



State Comptroller of Israel | Local Government
Audit Report | July 2025

Conduct During Emergencies and the
Swords of Iron War

**Activity of the
Educational
Psychology Service for
Emotional and Mental
Support – in Routine
Times and During the
Swords of Iron War**



Activity of the Educational Psychology Service for Emotional and Mental Support – in Routine Times and During the Swords of Iron War

Background

The emotional well-being and mental health of children and adolescents form the foundation for optimal development and learning in all its aspects: emotional, cognitive, behavioral, and social¹. Kindergartens and schools are the settings in which students' needs for support often become evident, and where there is an opportunity to positively influence their emotional and social development. Therefore, these settings play a critical role in identifying children in need of support. Failure to receive timely mental health assistance may significantly and negatively affect students' development and academic achievement².

Psychological treatment is a highly effective tool for preventing severe mental illness, reducing human suffering, lowering the use of healthcare services, improving functioning, and strengthening emotional resilience³. Immediate intervention for children experiencing psychological distress is critical, as the time window for effective therapeutic intervention is limited. Timely support can prevent or mitigate the development of emotional difficulties that may otherwise lead to prolonged, chronic mental health conditions⁴. In the literature, early diagnosis and early intervention are referred to as a "window of opportunity" for addressing emotional and psychological difficulties among children and adolescents, an opportunity considered irreversible⁵.

The Educational Psychology Service (EPS), operating within the education departments of local authorities, plays a vital role in providing emotional and mental support to children and adolescents. As the only mental health framework capable of reaching every child in Israel, it holds a critical position in identifying and preventing psychological distress among children.

- 1 According to the Circular of the Ministry of Education Director General, "Framework for Educational Psychological Services", Directive 0332 (August 2022) (Director General's Circular 0332 of the Ministry of Education).
- 2 Rational Institute, "Economic and Strategic Projects" **Public Psychology in Israel**, Economic Position Paper (July 2021), pp. 6, 12. P. Fusar-Poli, "Integrated Mental Health Services for the Developmental Period (0 to 25 Years): A Critical Review of the Evidence," **Frontiers in Psychiatry**, Vol. 10, p. 355 (2019). <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/31231250/>
- 3 Forum of Organizations for Public Psychology, Position Paper Submitted to the Knesset Health Committee, presented on May 29, 2023.
- 4 Rational Institute, "Economic and Strategic Projects" **Public Psychology in Israel**, Economic Position Paper (July 2021), p. 6.
- 5 P. Fusar-Poli, "Integrated Mental Health Services for the Developmental Period (0 to 25 Years): A Critical Review of the Evidence," **Frontiers in Psychiatry**, Vol. 10, p. 355 (2019). <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/31231250/>



The service operates in schools and kindergartens, assisting in identifying students' difficulties, providing assessments and diagnoses for students in both regular⁶ and special education, offering counseling to educational staff, providing psychological support through therapeutic interventions for children and parents, responding to crisis situations, and contributing to the formulation of educational policy related to children's mental well-being⁷.

6 Regular education in Israel refers to official state education – either secular (*mamlachti*) or state-religious (*mamlachti dati*). Educational institutions within this framework are operated by the state or by local authorities. Teachers in this system are state employees, and the institutions' activities are funded by the state and local authorities.

7 Among other means, through participation in local authority teams and municipal committees.



Key Figures

43%

Rate of increase in the number of treatments conducted by Ministry of Education educational psychologists for students at risk of suicide between the year of the COVID-19 pandemic (2020) and the year of gradual emergence from the pandemic (2021). In these years, there was a parallel increase of approximately 10% in suicide risk assessments conducted for students, and an increase of approximately 122% in systemic interventions by educational psychologists concerning students experiencing suicidal distress⁸

53%

Percentage of students in grades 7–12 who experienced psychosomatic symptoms⁹ at least once a day or almost daily during the months of October 2023 to January 2024¹⁰

72%

Proportion of parents of children aged 3 to 18 who reported emotional difficulties in their children, out of all parents who reported difficulties in one of their children, as indicated in a parent survey distributed by the State Comptroller's Office. These were parents whose child experienced emotional, social, or academic difficulties during the five years preceding August–September 2023

30.1%

Among Jewish parents of children aged 3 to 18 who experienced emotional, social, or academic difficulties in the five years preceding August–September 2023, are unaware of the services provided by the local Educational Psychology Service (EPS). Approximately 62.3% of parents of children with difficulties in the Arab sector, and approximately 54% of such parents in the ultra-Orthodox sector, reported not being familiar with the EPS

8 National Council for the Child, **Children in Israel 2022 – Statistical Yearbook: Selected Data** (2022).
9 Somatic symptoms influenced by psychological factors.
10 School of Education, Bar-Ilan University, Preliminary findings from the "Finger on the Pulse" survey: The impact of the Swords of Iron War on Israeli adolescents (February 2024).



