



Report of the State Comptroller of Israel |
December 2025

Systemic Issues

**Ilan and Assaf Ramon
International Airport
– Elat: Protecting the
Airport against
Security Threats and
the Response to Mass
Casualty Incidents**



Ilan and Assaf Ramon International Airport – Elat: Protecting the Airport against Security Threats and the Response to Mass Casualty Incidents

Background

Ilan and Assaf Ramon International Airport – Elat (Ramon Airport or the Airport) is located in the Southern Arava near Timna Park, approx. 19 km north of Elat, between Highway 90 and the Israel-Jordan border, and approx. 15 km from the Israel-Egypt border. Flight restrictions during the COVID-19 pandemic and the Iron Swords War's impact on international aviation to and from Israel, as well as on domestic aviation, have drastically reduced the airport's operation. In 2024, 658,000 travelers passed through the airport, more than 99% on domestic flights, despite an estimated potential annual passengers capacity of 2 million passengers in routine on domestic and international flights (approx. 33%).

Ramon Airport cost approx. NIS 2 billion to build, funded by the Israel Airports Authority (IAA). According to IAA figures, from 2019 to 2023, the airport lost approx. NIS 1.369 billion from operations, an average loss of approx. NIS 274 million in each of those years.

Ramon Airport is designated as an alternative to Ben-Gurion Airport. Ramon Airport is part of Israel's strategic national infrastructures.

An emergency incident at or near Ramon Airport can result from an act of terrorism or a mass aviation disaster at or near the airport. The initial response to such an emergency incident is based on the means and capabilities that are regularly in place at the airport in routine. A mass casualty incident (MCI) is an emergency incident that requires pooling resources with external rescue and emergency forces, including the Israel Police, Magen David Adom (MDA), the IDF, the Fire and Rescue Authority, the local authority, etc.



Key Figures

A short distance

The distance from the eastern fence of Ramon Airport to the border with Jordan.

A certain amount of time

The amount of time required to gather MDA and IDF medical personnel in a mass casualty incident at Ramon Airport, according to MDA procedures.

NIS 274 million

The average annual loss from the operation of Ramon Airport each year from 2019 to 2023. The total loss during these years was approx. NIS 1.4 billion. The cost of building the airport was approx. NIS 2 billion, which was funded by the Israel Airports Authority.

Audit Actions

From August 2024 to February 2025, the Office of the State Comptroller examined the protection of Ramon Airport against security threats and the response capabilities for mass casualty incidents at the airport. The audit was conducted at the IAA; the Israel Police – the security division and the operations division of the operations branch and the southern district; the Israel Security Agency (ISA); the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA); the National Security Council (NSC); the Ministry of Health; and MDA. From December 15 to 17, 2024, the Office of the State Comptroller conducted an inspection at Ramon Airport. This report is a supplementary report to a classified State Comptroller report on the protection of international civilian aviation to and from Israel that was submitted to the prime minister in January 2024, of which short sections were published in May 2024.

The subcommittee of the Knesset State Audit Committee decided not to place on the Knesset's agenda and not to publish particular data in this report for national security reasons, pursuant to section 17 of the State Comptroller Law, 1958 [Consolidated Version].



Key Findings

Coordinating the Management of Mass Casualty Incidents at Ramon Airport and the Surrounding Area

📌 The Police's Command and Control in a Mass Casualty Incident – The audit found deficiencies in this area. In addition, it was found that the Ministry of National Security had not determined the necessary budgetary source to fully address command and control issues in an emergency incident at the airport.


📌 Establishing Immediate Medical Response Capabilities for Routine and Emergency Situations at the Airport – Despite the NSC's January 2019 directive to the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Finance; and despite the March 17, 2019, letter from the deputy director general of the Ministry of Health to the prime minister, the director of the NSC and others in which he stated that he was "announcing that the Ministry of Health will not be able to take responsibility for the medical response in routine and emergency situations at Ramon Airport"; and despite the NSC's March 28, 2019, directive, a few days after the airport opened, to quickly hold a discussion on the issue; no follow-up discussion was held at the NSC on funding a medical response plan for the airport in routine and emergency situations, and the Ministry of Health and Ministry of Finance did not decide on a budgetary source for the plan. The lack of a decision on this issue for six years, from March 2019 to the audit completion date in February 2025, is preventing the establishment of the medical response in routine and emergency situations at Ramon Airport, including mass casualty incidents. This places the passengers and others at the airport at risk.

