



State of Israel

State Comptroller Report

July 2024

Abstracts



State Comptroller and Ombudsman | Jerusalem



Foreword

The State Comptroller's annual audit report – July 2024 is submitted to the Knesset under the State Comptroller's Law, 1958 [Consolidated Version]. The audit includes reports on government ministries, corporations, and the defense system.

Since the end of October 2023, Israel is in a state of war following the sudden murderous attack carried out by the Hamas terrorist organization on communities in the vicinity of the Gaza strip during the Jewish holiday of Shmini Atzeret, October 7, 2023. As previously announced, our office is conducting a comprehensive audit examining issues related to the massacre on October 7, 2023, and the Swords of Iron war. In my view, there is a public and moral obligation to conduct an audit that will examine the performance of all ranks on the day of the massacre, in the period leading up to it, and in the period thereafter.

In addition, our office continued to conduct audits in other areas. Following is a review of some of the report.

The Office of the State Comptroller places special emphasis on audits on systemic issues with broad national implications such as: **English Language Studies in the Education System; The Ministry of Welfare's Treatment of Adults with Disabilities; Outsourcing Social Services by the Ministry of Welfare and Social Affairs; Cellular Communication Infrastructure**. Below is a review of three of the above-mentioned reports.

- English is recognized as the most central language in the world, essential for basic functioning in many areas and an important tool for integration into modern life in Israel and outside it. Therefore, English is one of the core subjects in the education system, taught in schools at all age levels and across all sectors. It is a mandatory subject from the 3rd grade to the 12th. The audit on **English Studies in the Education System** raised that although the primary goal of the national program for English is to increase the number of students studying for the English matriculation exam in an enhanced track (of 4 and 5 units) was achieved, large discrepancies were found in the students' proficiency in English upon completing their studies in the education system: in the higher socio-economic cluster, the rate of those taking the matriculation exams in English at the 5 units level, out of all 12th grade students, was much higher than that in the lower clusters (66% versus 26%). Similar disparities were found among Jewish students compared to non-Jewish students (54% versus only 27%). Within the Jewish sector, the weakness of ultra-Orthodox education students in English studies is apparent: over half of them (55%) did not even take the English matriculation exams, and only a minority took the exam at the advanced levels (11% taking the 5-unit exam and 12% taking the 4-unit exam). Furthermore, five years after the implementation of the national program for English, in 2022, the proficiency level of high school graduates in English



who took the 4 and 5-unit level exams remained low: according to English proficiency exam data of applicants for studies in higher education institutions, the majority did not reach the 'exemption' level from further English studies. In 2022, the rate of high school graduates who studied 5-unit level English and who received an exemption in their SATs from further English studies in higher education institutions was 30%, a decrease compared to the rate in 2015 (36%). 4% of the graduates were required to take four courses in 2015 and 2022. Another of the program's key goals was not achieved: the shortage of English teachers – both quantitatively and qualitatively – remained high. Towards the 2022 academic year (which began in September 2022), there was a shortage of 711 English teachers, with 375 teachers (over half) in the Tel Aviv and Central districts. The qualitative shortage of English teachers also remained high, and in June 2023, around 26% of English teachers (approximately 3,300 teachers) did not meet the qualification requirements for the teaching the subject.

Despite the achievements of the national program for English, even if partial, the Ministry of Education drastically reduced the implementation of the program in 2020 without a formal decision, without deriving lessons from its implementation, and without evaluating its overall impact on achieving its goals. It is recommended that the Minister of Education, in collaboration with its professional bodies and led by the English Coordinating Supervisor, develop a continuation plan for the national program, based on comprehensive lesson learning from the national program's implementation, set annual and multi-annual goals, reducing the achievement gaps among various student populations, allocating the necessary resources for implementation, and monitor its execution.

It is further recommended that the Minister cooperate with its professional bodies, led by the Teaching Staff Administration, other government ministries, representatives of the business and civil sectors, and teachers' organizations – recruit high-quality English teachers, examine the forecast of future demand for English teachers and, according with the forecast, set multi-year goals for teacher recruitment to address the shortage of teachers or, at the very least, reduce it.