**NIS
51–61
billion**

Estimated annual burden on Israel's economy resulting from the general public's lack of access to professional, timely, and accessible mental health care¹¹

**1 per
1,000**

A single educational psychologist position is allocated for every 1,000 students in grades 2 through 12 in the regular education system, according to the Ministry of Education's staffing standards. For children in preschool through first grade, the ratio is 1 to 500

**More than
35 years**

have passed since the Ministry of Education set the staffing standard for the ratio of educational psychologists to students

54.6 days

The average waiting time for receiving initial service at Educational Psychology Services (EPS), compared to approximately 89.7 days at health maintenance organizations (HMOs) and approximately 36.7 days with a private therapist¹²

47%

Estimated increase in staffing required, according to heads of Educational Psychology Services (EPS), to the 3,370 positions (as of November 2022), in order to provide an optimal response to the needs of the EPS

**96%
and 34%**

Coverage rates in 2023 in the Educational Psychology Services (EPS) of the **Lod** and **Tayyiba** municipalities, respectively

112.3%

Increase in amount of deliberations held in the Special Education Committees from 2017 – prior to the implementation of Amendment 11 to the Special Education Law – until 2023 (from 105,541 discussions in 2017 to 224,024 in 2023). This situation, along with staffing standards that have not been updated for decades, may impair the support that educational psychologists provide to students, parents, and educational staff

**Only
32%**

Proportion of psychologists for whom confirmation was received regarding the absence of convictions for sexual offenses, in accordance with the Prevention of Employment of Sex Offenders Law, 2002: 9 out of 28 educational psychologists employed in the EPS offices audited in the years 2019–2023

11 Rational Institute, "Economic and Strategic Projects" **Public Psychology in Israel**, Economic Position Paper (July 2021).

12 According to data from a parent survey conducted by the State Comptroller's Office.



Audit Actions

From June 2023 to November 2024, the State Comptroller examined the activities of the Educational Psychology Services (hereinafter-EPS) in local authorities in the years 2019–2023 under routine conditions, and in the years 2023–2024 in emergency conditions due to the Swords of Iron War. An in-depth audit of routine EPS operations was conducted in seven local authorities: the municipalities of **Ashkelon**, **Tiberias**, **Tayyiba**, **Lod**, and **Netanya**, and the regional councils of **Eshkol** and **Mateh Asher** (hereinafter – the audited local authorities or EPSs). The audit of EPS emergency operations was conducted in five local authorities (hereinafter – the emergency-audited local authorities or EPSs): three authorities whose populations were evacuated – the municipality of **Ashkelon** and the regional councils of **Eshkol** and **Mateh Asher** (hereinafter – the evacuated authorities); and three that absorbed evacuees – the municipalities of **Tiberias** and **Netanya** and the regional council of **Mateh Asher**¹³ (hereinafter – the absorbing authorities). Supplementary examinations were conducted at the Ministries of Education and Health and at the Federation of Local Authorities in Israel.

The audit examined various aspects of the organizational preparedness of the Educational Psychology Services (EPS), including workforce standards for educational psychologists, the recognition of EPS units as institutions for internships in educational psychology, the prevention of employment of sex offenders, and the impact of amendments to the Special Education Law, 1988, on the work of educational psychologists. Additional issues reviewed included the basket of services provided by EPSs, their work plans, their operational interfaces with local authority leadership, and the extent of support provided by the authorities. The audit also assessed performance of EPSs following the outbreak of the Swords of Iron War. As part of the audit relating to emergency situations, the State Comptroller examined, inter alia, the Ministry of Education's performance following the outbreak of the Swords of Iron War. This included the collection and management of information regarding the functioning of the Educational Psychology Services, the manpower the Ministry provided to the EPSs in response to increased demand for services, and the responses given to inquiries from EPSs and educational psychologists, who had to cope with complex professional challenges as a result of the war. In addition, as part of the follow-up to findings from the 2021 audit report on local authorities' preparedness to treat individuals suffering from acute stress in emergencies (hereinafter – the previous report), the establishment of a computerized system by the Ministry of Education for managing EPS work was examined.