The audit found that there is a difference between the NSC's January 2019 directive, which is based on the Ministry of Health's July 2017 directive, which requires "the presence of a regular ambulance and a mobile intensive care unit (MICU), including staff, during the airport's hours of operation" for the immediate medical response; and the CAA director's statement at an NSC discussion in March 2025 that "the airport meets international standards, and the airport's [immediate] medical response" – "the stationing of a white ambulance + MICU with a medical clinic staffed during the airport's hours of operation by a CAA team with dual authority (medical and firefighting)" – "is sufficient."




📌 The Supplementary Medical Response in Routine and Emergency Situations at the Airport – Assembling the medical personnel in the event of a mass casualty incident at the airport is expected to take a certain amount of time. The medical response would, for the most part, not fall within the "golden hour" during which medical treatment to prevent irreparable damage to internal organs is the most effective, which could cost lives. The position of the CAA, the Israel Police, MDA, and the Ministry of Health, which




was presented at the NSC in March 2025, is that in the case of a mass casualty incident at the airport, the medical response is insufficient.

-  **The Israel Police's Preparedness for a Certain Scenario** – Despite a certain Security Cabinet decision and despite the NSC's directive, the Israel Police has not yet exercised its responsibility for command and control in a certain scenario, due to certain gaps. It should be noted that the IDF made clear in its comments on a draft audit report that it is continuing to bear responsibility for this scenario until the Israel Police assumes responsibility for command and control in this scenario.


Protecting Ramon Airport

-  **The Audit Found Deficiencies in the Airport's Security Arrangements in Terms of Personnel, Means, and Infrastructures.**
-  **Lessons Learned in Certain Areas following the Swords of Iron War** – Deficiencies were found in this area.
-  **Coordinating and Integrating Security Aspects at the Israel Airports Authority's Headquarters** – At the IAA's headquarters, there is no designated officer responsible for Coordinating and Integrating the aviation security at the airports under the IAA's responsibility, in terms of policy, development of armaments, application of technologies, and supervision and monitoring.

Ramon Airport as an Alternative to Ben-Gurion Airport







-  **Ramon Airport's Capacity** – Ramon Airport can only partially function as an alternative to Ben-Gurion Airport: unlike Ben-Gurion Airport, which handles approx. 400 flights per day on average, out of which approx. 120 flights operated by Israeli airlines and approx. 280 operated by foreign airlines, Ramon Airport can only handle a maximum of 150 flights per day (approx. 38% of the number Ben-Gurion Airport handles per day). Due to Ramon Airport's limited capacity, the following guidelines have been determined: the vast majority of international flights at the airport would be those operated by Israeli airlines (approx. 120 flights per day); the number of domestic flights would be reduced to six per day; and, as a rule, cargo planes would not be handled at the airport. All of these could affect international aviation to and from Israel, as well as international trade.

Key Recommendations

-  Given the risk posed by a mass casualty aviation incident and due to all of the deficiencies regarding the establishment and coordination of the handling of a mass casualty incident at Ramon Airport, the Minister of Transport and Road Safety and the Minister of National Security should ensure that the airport is prepared to handle emergency incidents, in



particular given the nature of the threats in Hamas's October 7, 2023, terrorist attack. Establishing a systemic solution for handling emergency incidents at and near Ramon Airport would also contribute to the handling of emergency incidents in Elat and the surrounding area.

