



State Comptroller of Israel | Annual Report 71C | 2021

Ministry of Religious Services

The Service to the Public at the Rabbinical Courts



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Background

The Rabbinical Court has a Judicial Authority. The Rabbinical Court Jurisdiction Law (Marriage and Divorce) of 1953 vests the rabbinical courts sole jurisdiction over matters relating to marriages and divorces of Jews who are citizens or residents of Israel. The rabbinical courts also have concurrent jurisdiction with the civil courts over matters relating to child custody, alimony and property divisions between spouses. The Rabbinical Court Administration is a support unit in the Ministry of Religious Services that is responsible, inter alia, for providing services to the public.



Key figures

11

Regional rabbinical courts provide service to the public at 13 sites nationwide.

7

Key service processes have service standards and fixed timeframes stipulated in the rabbinical courts' SLA (Service-Level Agreement) with which they have committed to comply.

400

The number of employees in the rabbinical courts (including rabbinical judges).

approximately 100,000

Cases were opened in rabbinical courts in 2019.

47–135

The average number of days that a person waited for an initial hearing of a child support case in 2019.

50–123

The average number of days that a person waited for an initial hearing of a divorce proceeding in 2019.


3

The number of online forms that may be completed and sent via the website. There are also 38 forms that may be printed and completed manually.

0

Self-service stations are operating at rabbinical courts. The two stations installed as a pilot in rabbinical courts in Jerusalem and in Petach-Tikva are shut down.

Audit actions





 From February to August 2020¹, the Office of the State Comptroller audited the rabbinical courts' services to the public, particularly services from distance, which became even more imperative due to the covid-19 pandemic declared by the World Health Organization in March 2020. The audit avoided engaging in judicial topics and focused on the Rabbinical Court Administration's activities providing service to the public. The audit in the Rabbinical Court Administration was performed in its units and secretariats and included the various service channels, and data from the Rabbinical Court Administration's information systems were also collected and analyzed.

¹ In mid-March 2020, the rabbinical courts began operating in an emergency-only format due to the covid-19 pandemic. Consequently, the audit activities were significantly constrained until the end of April 2020.



Supplementary audits were performed in the Unit for Improving Government Services to the Public in the Government ICT Authority, in the Civil Court Administration and in entities representing service recipients in the rabbinical courts.

Key findings


-  **Strategic plan for the provision of services** – The Rabbinical Court Administration has not yet formulated an organization-wide strategic plan that synchronizes all activities and implements standards of service.
-  **The committee for equating conditions between rabbinical and civil courts** – The Prime Minister appointed this professional committee and it submitted a report and its recommendations in March 2019. This report was not discussed by the government because, according to the Office of the Prime Minister, not all committee members approved and signed the report. The committee found disparity between the resources available to rabbinical courts and the resources available to the civil courts, and recommended, inter alia, improvements relating to computerization and construction. In fact, no solution has been provided for the reported disparities as of yet.
-  **Achievement of the service levels stipulated in the SLA** – The Rabbinical Court Administration is deviating in three out of the seven indicators specified in the SLA. In relation to two out of the three indicators, the Administration is not evaluating the extent of their achievement. In relation to one out of the three indicators, the Administration did not define a maximum performance timeframe and, in relation to another indicator, a deviation was found compared to the specified target timeframe; however, the Rabbinical Court Administration claims that the target is being achieved, even though the closure in the computer system is entered at a later date.
-  **Average waiting times for hearing dates²**
 - **Initial hearing of divorce cases** – Two of the rabbinical courts are achieving the target average waiting time for an initial hearing of a divorce case specified in the work plan – 75 days. In three rabbinical courts, the deviation is up to five days after the target, while in the other seven rabbinical courts, the average waiting time for an initial hearing is three months and longer.
 - **Initial hearing of child custody cases** – Differences in the average waiting time for scheduling an initial hearing for child custody arrangements were found among the rabbinical courts. The shortest average waiting time for an initial hearing for


² Excluding the Be'er Sheva Rabbinical Court in Eilat, which is operated for the purpose of issuing Jewish divorce certificates.





child custody arrangements is in Petach-Tikva, which is longer than two months, and the longest average waiting time is in Safed – more than five months.


