



State Comptroller of Israel | Local Government
Audit Report | 2023

Follow-up Audit

**The Local Authorities'
Handling of Sexual
Harassment and its
Prevention – Follow-
up Audit**



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Background

Sexual harassment affects human dignity, freedom, privacy, and the right to equality. It harms the self-esteem and social dignity of the harassed. It may adversely affect the victims' health and mental strength and their ability to study and earn a living, trust others, form interpersonal relationships, and function properly within the family and social framework. In 1998, the Knesset enacted the Prevention of Sexual Harassment Law, 1998, in which it was established that "A person may not sexually harass another or subject him to prejudicial treatment." The Minister of Justice was entrusted with implementing the law, and under his authority, the Prevention of Sexual Harassment Regulations (Employer's Obligations), 1998, were enacted.

In Israel, 258 local authorities employ about 190,000 of their own and many employees of workforce companies and other service providers. As in any work environment, here, too, there are often hierarchical and dependent relationships between different employees, and many of the local authorities' employees also have direct and frequent contact with the public, among other things, through office hours and by providing various services to the residents. Hence, the local authority should ensure a work environment free of sexual harassment – both among the employees of the local authority and between them and the public.



Key Figures

**about
173,000**

were sexually harassed in 2021, according to the Ministry of National Security and the CBS Personal Safety survey for 2021

**about
9,500**

the number of sexual harassment inquiries received at the Assistance Centers for Victims of Sexual Assault in 2021

51%

of the examined local authorities' employees, noted in the public participation process that they do not know if there is or who is the prevention of sexual harassment officer in the local authority

14%

of the examined local authorities' employees noted in the public participation process that they were sexually harassed or knew someone else who was sexually harassed within their work at the local authority in the last three years

22%

of the examined local authorities' employees noted in the public participation process that their workplace in the local authority is unsafe or moderately safe from sexual harassment (190 out of 866)

only 3

of the 12 examined, local authorities published the regulations for the prevention of sexual harassment on their websites

38

local authorities have appointed a prevention of sexual harassment officer, out of the 43 authorities noted in the previous audit not to have appointed this officer or did not answer the question on the subject

only 18

sexual harassment complaints were filed cumulatively in the 12 examined local authorities from the previous audit completion (October 2018 to August 2022)



Audit Actions

 In 2019, the State Comptroller's Office published a report on "The Local Authorities' Handling of Sexual Harassment and its Prevention" (the previous report or audit). From June to September 2022, the State Comptroller's Office examined several local authorities and the Ministry of Interior measures to rectify the main deficiencies raised in the previous report regarding the regulation of handling sexual harassment in the local authorities; Regarding the appointment of prevention of sexual harassment officers in the local authorities (Officer); Regarding the local authorities' actions to prevent sexual harassment; And regarding handling sexual harassment complaints (the follow-up audit). The follow-up audit was carried out at the Ministry of Interior at the **Umm Al-Fahm, Or Akiva, Elad, Be'er Ya'akov, Hadera, Tiberias, Tirat Carmel, Migdal HaEmek, Nazareth, and Nesher** municipalities, at the **Rekhasim** local authority, and the **Hof HaCarmel** regional council. Completion examinations were carried out at the Authority for the Advancement of the Status of Women and Gender Equality in the Ministry for Social Equality.

As part of the follow-up audit, 77 local authorities, which the previous audit found to have not appointed an Officer or to have not established regulations for the prevention of sexual harassment, were also examined. Relevant questions were sent to 62 of these local authorities (the follow-up questions), and regarding the remaining 15 authorities, their reports about rectifying the deficiencies raised in the previous report were examined.

Given the scope of sexual harassment on the public agenda affecting a large part of the population and the importance of its eradication, the State Comptroller's Office added to the customary audit tools a public participation process. In this context, a survey was sent to 7,552 employees in the 12 local authorities to obtain first-hand information about their sense of security and safeguarding against sexual harassment, including the degree of familiarity of the employees with the Officers and with the regulations; The extent to which they perceive the workplace in the local authority as safe from sexual harassment; The scope of employees who have experienced sexual harassment or who know of someone else who, according to them, has experienced sexual harassment within their work in the local authority (public participation process). A total of 866 employees answered all the questions in the questionnaire¹.