As part of the audit, the State Comptroller's Office distributed two questionnaires, one to service recipients and one to service providers: a nationwide questionnaire distributed

13 Some localities in the Mateh Asher Regional Council were evacuated during the war; however, the council also absorbed residents from other local authorities.



in August–September 2023 among 891 parents of children aged 3 to 18 (the Parents' Survey)¹⁴, the results of which were received before the outbreak of the Swords of Iron War; and a nationwide questionnaire distributed in September–November 2023 to directors of the Educational Psychology Services, aimed at examining the challenges faced by educational psychologists and EPS directors across the country (the EPS Directors' Survey)¹⁵.

Key Findings



Parents' Awareness of the EPS – In the Parents' Survey conducted by the State Comptroller's Office, 61.4% of all parents whose children experienced difficulties reported that they did not contact the EPS following the emergence of their child's difficulties. The main reason (44.6%) for not reaching out to the EPS was lack of awareness of the service¹⁶. This response rate was significantly higher than that of other reasons cited in the survey. Other reasons included: not being referred to the EPS by the educational staff (18%), and long wait times or unavailability of the EPS (12.5%). Among parents living in local authorities ranked 1–5 on the socioeconomic scale, 39.2% stated that they were not familiar with the service.



Human Resource Management in the EPS

- **The Staffing Formula and Allocation of Educational Psychologist Positions by the Ministry of Education** – In order to maintain an educational psychology service in all local authorities, the Ministry of Education allocates psychologist positions to local authorities based on a staffing formula. The desired number of positions according to the existing formula – which takes into account the number of students in general and special education settings, by age group and type of educational framework – amounted to 3,343 positions as of December 2023. However, the total number of positions actually allocated by the Ministry in that month was only 2,429. Although the Ministry of Education had been aware since

14 The age range referenced pertains to the population that the Educational Psychology Service seeks to serve within the regular education system. The survey was conducted through self-completion of an online questionnaire, with telephone follow-up for respondents from the Arab sector.

15 It should be noted that the survey was distributed twice: the first time before the outbreak of the war, yielding responses from 60 heads of Educational Psychology Services (EPS); and the second time in November 2023, about a month after the war began, as part of a reminder sent to all EPS heads requesting responses from those who had not yet replied. Following this reminder, an additional 112 responses were received. It should be stressed that in the reminder that the survey questions referred to the state of the EPS prior to the outbreak of the war.

16 The Parents' Survey.



2010 of the growing workload of educational psychologists and of the gap between the number of positions provided under the existing formula and the actual needs, and although the demand for psychological services has increased in recent years, the Ministry had not updated the staffing formula for more than 35 years prior to this audit. In the five years preceding the current audit, following Amendment 11 to the Special Education Law in 2018, the Ministry of Education conducted a single review to assess the relevance of the existing staffing formula. According to this formula, the Ministry allocates one position for every 500 children in preschool (ages 3–6) and Grade 1; one position for every 1,000 students in Grades 2–12; and one position for every 300 students in special education. The review was conducted in only two local authorities, and based on its findings, the Ministry decided not to revise the staffing formula, citing the shortage of psychologists in the EPSs as the reason. However, this shortage was already known to the Ministry prior to the review and was not a conclusion drawn from it. Moreover, the allocation of psychologist positions for students eligible for special education services who are integrated into general education does not follow the existing staffing formula. As a result, data regarding the current staffing levels in EPSs do not accurately reflect the actual shortage of educational psychologists in the system.

