



Report of the State Comptroller of Israel | May 2022

Ministry of Education

Development of Educational Institutions – New Construction and Expansion of Existing Structures



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Background

According to the Compulsory Education Law 1949, every child and adolescent must study in an educational framework (kindergarten or school). The Law prescribes the right to free education at an official educational institution from age three until the end of 12th grade. The establishment of official educational institutions for free compulsory education for those entitled within the jurisdiction of the local education authority is imposed jointly upon the State and the local educational authority.

The Ministry of Education is responsible, among other things, for the development budget of the educational institutions, including their construction out of the State budget: the construction of new educational institutions, renovation of existing structures, and contribution to the financing of portable structures and the rental of structures for educational institutions in the local authorities as necessary.

For many years a shortage of proper classrooms, complying with physical and pedagogic standards allowing appropriate conditions for learning had prevailed in the education system in Israel. In 2020, the shortage was 10,219 classrooms in schools and kindergartens, an increase compared to 2017, when there was a shortage of 7,487 classrooms.



Key figures

10,219

the number of kindergartens and school classrooms shortage at the end of 2020

38,770

the number of kindergartens and school classrooms budgeted by the Ministry of Education in 2007–2021

NIS 29.2 billion

the budget allocated by the Ministry of Education in 2007–2021 for the construction of kindergarten and school classrooms

28.1 compared to 23.3

the average number of students in a middle school classroom in Israel compared with the OECD average

NIS 700 million

the budget allocated by the Ministry of Education and the local authorities for the construction of 5,000 classrooms in portable structures in 2007–2021

4%

the rate of innovative schools built by the Ministry of Education since 2017 (19) among the total new schools budgeted (429)

79%

the rate of kindergarten classrooms not budgeted (2,063) out of kindergarten classrooms whose need was acknowledged in 2020 (2,602)

50%

the rate of the five-year 2017–2021 plan budget implementation until August 2021

Audit actions

From February to August 2021, the Office of the State Comptroller examined the construction of classrooms. Including the ongoing shortage of classrooms in the education system, the multi-year plan for the construction of the classrooms within the five-year plans framework, the approval and budget of the local authorities' applications for classrooms construction, execution of the approved budgets, supervision, and control over the execution of the budgets according to the classrooms construction progress, portable structures use, innovative classrooms construction and vacating educational structures. The audit was conducted at the Education System's Development Administration (Development Administration) at the Ministry of Education. Supplementary examinations were conducted at the Economics and Budgeting Administration at the Ministry of Education and the Budgets Department at the Ministry of Finance. An examination was



also conducted in four local authorities – Herzliya, Daliat el-Carmel, Elad, and Ofakim – and data was gathered from 12 additional local authorities: Laqye, Umm al-Fahm, Nazareth, Modi'in Illit, Beit Shemesh, Zefat, Dimona, Tiberias, Kiryat Yam, Kiryat Motzkin, Petah Tikva and Ness Ziona.

Key findings



Formulating five-year plans – the final product of the five-year plan is the number of budgeted classrooms each year as part of the overall quota of the classrooms determined in the plan, but this does not illustrate the overall shortage of classrooms and the entire range of aspects concerning it. Likewise, in all three of the Ministry's five-year plans since 2007, no tracking mechanism over the plan's implementation had been determined, and the Ministry did not assess (assessing the multi-year plan to improve its implementation) any of them.



Classroom shortage – the five-year plans did not solve the classroom shortage. Even though the number of classrooms allocated in the five-year plans increased, there is still a shortage, and it has even considerably worsened according to the end of 2020 data. Thus, even though in the third five-year plan, the number of budgeted classrooms had doubled compared with the second five-year plan, 2020 ended with a gap of 10,219 classrooms (an increase of 56% compared with the gap at the end of the second five-year plan). At the end of 2020, the classrooms shortage in the non-Jewish sector, both in kindergarten (93% of the kindergarten classrooms whose need was acknowledged were not budgeted) and in school classrooms (75% of the school classrooms whose need was acknowledged were not budgeted), was higher compared to the Jewish sector (75% and 62%, respectively). In all the sectors, the rate of kindergarten classrooms shortage is higher than the rate of school classrooms shortage, and it is exceptionally high in the non-Jewish sector: less than 10% of kindergarten classrooms acknowledged as needed were budgeted. These figures are also consistent with the gaps between the number of classrooms acknowledged as needed and the number of classrooms budgeted according to the socio-economic cluster: the gap is higher in the lower clusters – 74% – while in the medium clusters, it is 66% and in the high clusters – 56%.