¹ In total, the data of the answers of 866 respondents, which constitute 13% of the total number of employees of local authorities examined to whom the questionnaire was sent, were analyzed. Below is the response rate and the number of respondents in each of the local authorities examined: **Umm al-Fahm** – 169 employees (12%); **Or Akiva** – 13 employees (9%); **Elad** – 77 employees (24%); **Be'er Ya'akov** – 81 employees (13%); **Hadera** – 134 employees (7%); **Hof HaCarmel** – 50 employees (13%); **Tiberias** – 60 employees (9%); **Tirat Carmel** – 86 employees (11%); **Migdal HaEmek** – 63 employees (16%); **Nazareth** – 45 employees (12%); **Nesher** – 64 employees (16%) and **Rekhasim** – 24 employees (14%). The sampling error is 3.4%.



Key Findings



The Sexual Harassment Scope of Complaints – in the previous audit, the analysis of the answers of 241 local authorities raised that from January 2015 to July 2018, 372 sexual harassment complaints were filed, according to the following breakdown: in 152 local authorities, no complaints were filed, in 43 local authorities one or two complaints were filed, and in 46 local authorities three or more complaints were filed. The follow-up audit found that in the 12 examined local authorities, only 18 sexual harassment complaints had been filed since the previous audit's completion (from October 2018 to August 2022). The relative scarcity of complaints filed in the local authorities, in the previous audit as well as in the follow-up audit, may indicate, among other things, no sexual harassment in the authority, but may also stem from the victims' fear of complaining, the lack of awareness of the existence of an Officer, lack of familiarity with the law, and a distrust in the local authority ability to handle the complaint properly.



A Sense of Security and Safeguarding from Sexual Harassment – the findings of the State Comptroller's Office public participation process indicate that one out of seven employees (14%) who responded to the survey had been harassed or knew of someone else who, according to them, was sexually harassed in the past three years within their work at the local authority. 22% of all respondents stated that they define the workplace at the local authority as unsafe or moderately safe from sexual harassment. In the **Nazareth, Elad, and Umm al-Fahm** municipalities, the employees' rates who answered that their local authority is unsafe or moderately safe from sexual harassment were the highest (42%, 31%, and 30%, respectively).



Appointment of a Prevention of Sexual Harassment Officer (Officer) and Setting Regulations – the previous audit raised that the **Basmat Tab'un** and **Yanuh-Jat** local authorities did not appoint an Officer, and the **Basmat Tab'un, Zarzir, Lakiya, Ma'ale Iron** and **Sajur** local authorities did not set regulations for the prevention of sexual harassment. The follow-up audit found that the above authorities did not rectify the deficiency, neither appointed an Officer nor set regulations.



Familiarity with the Officer and Accessibility to Training Materials – the public participation process raised that 51% of the respondents do not know the identity of the Officer or think there is none in the local authority. The local authorities with the highest employee rate who do not know the identity of Officer were **Umm al-Fahm** and **Nazareth** (65%), **Rekhasim** (64%), and **Hadera** (62%). In the **Umm al-Fahm** and **Nazareth** local authorities, the employees' rate who stated that they were exposed to training and informational materials on the subject was low – 24% and 31%, respectively.



Receipt of Information, Supervision, and Control – the previous audit raised that the Ministry of Interior did not obligate the local authorities to report, as part of personnel headcount reports, on the appointment of an Officer, and that the Ministry does not have information on the local authorities' preventive actions; On the number of complaints they received; On their handling of complaints and the results of the investigation; And the actions taken following the complaints. The follow-up audit found that the deficiency was rectified to a small extent: The Ministry of Interior did not obligate the local authorities to report on the appointment of an Officer as part of personnel headcount reports, and does know the number of Officers in the local authorities. However, the external auditors on behalf of the Ministry of Interior were asked to check, as part of the audit reports they conduct in the local authorities, if the local authority appointed such an Officer.