- Psychologist Staffing System for Managing EPS Positions and Personnel** – The Ministry of Education's staffing system, which manages data on the EPSs, contains outdated, inaccurate, duplicate, and misclassified information. The system does not provide reliable data on psychologists employed in the EPSs, their professional status, or EPS coverage rates. It does not issue alerts for anomalous data entries, and the Ministry of Education does not conduct regular oversight of the system. For example, following a sample review conducted during the audit, the Ministry corrected the employment classification (full/part time) for one psychologist whose records had been incorrect for approximately two years.
- Job Requirements for EPS Directors** – Twelve psychologists (approximately 5% of all psychologists listed in the staffing system as EPS directors or station heads in 2023) did not meet the minimum eligibility criteria for appointment as an EPS director, as defined by the Ministries of Education and Interior. According to these criteria, the position of Educational Psychology Service director must be filled by a licensed educational psychology specialist, preferably one who is also a licensed supervisor. Over the years, the Ministry of Education did not verify whether its own directives – or those of the Ministry of the Interior – regarding the eligibility criteria for appointing EPS directors were being implemented, nor did it exercise oversight over the appointments themselves. Full responsibility for these appointments was left to the discretion of the local authorities.
- Police Clearance Regarding Absence of Sexual Offense Convictions for EPS Employment** – The municipalities of **Ashkelon**, **Tiberias**, **Tayyiba**, **Lod**, and **Netanya**, as well as the regional councils of **Eshkol** and **Mateh Asher**, obtained police clearances for only 9 out of 28 male educational psychologists




employed in EPSs from 2019 to 2023 (approximately 32%). For an additional 7 psychologists (approximately 25%), clearances were obtained only as a result of the audit, and for the remaining 12 psychologists (approximately 43%), no clearance was provided. Many of the clearances were received years after the psychologists began working in the EPSs, ranging from about one year to over a decade after the start of employment. The municipalities of **Tiberias** and **Tayyiba** failed to fulfill their legal obligation to obtain police clearance prior to employing male psychologists in EPSs, in violation of the Prevention of Employment of Sex Offenders Law. Following the audit, **Tayyiba** submitted clearances for most of the psychologists, many years after they had been hired. In the case of the **Lod** municipality, no clearance was found for any of the psychologists employed there from 2019 to 2023. Some of these psychologists had ended their employment by the time of the audit, and for several others, the municipality provided only a general criminal record report, which does not serve as a substitute for the police clearance required under the law.

- **Recognized EPS Units for Internship, in Numbers** – A recognized Educational Psychology Service unit is one that has been officially approved as a training institution for internships in educational psychology. Despite the importance of such recognition for training future educational psychologists, in the years 2019–2023, the number of recognized EPS units increased by only nine, from 181 in 2019 to 190 in 2023. Apart from the Ministry of Education’s initiative to establish “broad EPS units” and “EPS consortia,” it has not undertaken any additional proactive measures with local authorities to expand the number of recognized EPS units. In the years 2019–2023, the Ministry of Health approved the establishment of only a few broad EPS units. As a result, while the share of EPS units operating under broad units or consortia and thus eligible to offer internships has increased over the years, in 2023 they accounted for only approximately 9% of all unrecognized EPS units. That means over 90% of unrecognized EPS units across the country remained without such training capability. For many years, a significant disparity has persisted between the number and proportion of unrecognized EPS units in Jewish local authorities (27 unrecognized units, equivalent to about 17.1% of the recognized EPS units in Jewish local authorities in 2023) and in non-Jewish local authorities (39 unrecognized units, constituting approximately 45.9% of the recognized EPS units in non-Jewish local authorities in 2023).
- **Actions by the Municipality of Tayyiba to Promote Recognition of the Tayyiba EPS Unit for Internship Purposes** – Among the seven EPS units examined, the EPS unit in **Tayyiba** is the only one not recognized for internship training. This is due, *inter alia*, to the absence of an EPS director and the failure of the facility in which the **Tayyiba** EPS unit operates to meet the Ministry of Health’s requirements for recognition as a training institution in educational psychology.



- **Duration of Educational Psychologists' Internship** – The internship period for approximately 41.2% (615 psychologists) of the educational psychologists who received their professional certification in the years 2014–2023 lasted more than 6 and up to 10 years. About a quarter (23.8%, or 355 psychologists) completed the process over a period exceeding 10 years. Only a very small proportion of the psychologists who completed their internship in the years 2014–2023 did so within two to six years (523 psychologists, 35%). The primary reason for the prolonged internship period is the workload and field demands, which are not aligned with internship requirements. This extended duration undermines professional standards and creates organizational and systemic challenges, as many psychologists remain unauthorized by law to work independently.
- **Amendments to the Special Education Law and Their Impact on the Work of Educational Psychologists** – As a result of the amendments to the Special Education Law, additional types of committees were established to support its implementation, in which educational psychologists participate. This led to a 112.3% increase in the number of such committee meetings attended by educational psychologists from 2017 to 2023 (from 105,541 to 224,024 meetings), thus adding to their workload. This is in addition to regulations that have not been updated for decades, and the allocation of psychologist positions for students entitled to special education services integrated into regular education – an allocation that does not align with the directives of the circular of the Ministry of Education's Director General. These circumstances have exacerbated the sense of burnout among educational psychologists employed in EPSs and may accelerate their departure from public service, and thus compromise the quality and scope of services provided by the EPSs. This situation may also impair the support provided by educational psychologists to students, parents, and educational staff, as their working hours are increasingly diverted to preparing for and participating in special education committee meetings, without adequate compensation or support from the Ministry of Education to address the resulting workload and additional working hours.

