



Office of the State Comptroller
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Ministry of the Interior | Population and Immigration Authority

Control over the Border Crossings

Abstract

Control Over the Border Crossings

Background

The Israel Airports Authority generally operates the air and land border crossings by virtue of its authorities pursuant to the Airports Authority Law, 1977. The Population and Immigration Authority is responsible for the border control at these border crossings and at all other international border crossings. The Population Authority is required to provide efficient service to travelers at the border crossings and to prevent people from entering the jurisdiction of the State of Israel if there are any national security or criminal concern regarding their entry into Israel or if there is a concern that they are seeking to illegally immigrate to Israel, and to prevent people whose departure has been banned by judicial and law enforcement authorities from leaving Israel.

Key figures

29.1 million

Number of entries and exits registered at the border crossings in 2018

80%

Percentage of travelers passing through Ben-Gurion International Airport out of all travelers passing through border crossings

200%

Growth rate in the number of biometric stands placed at the border crossings from July 2017 until July 2019

781%

Growth rate in the number of cases where the State of Israel has denied tourist applications to enter its jurisdiction from 2012 until 2018


800%

Growth rate in the number of police investigations opened from 2017 until 2019 against Israelis passing through Ben-Gurion Airport due to suspicions of violations of the Entry into Israel Law


15 years


The timeframe that has elapsed since the drafting of a legislative amendment to regulate the obtaining and storing of biometric means of identification from foreign workers has begun and not yet been finalized


Audit actions

 From April to August 2019, the Office of the State Comptroller examined the following issues: the waiting time for border inspections at Ben-Gurion Airport; the extent to which the Population Authority is meeting the challenges of the border control array; the control over border inspections; and the infrastructures of the information to identify foreign travelers during border inspections. The audit was conducted at the Population Authority. Supplementary audits were conducted in the Israel Airports Authority, in the National Security Council in the Prime Minister's Office, in the Ministry of Justice and in the Israel Police. It should be noted that the audit engaged only in inspections of the Population Authority conducted to entering and exiting travelers.




Key findings

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Preliminary information about foreign travelers – unlike dozens of other countries, the State of Israel does not usually collect information for the purpose of conducting border inspections, regarding foreign travelers en route to Israel prior to their departure from their country of origin. The border inspection array's lack of preliminary information regarding foreign travelers seeking to enter the jurisdiction of the State of Israel prevents any improvement in the control over their entry, and could also impede the system's ability to prevent entry by people for security or criminal reasons, as well as entry by illegal immigrants.
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Inspections of foreigners at the entrance to Israel – the border inspection system allows some tourists to enter Israel after a very brief inspection, even when at issue are citizens of four countries that high percentage of their citizens are illegally residing in Israel. There is a concern that, although one of the two purposes of the system is being achieved – the provision of swift service to travelers at the border, the achievement of its second purpose is sometimes inadequate – preventing people from entering Israel due to security or criminal concerns or if there is a concern that they are seeking to illegally immigrate to Israel.
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Control over border inspections – the Border Inspection Administration has not conducted a comprehensive supervising process over the border inspection system in more than three years, a period during which there has been an eightfold increase in the number of instances of which suspicion arose regarding illegal entry into Israel through the Ben-Gurion Airport border crossing, and it did not obtain information regarding the way of entry of these foreigners into Israel. Furthermore, the Administration's computerized system is lacking critical reports for the purpose of controlling the border crossings.

-  **Regulation of the authority to take fingerprints from foreign workers arriving to work in Israel and to store them in a database** – a legislative amendment to regulate this issue is being formulated for 15 years, and the process has not yet been finalized. Therefore, as of August 2019, a foreign worker's entry into Israel is contingent upon the documentation of fingerprints, which are being kept/stored in a database containing biometric information regarding half a million foreigners, not by virtue of specified legislated authorization.
-  **Defining the maximum waiting time for a foreign traveler's interview** – the Population Authority has not defined the maximum waiting time of a foreign traveler for an interview, in the event that a suspicion arises that he is seeking to enter Israel for a different purpose than his declared purpose, and the actual waiting time has not been measured. That being the case, it is impossible to know for how long travelers have to wait for this interview, or whether the service to the public in this regard requires improvement.
-  **The area intended for questioning foreigners at Ben-Gurion Airport** – is a small area, and the number of seats in it cannot accommodate all those waiting.