Over-crowded classrooms – the classrooms in a large part of the education system are considerably over-crowded, both in an international comparison and in a nationwide inter-sectoral comparison: in about one quarter of the elementary education and high schools' classrooms and about one-half of the middle school classrooms, the number of students in the classroom exceeded 30. The average number of students in the OECD countries in middle school classrooms was 23.3; in Israel, it is 28.1, approximately 21% higher, by 2019. In elementary education, nearly 4% of the classrooms are overcrowded



with more than 34 students, the upper limit that must be reached by the 2020–2021 school year, as stipulated in a Government decision from 2015. The highest average number of students in the Jewish sector classroom is in state education, while the lowest is in the ultra-Orthodox education – an average gap of approximately 3.5 students per classroom. In the non-Jewish sector, the highest average number of classroom students is in the Arab education system, and the lowest in the Circassian education system – an average gap of 6 students per classroom.



Classrooms in portable structures – since the required scope of building new classrooms in permanent structures was not achieved, in 2007–2021, the State and the local authorities were required, as a temporary solution, to allocate a budget of NIS 700 million to the establishment of approximately 5,000 classrooms in portable structures. The number of mobile structure classrooms the Ministry budgeted increased throughout the entire period by 65%, constituting about 13% of all the classrooms built during this period. Nine out of ten local authorities where more than 100 portable structures for school and kindergarten classrooms were budgeted belong to clusters 1–6, and only one local authority belongs to clusters 7–10 (to cluster 7). It was raised that a student residing in a local authority in the lower clusters 1–6 is more likely to study in a portable structure compared to a student living in a local authority in clusters 7–10. It was further raised that the Development Administration does not have any updated data about the portable structures it budgeted, which were built, their use made over the years, their quality, and their actual location.







Classrooms construction applications – during the last five-year plan, classrooms construction applications increased consistently, twice and more. Moreover, there was a constant decrease in the acknowledged classrooms as needed – from 71% in 2017 to 49% in August 2021. Likewise, the higher the socio-economic clusters, the more common is the reason "residential construction" in the applications for the construction of acknowledged classrooms as needed, and the lower the socio-economic clusters, the more common is the reason "the unsuitability of existing classrooms for the needs of the students." This raises considerable concern that unsuitable classrooms for the needs of the students are higher the lower the socio-economic background.



The construction budget executions by the local authorities – it is more difficult for the local authorities in the low socio-economic clusters to execute the classrooms construction budgets than those in the high socio-economic clusters. The gap between the low and high clusters is exceptionally high in the current (the third) five-year plan and was nearly 20%. Likewise, the lower the socio-economic cluster of the local authorities – the higher the number of authorizations not executed at all (zero performance); and even though the present five-year period is about to expire, most of the authorizations – nearly one-half in the low clusters – have still not been executed. This is also manifested by the high rate of kindergarten (58% – 588 out of 1,015 classrooms) and school classrooms (49% – 2,615 out of 5,344 classrooms) where construction has not commenced.



-  **Additional funding by the local authorities** – the Ministry of Education does not systematically gather data on local authorities' self-funding of the educational institutions' establishment. Accordingly, it does not have an overall status to deduce the funding gaps by the local authorities, affecting the difference in the construction quality of the educational institutions.
-  **Ministry of Education programs** – in a comparison of the programs (educational institution program – a document defining the principles of the physical planning of the educational institution) of a state elementary school and a Talmud Torah (religious school), and in an additional comparison between the programs of high school, a comprehensive high school, and girls high school, substantive differences arose in the programs which were sampled in the structure, size and number of rooms, according to their educational stream classification (state, religious-state, ultra-Orthodox). Thus, for example, the final gross area for 18 state elementary classrooms was 2,902 square meters, compared to 1,757 square meters for Talmud Torah. Likewise, the gross area of a high school, a girl's high school, and a comprehensive high school for 24 classrooms were 4,069 square meters, 4,610 square meters, and 5,493 square meters, respectively. Likewise, it was raised that the Talmud Torah program for 18 classrooms did not include special education classrooms, a library/study room, a multi-purpose hall, a room for individual study, etc. In addition, the Ministry of Education's standard construction programs for educational institutions does not include accessibility for students and school staff with disabilities.
-  **Innovative learning infrastructures** – the Ministry of Education has budgeted the construction of 19 innovative schools (which enjoy budgetary additions at the rate of 20%–30% and 7% for green building). The overall cost of their construction was nearly NIS 700 million, the Ministry part was about NIS half a billion, and the local authorities added nearly NIS 200 million from their budget. Nevertheless, only two innovative schools were constructed in the low clusters 1–3, even though these clusters have the most significant number of students – a rate of approximately 38%. In the high clusters 7–10, there is about the same number of students – about 36% – but seven innovative schools have been constructed. Likewise, in 2017–2019 the Ministry of Education budgeted approximately NIS 122 million for 1,526 learning spaces, but less than half of the budgeted spaces – 712 were constructed (about 47%). In addition, there is a considerable gap in the authorizations execution rate among the authorities in the Jewish-state sector and the Druze sector – approximately 41% – and the local authorities in the Jewish-ultra-Orthodox sector and the Bedouin sector, where the rates of execution are the lowest – about 28% and about 31%, respectively.
-  **Construction of work and rest areas for teachers** – from 2008 to 2020, the Ministry budgeted approximately NIS 418 million for 4,377 work and resting areas for teachers, but only 77% were constructed. The ultra-Orthodox sector has the lowest budget execution rate for work areas (63%).