 **Work Planning in Educational Psychology Services** – Although a work plan is a critical tool for an organization to achieve its objectives, the Ministry of Education Director General's Circular 0332¹⁷ does not instruct the EPS units to include in their work plans components that are meant to ensure the plan's effectiveness and enable monitoring of its implementation. None of the EPS units examined – in the municipalities of **Ashkelon**, **Tiberias**, **Tayyiba**, **Lod**, and **Netanya**, and in the regional councils of **Eshkol** and **Mateh Asher** – determined a timeline or set milestones for achieving their goals in their respective work plans. With the exception of the EPS unit in the city of **Netanya**, the other units reviewed failed to assign responsibility for the achievement of goals to specific

¹⁷ According to the Ministry of Education Director General's Circular, "Framework for Educational Psychological Services", Directive 0332 (August 2022) (Director General's Circular 0332 of the Ministry of Education).



parties. The work plans of the EPS units in the city of **Lod** and the regional councils of **Eshkol** and **Mateh Asher** included numerous objectives that were fully or partially copied from plans of previous years, without reference to performance indicators or to the extent to which those goals were met in the past year. The objectives defined by the EPS units in the cities of **Tiberias**, **Tayyiba**, and **Lod** and in the **Eshkol** Regional Council were general and not measurable. In addition, no structured process for approving the work plans was found in any of the Ministry of Education districts examined – Southern, Central, or Northern.



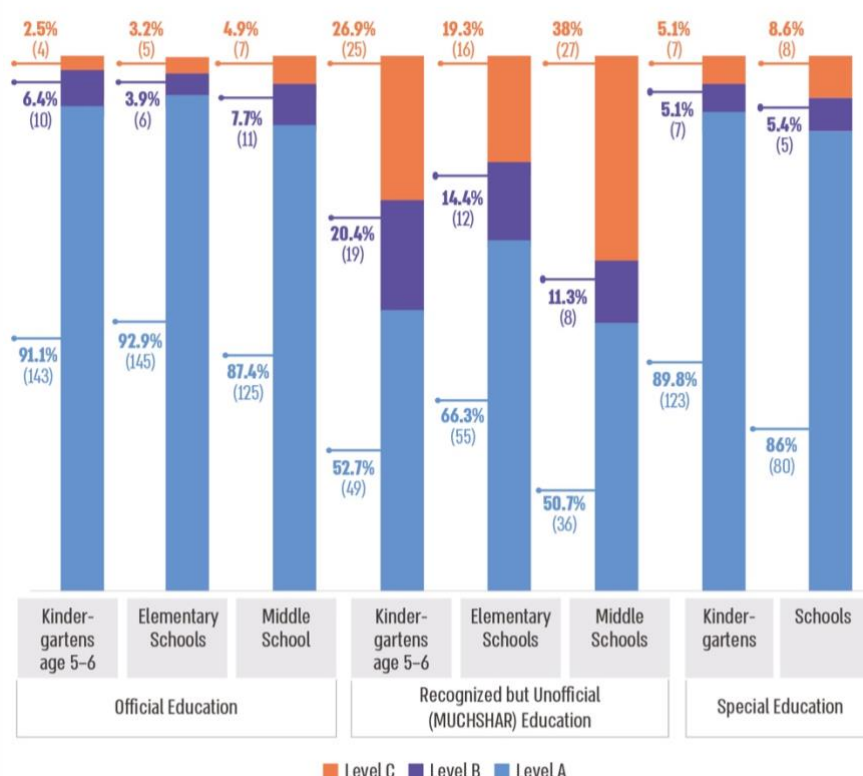
Service Composition of the Educational Psychology Services