Training of Managers and Employees in the Prevention of Sexual Harassment – the previous audit raised that the local authorities of **Or Akiva**, **Nazareth**, and **Rekhasim** did not train their employees to prevent sexual harassment. The follow-up audit found that the deficiency was rectified to a small extent: since the previous audit completion in October 2018, the **Rekhasim** local authority has carried out one training session in 2020 for municipal employees only; In the **Nazareth** municipality, with over 1,400 employees, only about 30 employees were trained; The **Or Akiva** municipality has not trained their employees since the previous audit completion.

The Arab Local Authorities' Handling of Sexual Harassment and its Prevention – the previous audit recommended that the Ministry of Interior, in coordination with all the relevant parties, including the Authority for the Advancement of the Status of Women, review the Arab local authorities' actions to prevent sexual harassment and handle them. Accordingly, they should formulate as soon as possible an action plan to combat sexual harassment suited to the unique characteristics of Arab society. The follow-up audit found that the deficiency was not rectified and that the Ministry of Interior did not formulate an action plan to combat sexual harassment in local authorities in Arab society and did not monitor the appointment of Officers in these authorities. It was further found that even though from the previous audit completion in the examined Arab local authorities, **Umm al-Fahm** and **Nazareth**, and until the follow-up audit completion, six sexual harassment complaints were filed cumulatively by an employee in the above two local authorities, only one complaint was documented. Therefore, the official number of complaints does not reflect the actual number. The analysis of the answers to the follow-up public participation process found that the two local authorities with no Officers and the five local authorities that did not set regulations were Arab local authorities.

Setting Guidelines and Procedures – the previous audit raised that even though 20 years have passed since the Prevention of Sexual Harassment Law was enacted, the Ministry of Interior did not set guidelines and procedures for the local authorities handling of sexual harassment and did not supervise the implementation of the Law, including not



setting guidelines regarding situations in which the Officer is in a conflict of interest and in particular regarding cases where senior employees are involved in the complaint; Regarding the process of informing the victim about the stages of the handling of the complaint; And regarding protecting the privacy of those involved in investigating the complaint. The follow-up audit found that the deficiency was not rectified and that the Ministry of Interior did not formulate relevant guidelines and procedures or guidelines for preventive actions that the local authorities must carry out.



Appointing an Officer – according to the answers to the questionnaire distributed in the previous audit to all 257 local authorities, 40 authorities did not appoint an Officer, and three authorities did not respond to the question in this regard. The follow-up audit, found that the deficiency was rectified to a large extent: 38 of the 40 local authorities that did not appoint an Officer and the three local authorities that did not answer the question on the subject in the questionnaire – appointed an Officer.

Defining the Role of the Officer and Financial Remuneration – the previous audit raised that the Ministry of Interior did not define the role and responsibilities of the Officer in the local authority and did not set threshold conditions for the position. The follow-up audit found that the deficiency was fully rectified: in November 2019, the Ministry of Interior published a job definition for the Officer position, determining his areas of responsibility and detailing the required performance and main tasks in the position, as well as the prerequisites for appointment. Moreover, in March 2020, the Senior Division of Control of Human Capital in the Local Authorities in the Ministry of Interior and the Salary and Labor Agreements Division in the Ministry of Finance decided on financial remuneration for those holding the position of Officer.

Training of Officers – the previous audit raised that the law and regulations did not establish mandatory training for local authorities Officers and that every authority acted as it saw fit. It was also found that the **Or Akiva, Elad, and Nesher** municipalities and the **Rekhasim** local authority did not train the officers to serve in his capacity. The follow-up audit found that the deficiency was fully rectified: The Ministry of Interior job definition published in November 2019 determined that the Officer must receive a minimum of 30 hours of training before their appointment. It was also found that the officers in the **Or Akiva, Elad, and Nesher** municipalities and the **Rekhasim** local authority underwent dedicated training for the position.