-  The Ministry of National Security and the Israel Police should ensure that the issue of command and control in emergency incidents at the airport is adequately addressed and funded.
-  The NSC, in cooperation with the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Health, and MDA, should resolve the issue of allocating the funding required for the immediate medical response for mass casualty incidents at the airport, and, if necessary, bring the issue to the government for a decision; should examine the implications of the pace of assembling the medical personnel at the airport in the case of a mass casualty incident; and should ensure that the Ministry of Health and MDA are capable of exercising their responsibility to provide the medical response. Subject to the decisions made, the Ministry of Health and MDA should, without delay, complete their preparations for responding to a mass casualty incident at the airport.
-  The Israel Police and the IAA should act to rectify the deficiencies found in the protection of Ramon Airport.
-  Due to the deficiencies described regarding responding to a mass casualty incident at Ramon Airport and the urgency of addressing them, the NSC should perform systemic methodological preparation work in cooperation with the Ministry of National Security, the Israel Police, the IDF, the Ministry of Health, the IAA, the Ministry of Finance, and MDA, in order to ensure the provision of an adequate response to emergency incidents in and around the airport, including deciding on the required budget.
-  Whereas the IAA is a statutory authority that performs actions of physical protection and handles the security of passengers at international crossings, including Ben-Gurion Airport and Ramon Airport, it is recommended that the IAA examine the need to appoint a position holder at its headquarters to be responsible for security, in order to oversee the handling of aviation security at the airports under the IAA's responsibility, in terms of policy, developing armaments, applying technologies, and supervision and monitoring.
-  It is recommended that the Minister of Transport and Road Safety examine the implications of the fact that, in emergency situations, Ramon Airport can provide a partial alternative for international flights to and from Israel, and that the airport is not expected to serve as an alternative airport for cargo flights, and, accordingly, consider how to properly address these deficiencies.



Summary

Ramon Airport is an international and domestic airport located near Elat and serves as an alternative to Ben-Gurion Airport for international aviation. The airport is a critical strategic infrastructure facility of the utmost national importance.

Emergency incidents at or near Ramon Airport could result from acts of terrorism or a mass casualty aviation disaster at or near the airport. A mass casualty incident (MCI) at the airport is an emergency incident that requires pooling resources with external rescue and emergency forces. The audit found deficiencies in the Israel Police's response capabilities for mass casualty emergency incidents at the airport.

The immediate medical response plan for Ramon Airport in routine and emergency situations that has been approved by the Ministry of Health and the NSC for the scenario of a mass casualty incident at the airport has not been implemented. As a result, the medical response capabilities would not fall within the "golden hour" during which medical treatment to prevent irreparable damage to internal organs is the most effective, which could cost lives.

Due to the deficiencies mentioned regarding the response capabilities for a mass casualty incident at Ramon Airport and the urgency of addressing them, the NSC should carry out systemic methodological preparation work in cooperation with the Ministry of National Security, the Israel Police, the IDF, the Ministry of Health, the IAA, the Ministry of Finance, and MDA in order to ensure the provision of a suitable response to emergency incidents at and near the airport, including deciding on the required budget.

In his comments on the draft State Comptroller report from April 2025, the deputy director general of the Ministry of Health stated regarding the medical response to an emergency incident at the airport that "this is an issue that keeps me and the other officials at the ministry involved in this issue awake at night, while the only impediment to its resolution is a budgetary issue that is not under the responsibility of the ministry and results from a lack of funding for this after the opening of the airport was approved." In its comments on the draft audit report, the Israel Police stated that it has accepted the recommendation to conduct a systemic methodological preparation work on response capabilities for a mass casualty incident at the airport.

Given the severity of the deficiencies noted in this report on the response capabilities for a mass casualty incident at Ramon Airport, and given their impacts on the overall response capabilities for emergency incidents at the airport, the CAA's director should ensure the deficiencies are rectified so that the airport complies with the terms of its operation license.

Furthermore, the audit found that Ramon Airport can serve as an alternative to Ben-Gurion Airport for Israeli international flights and approx. 10% of the international flights operated by foreign airlines, if they continue to fly to Israel. In addition, the airport is not expected to handle cargo planes. It is recommended that the Minister of Transport and Road Safety



examine the implications of the fact that, in emergency situations, the airport can provide a partial alternative for international flights to and from Israel, and that, as an alternative airport, the airport is not expected to handle cargo planes. Accordingly, the minister should consider how to address these gaps.

Given the risk posed by a mass casualty incident, and given all of the deficiencies noted in this report, the Minister of Transport and Road Safety and the Minister of National Security should ensure that Ramon Airport is prepared to handle emergency incidents. This need is underscored by the nature of the threats in the October 7, 2023, Hamas terrorist attack. Providing a systemic solution for handling emergency incidents at and near Ramon Airport can also contribute to the handling of emergency incidents in Elat and the surrounding area.

