



Report of the State Comptroller of Israel | May

Ministry of Culture and Sports

Construction, Maintenance & Operation of Sports Facilities



Construction, Maintenance & Operation of Sports Facilities

Background

Sports facilities are an important platform enabling athletes to work out in a high-quality environment, making them essential for advancing sports. Hence, developing sports facilities is one of the four areas the Ministry of Culture and Sports decided to focus on in its strategic plan formed in 2021. According to the Ministry of Culture and Sports' strategic plan, its sports facilities will be suitable for physical exercise, community sports, and competitive and elite sports and accessible to all population groups. Each of the different types of sports need facilities suitable for competition and training, mainly stadiums, gymnasiums, sports halls, athletics fields, and swimming pools.

The Minister of Culture and Sports is responsible¹ for developing sports infrastructures in Israel. According to the Sports Act, the Minister of Culture and Sports and the Minister of Finance, following consultation with the ministers responsible for allocating resources for the construction and upgrading of sports facilities and following consultation with the National Sports Council, shall form the National Facilities Program (Facilities Program). As of January 2019, the responsibility for the Facilities Program was transferred from the Toto to the Ministry of Culture and Sports, and since then, the Ministry has been the main body integrating the construction of sports facilities. Local authorities build, maintain, and operate sports facilities in their jurisdiction. The Facilities Program provides financial support to the construction of some facilities, while others are built without the support of the Facilities Program and are funded by the local authorities and sometimes by other entities.

The Ministry of Culture and Sports implements the policy of the Facilities Program by supporting local authorities with the construction and upgrading of sports facilities. Assistance to the local authorities is provided based on the Ministry's support criteria set in the Facilities Program policy.

1 Sports Act, 1988.



Key Figures

NIS 2.89 billion vs. NIS 14.9 billion

the budget of the National Facilities Program 2031 for ten years vs. the need of competitive and elite sports as specified by the various sports associations in 2021

8,794

the number of sports facilities mapped by the Ministry of Culture and Sports in January 2022

about 66%

of the schools do not have sports halls (3,500 out of 5,300)

thousands of basketball facilities

according to the Federation for Local authorities, thousands of basketball facilities do not meet Israel Standard 5515

about 20%

of the sports facilities that can serve the community are not fully available for the public and need to be coordinated in advance (665 out of 3,284), according to the Ministry of Culture and Sports

40%

the gap between the number of sports facilities per 1,000 residents in local authorities in socio-economic clusters 1–4 (0.64) vs. local authorities in socio-economic clusters 8–10 (1.07)

about 12,000

registered football players were added between the 2011–2012 season and the 2021–2022 season (34% increase). However, the number of football fields only increased by 15 (6% increase)


543 football fields per 1 million people

the ratio between the number of residents and the number of football fields in Iceland (190 fields per 350,000 residents). The ratio in Israel is 44 football fields per 1 million people². In 2018, Iceland's football team qualified for the World Cup; Israel's football team has not qualified for the World Cup since 1970


2 According to the strategic plan designated to improve Israeli football, prepared for the Ministry of Culture and Sports in January 2019.




Audit Actions

 From January to September 2022, the State Comptroller's Office examined the sports facilities. The audit examined the planning, upgrading, and renovating of sports facilities, supervision and monitoring by the Ministry of Culture and Sports, and operation of sports facilities by the local authorities. The audit was conducted at the Ministry of Culture and Sports, the Ministry of Education, the Budgets Department of the Ministry of Finance, the Council for the Settlement of Sports Betting, and Mifal HaPais (national lottery of Israel). Supplementary audits were conducted at the Planning Administration of the Ministry of Interior, several sports associations, including the Israel Football Association and the Israeli Basketball Association, the Federation of Local Authorities, and several local authorities (Petah Tikva Municipality, Holon Municipality, and Rosh HaAyin Municipality).

Key Findings

 **Sectoral and Demographic Gaps in Sports Facilities Distribution** – accessibility of sports facilities to residents of local authorities in socio-economic clusters 1–4 (0.64 facilities per 1,000 residents) is 40% lower compared to the accessibility of residents of local authorities in higher socio-economic clusters (1.07 facilities per 1,000 residents). Sectoral gaps were also found – the accessibility of sports facilities to residents of Arab local authorities (0.66 facilities per 1,000 residents) is 38% lower compared to Jewish local authorities (1.05 facilities per 1,000 residents), and the number of sports facilities in ultra-orthodox local authorities (0.08 facilities per 1,000 residents) is 90% lower than the number of facilities in Jewish non-ultra-orthodox local authorities. It was further found that, except for a minor gap of 10% in favor of the Arab local authorities in the number of football fields per resident, the number of athletics facilities in Jewish local authorities is over three times higher compared to Arab local authorities and the number of swimming pools and tennis courts in Jewish local authorities is over seven times higher compared to Arab local authorities. Moreover, the number of tennis courts available for residents of local authorities in a high socio-economic cluster is five times higher than the number of courts available for residents of local authorities in low socio-economic clusters, and the number of swimming pools is four times higher.