- **Lack of Centralized Data on Service Levels** – Although the Ministry of Education serves as the regulatory authority for the work of the EPSs and is responsible for allocating staffing positions to the various units, it does not hold centralized information regarding the levels of service provided by each EPS unit across Israel. Nor is this information available to the regional psychologists in the Southern, Central, and Northern districts with respect to the EPS units under their supervision.
- **Lack of Uniformity in Service Provision** – It was found that in all EPS units reviewed, except for the **Tayyiba** municipality's EPS, Level A service is provided to students in official pre-primary and elementary education. In **Tayyiba**, however, these students receive only Level C service. For middle schools, Level A service is provided in all reviewed EPS units, except in the municipalities of **Tayyiba** and **Netanya**, where the service levels are C and B, respectively. In other words, in **Tayyiba**, psychological-educational services are provided to kindergartens, elementary schools, and middle schools only in emergency situations, while in **Netanya**, psychological-educational services for middle schools are limited to 8 hours per week. It was also found that the EPS units in the municipalities of **Ashkelon** and **Tiberias**, as well as in the **Eshkol** Regional Council, provide Level A service to pre-primary (kindergarten) and elementary schools in the recognized but unofficial education system (Hebrew acronym: **MUCHSHAR**). In contrast, the EPS units in the municipalities of **Tayyiba** and **Lod**, and in the **Mateh Asher** Regional Council, provide only Level C service to institutions in that sector. The EPS unit in Netanya provides Level C service to pre-primary education in the MUCHSHAR system and Level B service to its elementary schools. In addition, the interpretation of service levels varies across local authorities, resulting in significant differences – even for the same designated level – in the frequency of school visits and in the number of hours allocated per visit. For example, although most EPS units reviewed appear to provide Level A service for most of the 5–15 age group as outlined in the Ministry circular, the weekly hours allocated for that service level vary widely. In the official education system, weekly hours ranged from one to three hours for kindergarten-aged children, and from four to twelve hours for elementary and middle school students. This variation was also found among special education



institutions, where special education kindergartens were allocated between 1.5 and 3 hours per week, while special education schools were allocated between 4 and 12 weekly hours.

Service Levels in EPS Units According to the EPS Directors' Survey




According to the EPS Directors' Survey conducted by the State Comptroller's Office.

- Provision of Services for Early Childhood** – Despite the great importance of providing educational psychological services for infants and toddlers from birth to age three – given that this period represents a window of opportunity for healthy development – and although responsibility for this age group was transferred to the Ministry of Education approximately three years before the start of the audit, the Ministry has not addressed the need to provide EPS services to educational frameworks serving this population. The only exception is initial system-wide intervention in emergency or crisis situations, such as cases of harm or suspected harm to a child by a staff member, or other serious incidents in which a child is



severely injured. This situation leads to delays in identifying and detecting children with special or emotional needs, as well as delays in providing appropriate responses.


- **Provision of Psychological Services for Ages 3–4 and 16–18** – Although the Ministry of Education stated in Director General's Circular 0332 that its aspiration is to provide educational-psychological services to educational settings serving children aged 3 to 4 and 16 to 18 as well, and despite the importance of offering such services to these age groups, the circular specifies that "at this stage" the positions included in the Ministry's staffing standard are allocated solely for services to children aged 5–15 in general education and 3–21 in special education. As for the other age groups, the Ministry of Education states that the allocation of resources for them is to be determined jointly by the director of the EPS unit and the head of the local authority's education department.
- **Recognized but Unofficial¹⁸ (MUCHSHAR) Education** – The Ministry of Education's Director General's Circular does not address the recognized but unofficial education system (MUCHSHAR) in terms of resource allocation. Although the Ministry's policy is to allocate resources to MUCHSHAR institutions similarly to the official education system, a nationwide survey of EPS directors revealed that only approximately 57% of MUOCHSHAR institutions serving children aged 5–15 receive Level A services from EPS units, compared to approximately 91% of institutions in the official education system. The data show that Level C service is provided to elementary schools in the MUCHSHAR system by approximately 19.3% of EPS units, to pre-primary (kindergarten) settings by approximately 26.9% of units, and to middle schools by approximately 38% of units. This means that many students and educational staff in the MUCHSHAR system do not receive essential services such as counseling, guidance and support for educational frameworks, psychological evaluations and therapeutic interventions for children with special needs or at high risk, parental consultation and support, and school principal consultations (and, when necessary, guidance for the educational staff) three times a year.