- Cellular communication infrastructure is essential for maintaining a proper way of life and for the development of the Israeli economy and industry. The Ministry of Communications has granted cellular infrastructure companies licenses to use radio frequencies, which are a limited resource of the state, to ensure an adequate level of cell services to the public. According to the Ministry of Communication, data consumption in Israel through cell networks has increased 28-fold from 2013 to 2022, at an exponential rate of 40% per year, and by 2030, it is expected to increase up to 43-fold. As of August 2023, Israel is ranked only 64th in the world out of 145 countries in the median index of download speed in mobile surfing. The audit on **Cellular Communication Infrastructure**, raised significant difficulties in cell reception quality in dozens of local authorities in the country and deficiencies in the activities of government ministries responsible for ensuring efficient and safe cell services to the



public. A significant portion of the audit findings relate to the manner in which the Ministry of Communications fulfilled its role as the sector regulator. Thus, for example, it was found that the Ministry of Communications did not fully exercise its authority to obtain information from cell companies about the cell service they provide to the public and relied on the companies' estimates, which do not reflect the service in practice. Additionally, a State Comptroller's survey and questionnaire distributed to local authorities raised significant discrepancies between the data held by the Ministry of Communications and the reports of the local authorities and interviewees on the quality of cell reception. For example, in the 18 local authorities included in the survey, 11% to 78% of the interviewees reported moderate or poor cell reception. In contrast, according to the Ministry of Communications' data, the cellular coverage in these local authorities ranges from 99.92% to 100%, meaning full or near full coverage. Audit findings raise concerns that cellular infrastructure companies are not meeting the coverage and reception requirements mandated by the licenses. At the core of the issues highlighted in the audit concerning significant difficulties in cell reception in the examined local authorities is a shortage of transmission facilities. The Ministry of Communications did not evaluate the extent of the required facilities, so it does not have data on the scope of the facilities' shortage. The examination of the deployment and operation rate of 5G transmission facilities indicates that, the number of facilities deployed in Israel by July 2023, 1,943 facilities, did not meet the requirements of the Ministry of Communications' licenses, and Israel's coverage rate with this technology is lower than the rates in most European Union countries in the previous year. Moreover, significant disparities were found in the deployment of 5G communication infrastructure between large local authorities and peripheral authorities, and the scarcity of 5G transmission facilities is most severe in peripheral Arab communities. The Ministry of Communications promoted legislative amendments to improve the planning and licensing processes of the cellular infrastructure in Israel, but did not improve them. The report also raised deficiencies in protecting the public from radiation from cellular transmission facilities. With respect to government transparency, deficiencies were found in the publication of information and data to the public, both regarding the extent of cellular coverage and the quality of cell service, as well as in the results of measurements of radiation from cellular transmission facilities. Deficiencies were also found in the public information format regarding the health implications of radiation from cellular transmission facilities – information that is essential to provide reliable data to the public on the topic and to reduce its objections to expand the cellular infrastructure, as required for providing quality cell service. It is recommended that the relevant government ministries, led by the Ministry of Communications, the Ministry of Health, and the Ministry of Environmental Protection, along with their respective ministers, address all the deficiencies raised in the audit to improve the level of cell service provided to the public in Israel, while ensuring proper safeguarding of public health.

- Stroke is the second leading cause of death worldwide. Strokes can affect various areas of the brain, causing a wide range of motor, cognitive, speech, emotional, and behavioral



