence and constant improvement, basing itself on the work of its high-quality and highly ethical personnel.

In accordance with that vision, this Report deals with the core issues of local government activity – with the various aspects relating to the security and safety of the residents of the various local authorities; the financial management of the authorities; the ensuring of the provision of service to the residents; the securing of their welfare; and the protection of the environment. The Report is based on the areas directed by the State Comptroller's Law and examines whether the authorities have acted in a manner that reflects

economy, efficiency, and transparency and have followed the rules of good governance. Alongside this, we emphasized the integration of social, financial and innovative audit – such as the auditing of activity on social networks, in accordance with the emphases established by the State Comptroller.

The following is a survey of some of the subjects that were examined:

In recent years, the public sector, including local authorities and their elected officials, have frequently used online social networks (mostly Facebook, YouTube, Instagram and Twitter) and have communicated with the public directly through these networks. This makes the transfer of messages and information to the public quicker and more efficient, but also involves a potential for danger and harm, such as the risk of infringement of the right to privacy, of freedom of expression or of equal treatment. Our office examined the **use of social networks by local authorities and their elected officials** from the following perspectives: the scope of use and the purposes thereof; the technical management; the content posted by the authorities and by the public; and the use of social networks by the heads of local authorities. In light of the audit findings, I have recommended that local authorities and their elected officials should make the best possible and most efficient use of social networks in order to utilize their full potential in a manner that will boost the public's trust. At the same time, the local authorities and their elected officials must remember that their activity on social networks is subject to the rules of public law, and that they must be extra cautious in order to prevent harm to the public as a whole, including the public that uses these networks. It is also necessary to make certain that the social networks are used in a way that is respectful of the public as well as the elected officials. The entire subject should be examined and regulated by the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Justice. It is noted that in recent years, the Ombudsman's Office has examined various complaints regarding the use of social networks by



public officials and public entities. In light of this accumulated experience, the audit staff was accompanied by an employee of the Ombudsman's Office. The execution of this audit thus reflected the benefits of combining the functions of the State Comptroller and the Ombudsman in a single office.

Israel has a 45-kilometer long coastal cliff. This cliff is not stable and is gradually collapsing and retreating eastward – as a result of both natural forces and human activity. An audit regarding **the authorities' handling of coastal cliff erosion processes** has shown that over the past nine years, since the adoption of a government resolution dealing with this matter – and despite the establishment of a dedicated governmental corporation – substantial parts of the government resolution have not yet been implemented. Moreover, none of the bodies which are responsible for constructing the defenses for the coastal cliff have any general plans for such construction - not even a prioritization based on the available budgets and the physical condition of the cliff. The relevant parties do not have an updated and complete cost estimate regarding the establishment of the defenses. Most of the local authorities which were audited on this matter had not taken immediate necessary measures for ensuring public safety in the area of the cliff, nor had they established the required land defenses within their jurisdictions. The government's Mediterranean Coastal Cliffs Preservation Company has not yet implemented many of the initiatives included in its work plans, and has not established sea defenses in various areas – including in areas which require urgent care . The bodies involved – government ministries, the Mediterranean Coastal Cliffs Preservation Company, and the local authorities – must conduct a comprehensive investigation of the matter and of the obstacles that are impeding the implementation of the government resolution. They must also reach operative decisions so as to improve the efficiency of the handling of the coastal cliff and prevent additional delays.



A key area of a local authority's activity is the management of the planning and building process, through local planning and building commissions which operate alongside the local authorities. In light of the importance of this issue and the entry into effect of a reform regarding this matter (Amendment 116 to the Planning and Construction Law), I saw the significance of carrying out a systemic audit regarding the **inspection of construction by local planning and building commissions**. The audit found systemic defects in the preparation of local commissions for inspecting construction, and defects in their enforcement activity. The phenomenon of building violations is widespread, and its consequences are likely to be the unwise use of land resources, damage to quality of life and the environment, and possibly even the endangerment of the public. Most of these offenses are obvious to all; thus, the manner in which the authorities deal with them impacts public trust in the enforcement authorities. This Report's recommendations deal with, among other things, the improvement of the interfaces between the inspection and planning bodies within the commissions.

Based on the data provided by the National Road Safety Authority, the number of members of the Arab Israeli population who are involved in fatal car accidents is far greater than the group's proportionate share of the total population. The chapter dealing with **measures to increase road safety within the jurisdictions of the Arab population's local authorities** indicated that it is necessary to act in several areas in order to promote the issue: Education and publicity, improvement of infrastructures, and enforcement. In order to reduce the number of road accidents and the number of those injured, Arab local authorities must give top priority to the issue of road safety. A greater involvement of the local authorities and the relevant governmental bodies is required in order to promote safety on the roads, and they should lead actions that will address the needs of at-risk populations and risk centers. We



note that the chapter dealing with this issue is being published in the Arabic language as well.

A water utility corporation has been established in the Samaria region, but only two local authorities are using its services. The other local authorities in Samaria provide water and sewage services to their residents by themselves. Our audit of **selected issues in the Samaria water industry** indicated that in most settlements in Samaria, there have been frequent water supply stoppages for many key reasons, among them an improperly treated infrastructure over decades and a significant increase in water consumption – due to a population increase that has not been accompanied by a parallel increase in water sources. The audit indicated defects in the provision of service in this area to the residents of Samaria, which need to be resolved at both the national and local levels. The infrastructure needs to be cared for intensively, with the objective of improving the supply of needed water and reducing the loss of water.

Domestic violence is a difficult social problem, and it presents a serious and central challenge to all the governmental ministries which are involved with handling it, as well as to the municipal welfare services and law enforcement agencies. The findings of our audit regarding the **prevention of violence between spouses and the treatment of the victims of family violence in Ramla** emphasize the need to complete the implementation of the recommendations of a national professional committee established for dealing with the issue; to formulate solutions to the local and national shortage in social workers whose job it is to handle acts of domestic violence; and to increase cooperation and coordination among Ramla's social services department, the Family Wellbeing Center that operates in the city and other professional elements (the Police and education and health authorities) – for the purpose of improving the treatment of the victims of family violence.

The audit findings also point to the need to systematically and regularly carry out publicity regarding the issue; and to work on the identification of those engaging in violence, in order to prevent incidents of domestic violence and discover those that occur within specific sectors of society. Pursuant to the directives set for this matter, an immediate treatment for the victims of domestic violence and those who engage in such violence is required. Training of professionals to serve the needs of unique social sectors is also needed. All this should be done in order to prevent, as much as possible, this type of violence, and to improve the treatment of its victims.

Considerable effort was expended by the personnel of the State Comptroller's Office in the preparation of this Report, which was done in a professional, thorough, fair and careful manner. The employees of the State Comptroller's Office carry out their public functions out of a sense of true dedication. I am grateful to those who prepared this Report.

I am also aware that much good has been done in many local authorities for the benefit of their residents, and the most notable of these efforts have been noted in the audit reports. Alongside this, the authorities are obligated to correct the shortcomings mentioned in this Report, with the goal of improving the quality of life and the environment of the residents of the country.



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Jerusalem, July 2020