Establishment of Regulations for the Prevention of Sexual Harassment – according to the questionnaire distributed in the previous audit to all 257 local authorities, 59 local authorities did not set regulations, and five local authorities did not respond. The follow-up audit found that the deficiency has been rectified to a large



extent: 59 of the 64 local authorities that did not set regulations or answer the question in the previous audit rectified the deficiency and established regulations.

Training Managers and Employees in Preventing Sexual Harassment – the previous audit raised that the **Elad** municipality did not train their employees. The follow-up audit found that the Municipality rectified the deficiency, and from November 2019, it requires the municipality's employees to study courseware on the subject. It monitors and controls the number of employees who took the courseware and sends reminders to the employees if necessary. Every new employee at the municipality receives the regulations as part of the onboarding documents. Except for the **Elad** municipality, the **Hadera** and **Nesher** municipalities also distributed courseware to employees. They monitored the response to the courseware by the employees, and the **Hadera** and **Hof HaCarmel** local authorities raised awareness of sexual harassment and created a work environment that is free of sexual harassment and safe, held dedicated training for employees, and published relevant informational materials. The public participation process found that in the **Elad**, **Tiberias**, and **Nesher** municipalities, over 70% of the respondents stated that they were exposed to training materials and were familiar with the regulations for preventing sexual harassment.

The Actions of the Authority for the Advancement of Women's Status – the previous audit raised that the Authority for the Advancement of the Status of Women previously contacted the local authorities, gathered details about the appointment of an Officer, and sent them reminders on the subject. However, the Director of the Authority for the Advancement of the Status of Women at the time stated that in the absence of legal powers, it did not follow up on the appointment of the above Officers nor after implementing other legal provisions in the local authorities and other organizations. The follow-up audit found that in 2022, the Authority for the Advancement of the Status of Women increased its involvement in the local authorities' actions to prevent sexual harassment. It turned to the Ministry of Interior to execute a survey among the local authorities to collect data on implementing the provisions of the Prevention of Sexual Harassment Law and the number of complaints received.



Key Recommendations

-  The local authorities should increase the employees' sense of protection against sexual harassment and influence the organizational atmosphere to promote a work environment free from sexual harassment. The Ministry of Interior, in coordination with the Ministry of Justice, should regulate the matter and ensure that the local authorities have the appropriate tools to deal with the phenomenon and increase the sense of security of their employees.
-  It is recommended that the Ministry of Interior require the local authorities to report to it on the appointment of an Officer as part of the personnel headcount reports each year and set guidelines for obtaining additional information about their actions to prevent and handle incidents of sexual harassment. Given the issue's importance, it is recommended that the Ministry of Interior make this data available to the public.
-  It is recommended that the Ministry of Interior publish, in coordination with the Ministry of Justice: instructions to the local authorities if complaints are filed against senior officials in the local authority; or if the Officers is in a possible conflict of interest preventing them from investigating; and instructions to protect the privacy of those involved in investigating the complaint.
-  It is recommended that the Ministry of Interior informs all local authorities about its decision on financial remuneration for Officers and that even an Officer appointed without a tender before the publication of the decision, when there was still no obligation to hold a tender for the position, is entitled to receive the compensation.
-  It is recommended that the Ministry of Interior and the Authority for the Advancement of the Status of Women promote the Authority's involvement in sexual harassment prevention among local authorities and consider setting an arrangement similar to the existing one regarding advisers for the advancement of the status of women in the local authorities also regarding those responsible for preventing sexual harassment in the necessary changes. For example, the Officers will be required to report every year on their preventive actions and the number of complaints filed at that local authority, and these data will be published and accessible to the public.
-  The **Basmat Tab'un** and **Yanuh-Jat** local authorities should appoint an Officer; The **Basmat Tab'un**, **Zarzir**, **Lakiya**, and **Ma'ale Iron** local authorities should set regulations for the prevention of sexual harassment, publish them, and bring them to the attention of their employees.
-  It is recommended that the **Or Akiva** municipality train their employees to raise their awareness of preventing sexual harassment; It is also recommended that the **Nazareth** municipality train more significant number of employees; And that the **Rekhasim** local



authority also train its (male) employees to expand their familiarity with the subject. It is recommended that the other examined local authorities continue to train their employees, particularly the local authorities for which over half of the respondents, according to the public participation process (51%), reported that they did not know the identity of the Officer – **Umm al-Fahm, Nazareth, Rekhasim, Hadera, Tirat Carmel** and **Migdal HaEmek** and in the **Umm al-Fahm, Nazareth, Tirat Carmel** and **Rekhasim** local authorities, where even over half of the respondents reported that they were not exposed to training and informational materials on the subject.