disorders, and may lead to disability and even death. In 2020, about 18,400 new stroke events occurred in Israel, with an average age of 71.7 among stroke patients that year, and 20% of stroke patients under the age of 60. The direct and indirect costs of the consequences of stroke in Israel are estimated at NIS 2.3 billion per year as of 2018. Timing is a critical factor in providing treatment, and treatment within the recommended time window influences the recovery of stroke patients, leading to a significant reduction in disability rates and deaths caused by stroke. In the audit on **Stroke – Treatment and Rehabilitation**, deficiencies regarding the provision of the necessary optimal treatment to stroke patients have been identified, including: treatment of patients in wards not specializing in stroke treatment, where stroke treatment is not within the expertise of the treating staff, especially doctors and nursing staff; The Ministry of Health lacks a mechanism for efficient and central management of the catheterization array, resulting in patients in need of catheterization potentially not receiving it or wasting valuable time arriving at a hospital without an available catheter doctor, risking deterioration in their condition; Stroke patients do not receive the full range of rehabilitation services required during general hospitalization, and the services they receive in rehabilitation frameworks are not always available and accessible as needed, especially in districts where the ratio of rehabilitation beds to stroke patients is lower than in others. Furthermore, the Ministry does not assess the effectiveness of the entire rehabilitation system for stroke patients. The number of stroke events is expected to increase significantly in the coming decades due to demographic changes in the population size and composition, particularly due to the predicted increase in the 65 and older age groups – from about 18,400 events in 2020 to 30,000 in 2030, 1.7-fold higher. This is compared to the expected growth of the population over 18 years old age group, which is 1.2-fold higher. The estimation indicates that one in every four people in the world will experience a stroke of some severity during their lifetime. Therefore, it is important to promote the prevention of stroke events, and it is important for the Ministry of Health to increase awareness for identifying a stroke event and the need to promptly arrive at the hospital, so that the patient receives optimal treatment within the appropriate time frame and in a treatment-bed dedicated for stroke patients. Additionally, it is necessary that the Ministry improve the disperse of the catheter doctors and increase their availability to provide optimal coverage in all parts of the country, as well as providing useful rehabilitation that can restore stroke patients to independent functioning, while improving their quality of life and that of their families.

The law, under which the National Fire and Rescue Authority operates, imposes on the Authority to investigate fire incidents to identify their circumstances and causes. The findings of the investigations and their conclusions are intended to assist authorities, businesses, and the general public in preventing fires that cause harm to life and property, and primarily to save lives. Between 2019 and 2023, 117 people died in fires, and about 328,000 dunams were burned in fire incidents that occurred in 2019. According to estimates, the cost of fire damage nationwide in a year is over NIS 7 billion. The audit on the **Investigation of Fires by the National Fire and Rescue Authority** raised disparities in the following aspects: the



operation of the investigation system on building up of the force and exercise of the force; Planning, management, and training of human resources and the supply of material resources for conducting investigations, including technological and other means; And management of internal and external working interfaces of the investigation system. The audit findings indicate that the Authority is not prepared to carry out investigations to the extent required by law; And, since the establishment of the investigation system in 2012, an average of about 10% of fire incidents handled by firefighting teams have been investigated, without the decisions not to investigate the remaining incidents being made through formal examination processes and authorized decision-making by the relevant authorities. Reconciling the disparities highlighted in the audit requires the National Fire and Rescue Authority to formulate an effective operational concept of the system in relevant aspects of fire investigation; Develop an organizational structure that meets the needs; Establish risk-based policy; Formulate a structured methodology; Equip with necessary equipment; Train specialized personnel and preserve their capabilities over time; And regulate working interfaces with peer bodies. In the broader concept, the Authority should focus on achieving the goal of investigating fires, through public information activities based on investigation findings, to embed the necessary messages in the fire prevention and protection.

One report at the defense system about **The Protection of the Traffic Roads in the Judea and Samaria** passed a confidentiality process in the subcommittee of the State Audit Committee under section 17 of the State Comptroller's Law, 1958 [Consolidated Version], and it was decided to publish only some of its findings to the public for considerations detailed in the said section. Two additional issues were examined at the Prime Minister's Office: **Protection of Computerized Information in the Prime Minister's Office and Information Security in the Conversion Division of the Prime Minister's Office – Resilience Test Results**. They also underwent a confidentiality process and only parts approved by the committee were published.

Monitoring the rectifying of deficiencies raised in previous audits is an important tool ensuring that the audited bodies have indeed rectified what is required. Hence, we increase from year to year the scope of follow-up audit we conduct and improve their conduct. This audit presents the findings of two follow-up audits: **The Regulation of Clinical Training of Physicians Between the Healthcare System and Academia and the Purchase and Sale of Public Housing Units**.

The preparation of the report required a significant effort by the personnel of the Office of the State Comptroller, all of whom worked hard to prepare it with the utmost professionalism, thoroughness, fairness and meticulousness. The Office staff conduct their public roles out of a sense of true dedication and they have my gratitude.



Foreword

We will continue to pray and hope for the victory of the IDF and the defense system in this difficult war forced on us by our most bitter of enemies seeking to destroy us as a people and as a state, for the return of the hostages to their homes, and for peaceful and tranquil days.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Matanyahu Englman'.

Matanyahu Englman

State Comptroller
and Ombudsman

Jerusalem, July 2024