Educational structures which are not used for their purpose – the Ministry of Education does not have a map of all the educational structures it funded, including their current purpose, particularly structures that are not used for their original purpose. Likewise, throughout a decade, 26 educational institutions were vacated (by the vacated buildings procedure) in the whole of Israel. In addition, five out of the 16 examined local authorities made a change in the use of the educational institutions without approval from the Ministry of Education as required.



Over-crowded classrooms in the Druze and Bedouin sectors – the Druze and the Bedouin sectors were budgeted in the third five-year plan for the years 2017–2021, according to the Government's decisions to develop these sectors. 118 classrooms were budgeted in the Druze sector and 1,066 classrooms in the Bedouin sector. From 2016 to 2020, there was a considerable decrease in the Druze sector from an average of 26.5 to 25.8 students per classroom, and in the Bedouin sector, there was a decrease from 26.9 to 26.2 in the average number of students per classroom.

Budgeting innovative learning spaces – the Ministry of Education budgeted 1,526 innovative learning spaces ("M-21 spaces") in the five-year plan for the years 2017–2021.

Key recommendations



Mapping out and reducing the shortage – it is recommended that the Ministry of Education map out the existing shortage in classrooms according to their characteristics – school and kindergarten classrooms, sectorial socio-economic cluster affiliation – and the ongoing gap in the number of classrooms should be defined, apart from the new annual needs. Based on this mapping, it is recommended that the Ministry formulate a policy to diminish this gap alongside the new needs, where the budgetary need is also determined. It is recommended that this strategic work be performed in conjunction with the Budgets Department at the Ministry of Finance to reach agreements on the plan. It is further recommended that the Ministry of Education examine the reasons for the higher rates of classroom shortage in the local authorities from the low socio-economic clusters, compared to the local authorities from the high socio-economic clusters, in the non-Jewish sector vis-à-vis the Jewish sector and within the sectors themselves, and take specific actions to reduce these gaps.



Over-crowded classrooms – it is recommended that the Ministry of Education examine the implementation of the Government decisions from 2008 and 2015 to reduce the number of classroom students and publish this to the public. Including: analyzing



the reduction needs according to the educational stages, the local authority's socio-economic level, and the school's sector; formulating a multi-year action plan for the implementation of the Government decisions by the determined targets; determining standards adapted to the socio-economic clusters entitled to be advanced, and in particular in the non-Jewish and ultra-Orthodox sectors, by the policy to reduce the classroom shortage, and consider this when prioritizing the allocation of the budgets for the construction of the new classrooms in the local authorities.



Realization of the authorizations for budget allocation – it is recommended that when formulating its five-year plan, the Ministry of Education consider the difficulties and the ways to help the local authorities in low socio-economic cluster to realize the construction of classrooms budgets, including reducing the launching delays of the approved projects.



Construction of portable structures – it is recommended that the Ministry of Education gather data from the local authorities regarding the educational institutions in whose areas there are mobile structures, including their physical condition, to formulate the classroom shortage status.



Additional funding by the local authorities – it is recommended that the Ministry of Education gather local authorities' additional funding data and determine the criteria and the format for the awarding points method to the projects submitted by the local authorities to bridge the gaps in the local authorities' ability to support the development of the educational institutions in their area.



Educational institutions programs – it is recommended that the Ministry of Education concentrate the data and examine the gaps in the programs between the various educational streams, in consultation with the local authorities and the various educational authorities, to provide an appropriate and equal solution, considering the multiple needs of each sector and the needs of persons with disabilities.