 **Facilities Program Budget** – according to the Ministry of Culture and Sports, the overall need of elite and competitive sports facilities exceeds NIS 14.9 billion, while the Program budget for 2031 is NIS 2.89 billion. As of August 2022, 16.5% of all local authority's liabilities for construction which were treated by the Toto and transferred to



the Ministry of Culture and Sports according to the 2019 reform, were canceled (NIS 225 million out of NIS 1.36 billion). 59% of those liabilities were used to construct sports facilities (NIS 804 million out of NIS 1.36 billion). These gaps indicate the barriers the local authorities faced to implement the above facilities programs.

-  **Building Sports Halls and Sports Fields in Schools** – plans to construct new schools must include land designated as sports halls; however, it is not mandatory to build the halls. Hence, as of December 2021, 66% of all schools (3,500 out of 5,300) do not have sports halls. Furthermore, the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Culture and Sports have not mapped the roofing and shading of sports fields data, and the Ministry of Education's basic program plan and budget do not include roofing.
-  **Mapping of Sports Facilities** – the sports facilities database managed by the Ministry of Culture and Sports (Facilities File) is incomplete and lacks the information necessary for facilities management, evaluation, and decision-making. The audit raised that out of 8,794 facilities in the Facilities File, 7,650 contained inadequate data entry. Some facilities were not classified correctly – for example, basketball or football fields were classified as "other." Moreover, the Facilities File lacks essential information about the condition of the facilities. As of September 2022, the Ministry of Culture and Sports had not started characterizing a new system that adequately maps sports facilities.
-  **Future Planning of Land Designated for Sports Facilities** – as of September 2022, the Ministry of Culture and Sports had not formed a planning and allocation perception of land for sports facilities nor a long-term plan for sports infrastructures.
-  **The Number of Football Fields in Israel Compared to Other Countries** – according to international comparison, there are only 44 football fields per 1 million residents in Israel, as opposed to Germany, where there are 607 fields per 1 million residents, England, where there are 547 fields, Belgium, with 348 fields and Iceland, with 543 fields. Moreover, Iceland implemented a program to build football fields, and its football team qualified for the World Cup in 2018. Israel's football team, on the other hand, has not qualified for the World Cup since 1970.
-  **Upgrading and Renovating Football Fields** – while the number of registered football players increased by almost 12,000 players from the 2011–2012 season to the 2021–2022 season (34% increase), the number of active football fields approved for league matches increased only by 15 (6% increase). I.e., the ratio between the number of football players and the number of football fields has worsened in recent years, which might hinder football advancement in Israel. As for the football season 2019–2020, out of the 265 football fields used by football teams, 84 fields were used by over 10 football teams, and 6–10 different teams used 74 fields. The Football Association's plan mainly focused on planning and building new football fields, but given the shortage of facilities, it did not include mapping of existing fields that could be upgraded and renovated and then used for training of competitive football teams. Analysis of the number of football

fields in the Facilities File vs. the number of fields approved for matches by the Association indicates the potential for upgrading up to 150 fields. Furthermore, according to the Facilities File, about 350 additional football fields are not in the standard size (although some can be used for training) – half of them lack adequate lighting systems.