- 💡 It is recommended that all local authorities publish their regulations for the prevention of sexual harassment and the contact details of their Officers on their websites.
- 💡 It is recommended that the Ministry of Interior, in cooperation with the Arab local authorities, formulate an action plan to combat sexual harassment in local authorities in Arab society, which will suit the unique characteristics of this society.



The Local Authorities' Appointing of a Prevention of Sexual Harassment Officer (Officer) and Setting Regulations Following the Previous Audit

Setting Regulations in Local Authorities

In the previous audit

The number of local authorities that did not appoint an Officer

59



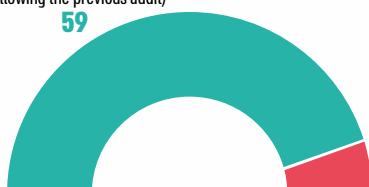
The number of local authorities that did not respond

5

In the follow-up audit

The number of local authorities that set regulations (following the previous audit)

59



The number of local authorities that did not set regulations

5

Appointing a Prevention of Sexual Harassment Officer

In the previous audit

The number of local authorities that did not appoint an Officer

40



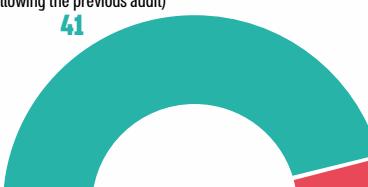
The number of local authorities that did not respond

3

In the follow-up audit

The number of local authorities that appointed an Officer (following the previous audit)

41



The number of local authorities that did not appoint an Officer

2



The Extent the Key Deficiencies Noted in the Previous Report were Rectified

The Audit Chapter	The Audited Body	The Deficiency Noted in the Previous Audit	The Extent of Deficiencies Rectification Noted in the Follow-up Audit			
			Not Rectified	Slightly Rectified	Significantly Rectified	Fully Rectified
Setting guidelines and procedures	The Ministry of Interior	Did not set guidelines and procedures for the local authorities' handling of sexual harassment or supervise the implementation of the Law therein.				
Receipt of information, supervision, and control	The Ministry of Interior	Did not require the local authorities to report as part of the workforce headcount reports on the appointment of an Officer and does not have information on the local authorities' preventive actions, the number of complaints they received, their handling of complaints and the results of the investigation.				



The Audit Chapter	The Audited Body	The Deficiency Noted in the Previous Audit	The Extent of Deficiencies Rectification Noted in the Follow-up Audit			
			Not Rectified	Slightly Rectified	Significantly Rectified	Fully Rectified
Appointing a prevention of sexual harassment officer	43 local authorities from the previous audit	Forty local authorities did not appoint an Officer, and three local authorities did not answer the questions in the questionnaire.				
Letter of appointment for the prevention of sexual harassment officer	The Hadera , Tirat Carmel , Nazareth , and Rekhاسim local authorities	No official appointment letter for the Officer was found.				
Notice to employees about the appointment of the prevention of sexual harassment officer	The Elad and Rekhاسim local authorities	Did not inform their employees of the identity of the Officer that was appointed.				
The prevention of sexual harassment officers – definition of their role	The Ministry of Interior	Did not define the role and responsibilities of the Officer in the local authority and did not set threshold conditions for the position.				