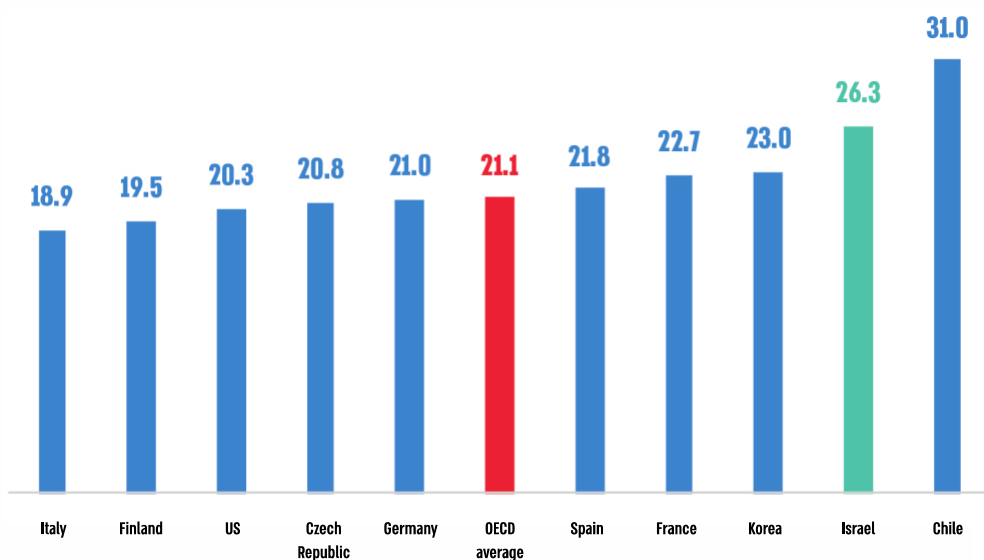
Innovative learning infrastructures – it is recommended that the Ministry of Education examine whether the priority it gave to local authorities in low socio-economic cluster to bridge the gap of the difficulty they encounter, and insofar as this is insufficient, it is recommended that it consider additional tools that will provide a highly feasible solution for implementation.



Educational structures which are not used for their purpose – it is recommended that the Ministry of Education, in conjunction with the local authorities, online map (GIS) all the educational structures funded by it and their present use. Thus, track and control structures that are no longer used for their original purpose to reallocate them or to vacate them and finance the construction of alternative structures.



The average number of students per classroom in elementary Education in selected OECD countries compared to Israel, 2019



According to Ministry of Education data, the Office of the State Comptroller processes it.

Sample school structures

**Zofit school –
Drom HaSharon Regional Council**



**Classrooms in portable
structures – Elad**





Summary

One of the main tasks the Ministry of Education faces is the allocation of budgets for the development and construction of schools from the State Budget via the local authorities – the building of new educational institutions, the renovation of existing structures, and contribution to the financing of portable structures and the rental of structures for educational institutions in the local authorities according to the need. At the end of 2020, there was a shortage of over 10,200 classrooms in the schools and kindergartens – an increase compared to 2017 when the shortage was nearly 7,500.

This report exposes a unique aspect of the social gaps in Israel: the gaps between the local authorities in the high socio-economic clusters and the local authorities in the low socio-economic clusters, to the detriment of the latter, are expressed in a variety of aspects concerning the construction of classrooms – in the scope of the existing classroom shortage, in the average number of students per classroom, in the rate of execution of the budget allocated for the construction of the classrooms and in the construction of innovative learning spaces. On the other hand, most of the funding for constructing classrooms in portable structures (85%) is designated for local authorities in relatively low clusters (1–6). The main reason for the gaps is that the low clusters local authorities find it challenging to realize the budgetary authorizations they have received from the Ministry of Education for the classroom construction. The result is that a high socio-economic local authority can offer the student, beyond the uniform and binding specification, better quality physical infrastructures and learning environment: an institution constructed to a higher standard, more spacious and well-equipped, and a more cultivated environment – resources which a low socio-economic local authority is unable to offer its students.

The Office of the State Comptroller recommends that the Ministry of Education formulate a policy for reducing classroom shortage over several years until it has closed, including providing permanent solutions in place of the portable classrooms. It is further recommended that the Ministry consider the inability of the low socio-economic local authorities to realize the budgetary authorizations for the construction of the classrooms. Thus, the Ministry will increase the chances of the students in the schools in these local authorities to start at the same starting point as the students in the schools in other local authorities and ensure that they have an equal opportunity. The Office of the State Comptroller further recommends that the Ministry of Education examine the implementation of the Government decisions concerning the reduction of the over-crowded classrooms during the past 13 years: analyze the reduction of the classroom students number according to the educational stages, the socio-economic affiliation of the local authority and the sector to which the school belongs; formulate a multi-year action plan for the implementation of the Government decisions, and prioritize the budgets of new classrooms construction in the local authorities where there is a higher average over-crowded classrooms in the schools under their jurisdiction.