-  **Safety of Basketball and Goalpost Facilities** – according to the Federation of Local Authorities, thousands of basketball facilities do not meet Israel Standard 5515, which defines basketball facilities' operation, safety, and testing requirements. Although Standard 5515 is not binding, but it emphasizes the safety risk of facilities that don't meet the standard. Moreover, using goalposts (not referred to in the Standard) in mini-pitch fields might pose a safety risk. As the Ministry of Culture and Sports noted, hundreds of goalposts are installed in mini-pitch fields, including the ones built or planned to be built by the Ministry for the Development of the Periphery.
-  **The Ministry of Culture and Sports' Supervision and Monitoring if the Local Authorities Receiving Supports Meet Their Responsibilities** – it was found that the Toto Council and the Ministry of Culture and Sports did not supervise and monitor if the local authorities met their responsibilities during the period in which it was responsible for the Facilities Programs 2020 and 2027.
-  **Operation of Sports Facilities by the Local Authorities** – according to the Facilities File, as of January 31st, 2022, 20% out of the 3,284 sports facilities that could be useful for the community and that are spread out in 134 local authorities are not fully available for the public and require coordination with the person in charge of the facility on behalf of the local authority. It is especially problematic for minors who wish to use the sports facility but often cannot coordinate it by themselves. The State Comptroller Office team conducted tours in Petah Tikva, Holon, Rosh HaAyin, Ramat Gan, and Tel Aviv and witnessed outdoor sports facilities that could have been useful for the community but were locked and unavailable for the public. In addition, except for Petah Tikva, which installed signs with relevant information about the availability of the facilities, at some of the facilities in Tel Aviv-Jaffa, Rosh HaAyin, and Holon, there were no signs detailing the availability of the facilities. Holon and Rosh HaAyin's municipal websites do not specify the sports facilities' terms of use or opening hours.
-  **Allocation of Football Fields to Women** – during the Knesset Committee on Education, Culture, and Sports discussions in October 2020 and of the Special Committee for Public Petitions in March 2022, complaints were raised regarding the physical infrastructures available for women's football. According to the complaints, training sessions of 95% of the players in the women's Super League take place at half a football field, and at most football fields where women train (60%–70%), there are no dressing rooms, restrooms or a space where equipment can be stored. In addition, girls are forced to train late in the evening or inadequate fields. The audit raised that despite the state of women's football in Israel, the Ministry of Culture and Sports and the Israel Football Association have not provided proper opportunities to female footballers of all age groups to train and play in football fields in equal and respectful manner. For comparison –






according to UEFA, in 2017, there was an average of 0.157 players per 1,000 women among UEFA member states. In Israel, 1,294 female footballers were registered in 2017 – 0.015 per 1,000 women (one-tenth of the average amongst UEFA member states).








National Facilities Program 2031 – the State Comptroller Office commends the Ministry of Culture and Sports for advancing the Facilities Program 2031, especially as the Program was developed during several election campaigns and the Covid-19 crisis.

Facilities Program's Budget – the 2031 Program budget (NIS 2.89 billion) is 62% higher than the 2020 Program budget. It should be noted that compared to the previous facilities programs, the 2031 Program designated about 18.5% of the budget for developing infrastructures in the Arab sector for the first time, according to the government decision. The State Comptroller Office further commends the joint project for supporting local authorities in low socio-economic clusters. The project might help these local authorities, some of which are Arab authorities, to implement budgeted projects.

Key Recommendations

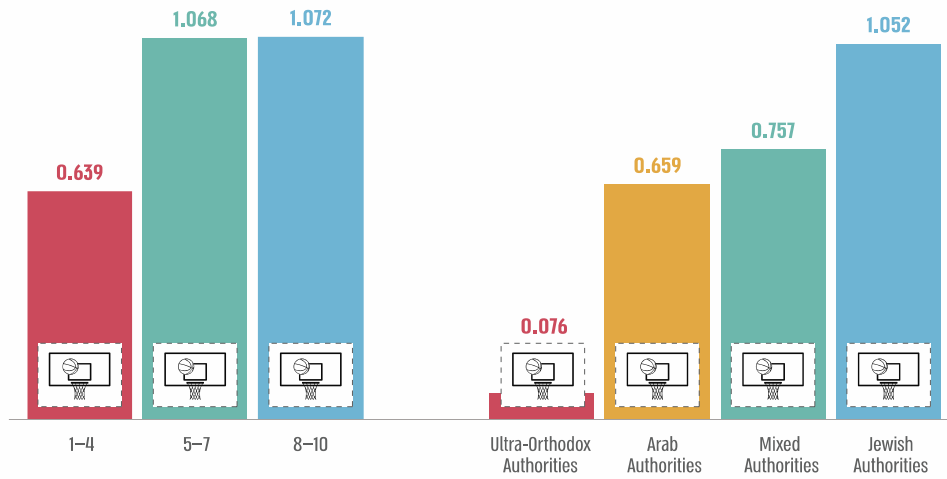
-  According to studies, there is a direct link between exercising sports to positive economic and social impact. It is recommended that the relevant bodies – the Ministry of Culture and Sports, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry for the Development of the Periphery, the Negev and the Galilee, and the local authorities – minimize the gaps in the various sports facilities in local authorities of low socio-economic clusters, Arab local authorities, and Ultra-Orthodox authorities.
-  To properly plan and manage sports facilities, it is recommended that the Sports Administration thoroughly and reliably map the sports facilities, their availability and data related to the users, and the various requirements of the different sports types. Such mapping might be used to review requests to build or upgrade facilities based on the Facilities Program support criteria. To update the mapping, the Ministry should ensure that the heads of sports departments at the local authorities update the file periodically, uniformly, and according to specific instructions. It is appropriate to consider using mandatory fields out of a closed list to optimize the data and create uniformity. It is further recommended that the Ministry advance the development of the new information system and set a time frame for its completion.
-  It is recommended that the Ministry of Culture and Sports, together with the National Sports Council and the Planning Administration, advance long-term planning, including references