- **Initial hearing of child support cases** – None of the rabbinical courts are complying with the covenant stipulated in the SLA to schedule an initial hearing within an average of 21 days, and none are achieving the target specified in the work plan of scheduling a hearing within an average of 30 days. The shortest average waiting time for an initial hearing of a child support case at all rabbinical courts (excluding the Ariel extension) is longer than two months, which deviates from the target stipulated in the SLA and from the target specified in the Rabbinical Court Administration's work plan. The lowest deviation from the 30-day target specified in the work plan is at the Ariel rabbinical court, which deviates by 17 days, while the highest deviation is at the Safed rabbinical court – 105 days. Even though priority should be given to hearings of child support cases, the audit found that, in six rabbinical courts, the waiting time for an initial hearing of a child support case is longer than the waiting time for an initial hearing of a divorce case or a child custody case or is longer than either of these.

 **Online service** – There is a limited variety of operations that may be performed online through the rabbinical courts' website. For example: the Rabbinical Court Administration has one application that enables the public to schedule an appointment with secretariats.

 **Use of online forms** – The rabbinical courts' website displays 38 forms that may be printed and completed manually. Three other forms are online forms that may be transmitted via the website. One such form – "general request" – enables 65 different types of requests to be submitted. In relation to this form, although the request is transmitted via the website, it is not attributed to the relevant case file and secretariat clerks need to perform the attributions.

 **Upgrading of the computerized system for managing rabbinical case records** – Although the need to upgrade this computer system arose four years ago, the process for its replacement has still not been completed. In October 2020, a serious malfunction occurred in this system.

 **Online payments** – The rabbinical courts' payment system attributes fee payments to the identity of the payer and not to any specific case file. Consequently, the rabbinical courts' online payment mechanism cannot attribute fee payments to the case file for which it is being paid and secretariat clerks have to manually attribute payments to the relevant case files.






 **Website accessibility by people with disabilities** – The rabbinical courts' website does not enable people with disabilities to obtain customized access.



Measures to improve the service to the public – The Rabbinical Court Administration has instituted measures to improve the service to the public, including: drafting an SLA in 2015 and establishing evaluation and control mechanisms: establishing a database in 2014 for entering queries that support decision-making; establishing a new telephone call center in 2019; voluntary participation in a 2019 survey by the Unit for the Improvement of Government Service to the Public; and appointing a public service manager.

Establishment of a computerized report system – The Rabbinical Court Administration established a BI (business intelligence) report system, which is used to analyze information and support decision-making. However, it should be noted that the system is undergoing additional development stages to improve its data analytics capability.

Key recommendations

-  It is recommended that the Rabbinical Court Administration take action to formulate an organization-wide strategic plan for improving the service to the public.
-  The Prime Minister's Office should finalize the report of the Committee for Equating Conditions between Rabbinical and Civil Courts and, if one of its members does not sign the report, it should instruct the relevant committee member or, in his absence, should instruct a ministry representative to add his position (including reservations, if any, about the recommendations included in the report), and it should define a specific timeframe for this. At the end of the defined timeframe and upon receiving the report, it is recommended that the Prime Minister's Office submit the report for discussion by the government (including reservations, if any were submitted) for the purpose of making a decision about adopting the committee's recommendations.
-  It is recommended that the Rabbinical Court Administration update the SLA, examine the obstacles that are preventing achievement of the current service level targets, set updated targets from time to time according to the public's needs and take action to achieve them.
-  It is recommended to analyze the disparities between the various rabbinical courts in scheduling dates for initial hearings and the obstacles, and to remove them in order to improve and optimize the service to the public.
-  It is recommended that the Rabbinical Court Administration: upgrade its digital communication channels with the public; increase the number of self-service operations that may be performed on its website, including enabling the public to transmit online