The short waiting time for border inspections – the waiting time for travelers exiting Israel during the summer months between 2015 and 2019 was shorter than the defined target. The Office of the State Comptroller commend the short waiting time for the provision of this service to the public.

Installations of fast-track biometric stands at border crossings – since the Biometric Database Law came into effect on all residents of Israel, the number of biometric stands at border crossings has increased by 200% from June 2017 until August 2019.

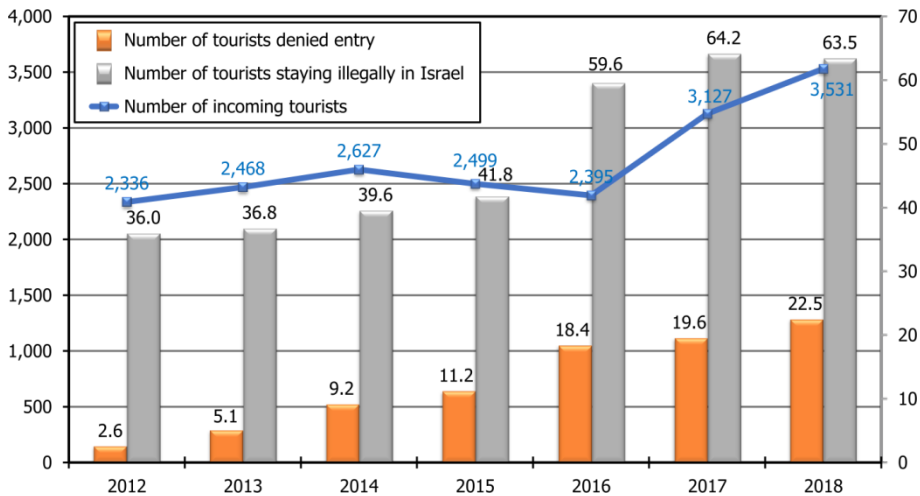
Establishment of advanced information systems for border inspections – the Office of the State Comptroller commend the actions the Population Authority took to establish these systems. However, for reasons of efficiency and savings, the Authority should ensure that there is no redundancy between a project that it is advancing in this regard and a similar project that the National Security Council is advancing.

Key recommendations

-  The Population Authority, in collaboration with the National Security Council, should take action to establish computerized systems to obtain preliminary information about foreign travelers.
-  The Population Authority should ensure that the border inspection system is operating with determination to achieve the two fundamental purposes of its activities: to provide swift service to travelers at the border crossings and to prevent people from entering Israel's jurisdiction for security or criminal reasons or if there is a concern that they are seeking to illegally immigrate to Israel.
-  The Border Inspection Administration should: formulate an annual control program and take prompt action to implement it; consider the possibility of developing management reports in the computerized system to improve the control over the border crossings; and to also use information available in the Enforcement and Foreign Workers Administration regarding the mode of entry of illegal aliens into Israel.
-  The Population Authority should: define the maximum timeframes for all stages of the questioning of tourists at Ben-Gurion Airport; measure the actual duration of the questioning; and ensure that the rules that it sets are being followed. The Population Authority and the Airports Authority should also ensure adequate conditions for travelers who are waiting to be questioned.



Increase in the number of incoming tourists, the number of entry applications that were denied and the number of tourists who stayed illegally in Israel, 2012 – 2018 (in thousands)



Source: the Population Authority; processed by the Office of the State Comptroller

Summary

The border inspection system is designed to achieve two purposes: one – to provide swift service to travelers at border crossings; and two – to prevent people from entering Israel's jurisdiction due to security or criminal reasons or when there is a concern that they are seeking to illegally immigrate to Israel. The set of audit findings raises a concern that, while the first purpose is being achieved, the second purpose is sometimes underachieved.

Considering these findings, it is becoming increasingly important for the Population Authority to perform high-quality, comprehensive control over the border inspection system, and to improve the information infrastructures for identifying foreign travelers. However, deficiencies were found in both areas. The lack of information infrastructure regarding foreign travelers before they reach Israel and a lack of control over the system is liable to endanger the State due to entry of foreigners involved in criminal activities or in terrorist activities to Israel and to expose it to illegal immigration. These deficiencies also might affect Israel's public image and cause inconveniency and unnecessary costs to foreign travelers and if their application to enter Israel is denied.