to the allocation of land for the facilities, considering the various needs, population growth, future transportation infrastructures and construction of new cities and neighborhoods. Planning is also recommended to include mixed land use, to efficiently use the land.

-  Given the shortage of football fields, it is recommended that the Ministry of Culture and Sports and the Israel Football Association map the football fields that have the potential to be renovated and upgraded and prepare, together with the relevant local authorities, a work plan to upgrade and renovate the relevant football fields according to the priorities and needs.
-  It is recommended that the Ministry of Culture and Sports, the Ministry of Education, and the Federation of Local Authorities vis-a-vis the local authorities identify basketball facilities that might pose a safety hazard and form a plan to replace them with safe facilities that meet the standard. Moreover, the Ministry of Culture and Sports should verify with the Ministry for the Development of the Periphery that the mini-pitch fields they build, including the ones where goalposts are installed, are safe. It is recommended that the Ministry form a product portfolio for the mini-pitch facilities across Israel.
-  The Ministry should ensure that the local authorities that receive building support or renovate or upgrade sports facilities meet the criteria for receiving support. It is appropriate that the Ministry form a supervisory and control system to verify that the local authorities meet their responsibilities.
-  It is recommended that the Ministry act vis-a-vis the Federation of Local Authorities and the local authorities to make sports facilities available to the public, as much as possible, including on a free-of-charge basis, thus improving the public's services. It is recommended that the Ministry of Culture and Sports, advancing community sports activities and employing supervisors in all local authorities, verify that the local authorities' websites and appropriate signs at the sports facilities include all the information on athletics fields available for public use.
-  It is recommended that the Ministry of Culture and Sports and the Israel Football Association advance equal opportunities for female footballers and enable them to train and play football at convenient hours and in appropriate football fields similar to male footballers. It is recommended that the committee established for advancing women's sports focus, amongst other things, on equal allocation of football fields to women. The Ministry should also ensure that the local authorities meet their obligations to make the football fields, funded by the Ministry, available to sports associations and clubs while prioritizing sports activities for girls and women.



The Number of Sports Facilities per 1,000 Residents in Local Authorities by Socio-Economic Cluster and Sector



Segmentation by socio-economic cluster

Segmentation by sector

According to the Facilities File formed by the Ministry of Culture and Sports and the Central Bureau of Statistics data, processed by the State Comptroller Office.



A Basketball Pole that Fell at a School in December 2015



Source: safety investigation conducted by the Ministry of Education on December 29th, 2015.



Summary

As of January 2019, the responsibility for the Facilities Program was transferred from the Toto to the Ministry of Culture and Sports, and since then, the Ministry has been the main entity integrating the construction of sports facilities. In April 2022, the National Facilities Program 2031, designated for ten years, was approved. The Program's budget is NIS 2.89 billion for the duration of the program versus needs of about NIS 14.9 billion.

By the audit end date, in September 2022, the Ministry of Culture and Sports had not prepared a long-term plan for constructing sports infrastructures and had not formed a plan and allocation perception of land for sports facilities. Given the barriers to building sports facilities, the need for a long-term plan intensifies. The most significant barrier is a shortage of available land. The Ministry did not form a system that supervises and monitors the local authorities' use of the facilities built in the Facilities Program.

It is recommended that the Ministry of Culture and Sports and the National Sports Council advance long-term planning and allocating lands for sports facilities, considering the different needs, population growth, future transportation infrastructures, and construction of new cities and neighborhoods. It is further appropriate that the Ministry, together with the local authorities, advance a comprehensive plan for upgrading and renovating sports facilities for efficient use throughout the year and according to safety standards. In addition, outdoor sport fields should be available for public use as much as possible for their efficient use. It is further appropriate that the Ministry of Culture and Sports form a supervisory and control system to verify that the local authorities meet their responsibilities. The Ministry should also confirm with the local authorities that all the information on the availability of sports facilities is published on municipal websites and signs at the sports facilities.