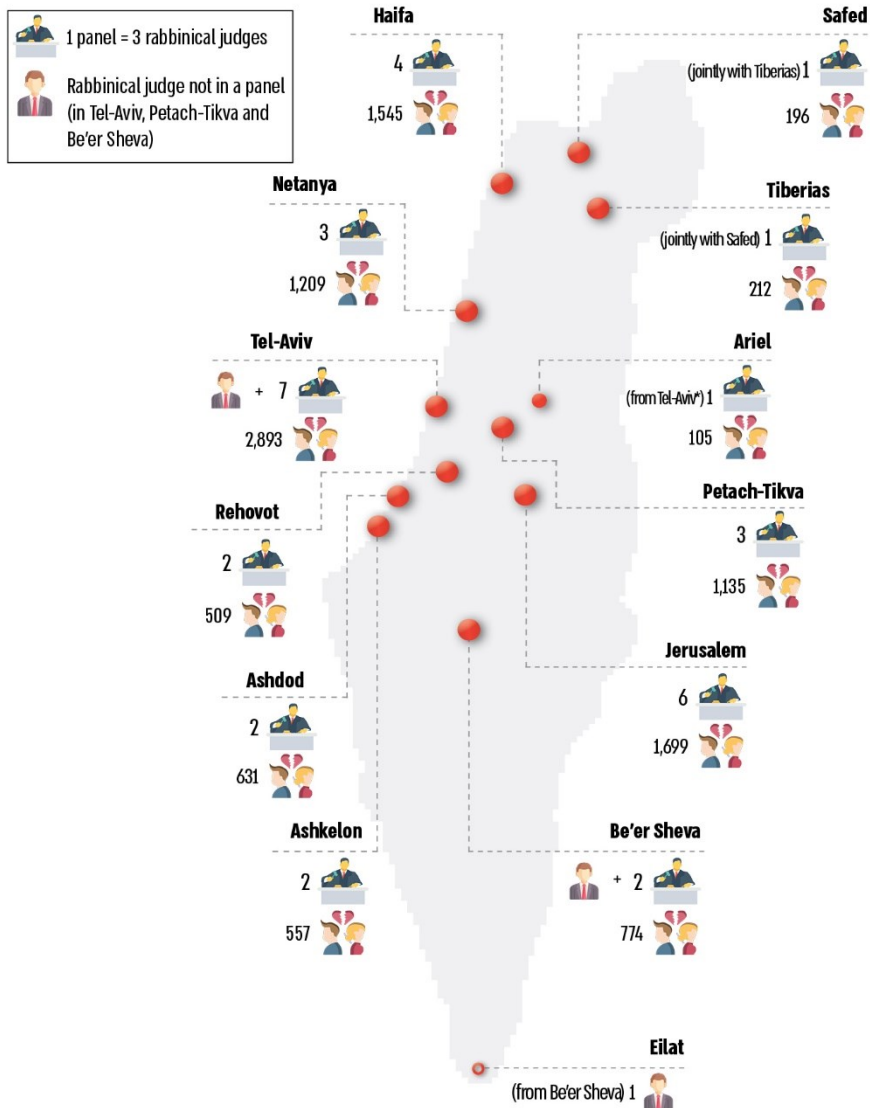
requests and upload documents; develop and upgrade the computerized system for managing rabbinical case records; and improve its online fee payment system.



It is recommended that the Rabbinical Court Administration complete the drafting of a training program and operate orderly training courses and other professional continuing education courses relating to public service for all rabbinical court employees, particularly employees of the secretariats.



Number of couples who got divorced and the number of rabbinical court panels in 2019



* Additional panel to the seven defined in Tel-Aviv.
 According to Rabbinical Court Administration data, processed by the Office of the State Comptroller.



Summary

Optimal, high-quality government service contributes to improving the public's satisfaction, to reducing the bureaucratic burden, to increasing efficiency of the work and to savings in time and money resources. The audit found that the rabbinical courts have made progress in their actions to improve service; however, the audit also found the following deficiencies: the Rabbinical Court Administration has not yet formulated an organization-wide strategic service plan that synchronizes all activities and implements standards of service; has not yet updated, published or implemented the rabbinical courts' SLA or achieved the service levels stipulated in it; and making information accessible on digital and telephone channels and integrating an advanced technology to improve online deficient services.

It is recommended that the Rabbinical Court Administration continue to improve its services to the public by planning services with an organization-wide perspective; upgrade its digital communications channels with the public and increase the number of operations that may be performed online; update, validate and publish the SLA to the public; and make sure that the rabbinical courts achieve their targets in order to ensure optimal, high-quality service to the public.