The Audit Chapter	The Audited Body	The Deficiency Noted in the Previous Audit	The Extent of Deficiencies Rectification Noted in the Follow-up Audit			
			Not Rectified	Slightly Rectified	Significantly Rectified	Fully Rectified
Investigation of complaints against senior officials	The Ministry of Interior	Did not publish instructions for handling sexual harassment complaints against senior officials in the local authorities and regarding the degree of involvement of the Officials handling such complaints.				
Training of the officers in charge and their professional support	The Ministry of Interior	No training obligation was established for the Officers.				
Regulations for the prevention of sexual harassment – establishment and publication	64 of the local authorities from the previous audit	Fifty-nine local authorities did not set regulations, and five local authorities did not answer the subject in the questionnaire.				
Update of the regulations	The Or Akiva, Be'er Ya'akov, and Hadera municipalities and the Hof HaCarmel regional council	Did not update their regulations after the amendment to the Law, even four years and more after the amendment.				
	The Elad municipality					



The Audit Chapter	The Audited Body	The Deficiency Noted in the Previous Audit	The Extent of Deficiencies Rectification Noted in the Follow-up Audit			
			Not Rectified	Slightly Rectified	Significantly Rectified	Fully Rectified
Training managers and employees in preventing sexual harassment	The Nazareth, Rekhasim local authorities	Did not train their employees on preventing sexual harassment.				
	The Or Akiva municipality					
Informing the victim about the stages of handling the complaint	The Ministry of Interior	There is no procedure for notifying victims and their right to appeal in disciplinary proceedings following sexual harassment complaints handled by the local authorities.				
Protection of the privacy of those involved in investigating the complaint	The Ministry of Interior	Did not set clear guidelines for the conduct of the local authorities regarding the protection of the privacy of those involved in cases of sexual harassment.				
	Hadera	Did not protect the privacy of those involved in investigating sexual harassment complaints.				



Summary

Sexual harassment affects the person's human dignity, freedom, privacy, and right to equality. Sexual harassment in working relationships has a negative impact on the entire work environment. The findings of the previous audit raised that essential aspects concerning the implementation of the provisions of the Law and the regulations for the prevention of sexual harassment in the local government, including the manner of handling complaints, were not regulated.

The follow-up audit found real progress in the Ministry of Interior's actions to appoint an Officer in local the authorities: The Ministry published a job description for the Officer position, set financial remuneration for the performance of the job, and instructed to review the appointment of an Officer as part of the audit reports of the external auditors on its behalf. However, other deficiencies have not yet been rectified. Thus, for example, the Ministry of Interior does not collect information on the local authorities' number of complaints received and their handling; It has not set guidelines regarding situations in which the Officers is in a conflict of interest and in particular regarding cases where senior employees are involved in the complaint, regarding the informing of the victim of the handling stages of the complaint and regarding the protection of the privacy of those involved. Moreover, many local authorities rectified the deficiencies noted in the previous report: Following the previous audit, 41 authorities appointed Officers, and 59 authorities set regulations for preventing sexual harassment; The Officers in the **Or Akiva, Elad, and Nesher** municipalities and the **Rekhlasim** local authority underwent dedicated training; The **Elad, Hadera** and **Nesher** municipalities distributed courseware to their employees; And other local authorities raised the awareness of their employees and conducted relevant trainings. However, it was found that almost no complaints were filed in the examined local authorities (18 complaints cumulatively since the completion of the previous audit), which may indicate that the phenomenon's scope is still unclear enough and that it is not enough to fulfill the legal obligations.

The public participation process raised serious findings such as: over half of the respondents stated that they did not know if there is an Officer in the local authority or think that there is none; 22% of the respondents indicated that their workplace at the local authority is unsafe or moderately safe from sexual harassment (and in the **Nazareth, Umm al-Fahm** and **Elad** municipalities, 30% or more of the respondents); One out of seven employees responded that they had been harassed or knew of someone who had been harassed in the last three years in the framework of their work at the local authority; And about a quarter of the employees answered that they would not contact the Officer if they had experienced sexual harassment.

All local authorities should increase the employees' sense of protection against sexual harassment and influence the organizational atmosphere to promote a work environment free from sexual harassment. The Ministry of Interior, in coordination with the Ministry of Justice,



should regulate the issue and ensure that the local authorities have the appropriate tools to deal with the phenomenon and increase the sense of security of employees in the local authorities.