 **Waiting Time for Receiving Services from EPS Units** – According to a survey conducted by the State Comptroller's Office among parents of children aged 3–18, the average waiting time for receiving an initial service was approximately 54.6 days in EPS units, approximately 89.7 days through the health maintenance organizations (HMOs), and approximately 36.7 days with a private therapist. The private sector enables access to treatment in much shorter timeframes: among approximately 49% of parents who turned to private therapists, the waiting time was up to ten days, and approximately

18 Recognized but unofficial (MUCHSHAR) educational institutions are owned by public bodies, such as local authorities and corporations, or by private entities. Their teaching staff are not state employees, and the institutions enjoy a certain degree of autonomy in their curricula. This sector includes a variety of educational streams, such as Haredi (ultra-Orthodox) education, anthroposophic education, democratic education, private schools for the arts or sciences, and international schools. Some MUCHSHAR schools also serve national minority populations.



76% received the service within a month. In EPS units, only approximately 57% of parents received service within a month, and in the HMOs the figure was even lower – approximately 37%. In addition, the survey found that the waiting time for EPS services is sometimes perceived as long, which may lead to parents not turning to the EPS even when needed, or alternatively, to seeking paid treatment in the private sector.

 **Coordination with Local Authorities** – According to findings from the survey distributed by the State Comptroller's Office to EPS directors, the latter reported significant challenges in the working relationship between EPS units and the local authorities in which they operate. These challenges are often related to how the EPS is perceived by municipal officials in terms of its role, the nature of its services, and its importance – factors that affect the day-to-day work of psychologists in the EPS units. The audit found variation in working conditions across EPS units, stemming from the extent of resources invested by local authorities in the EPS, and from the degree of flexibility they allow in the employment terms of EPS psychologists. This variation was observed both in the authorities included in the in-depth audit and on the national level, as reflected in responses from EPS directors to the survey conducted as part of the audit. For example, among the local authorities reviewed, the municipality of **Netanya** does not pay EPS psychologists for on-call hours. The **Tiberias** municipality pays on-call hours to the management team and two psychologists, while the **Tayyiba** municipality pays on-call hours only to licensed specialist psychologists. In the municipalities of **Ashkelon** and **Lod** and in the **Eshkol** and **Mateh Asher** regional councils, on-call hours are paid at varying levels, depending on the authority's decision and the professional status of the psychologist within the EPS unit. In addition, the municipalities of **Ashkelon**, **Lod**, and **Netanya**, as well as the **Eshkol** and **Mateh Asher** regional councils, covered vehicle maintenance expenses for all psychologists employed in their EPS units both before and after the outbreak of the Swords of Iron War. In contrast, the municipalities of **Tiberias** and **Tayyiba** reimburse vehicle expenses only for the director of the EPS unit, not for other psychologists. Furthermore, while the municipalities of **Ashkelon**, **Tayyiba**, and **Netanya** and the **Eshkol** and **Mateh Asher** regional councils allow flexible clock-in procedures for educational psychologists, the **Tiberias** municipality does not offer such flexibility, requiring psychologists to report in person to the EPS office to register attendance. It should be noted that while the **Lod** municipality did allow flexibility during the audit period, as of May 2025, it reported that such flexibility is no longer permitted.

Work Environment in EPS Units

- **Physical Condition of the EPS Units Reviewed** – The EPS units in the municipalities of **Ashkelon**, **Tiberias**, **Tayyiba**, and **Netanya**, as well as in the **Eshkol** Regional Council, suffer from maintenance issues including cracks and crumbling plaster, torn upholstery on furniture, and moisture problems. In the EPS units of **Ashkelon**, **Tiberias**, and **Tayyiba** and in the **Eshkol** Regional Council, safety hazards were also identified, including exposed electrical panels, broken electrical sockets, and exposed wires – posing a risk to both staff and visitors.



Electrical Hazards in EPS Units in Eshkol, Ashkelon, and Tiberias



Right – Eshkol EPS unit; Left – Tiberias EPS unit.



Ashkelon EPS unit.

Photographs taken by the audit team: Eshkol EPS – May 27, 2024; Ashkelon EPS – May 21, 2023; Tiberias EPS – February 15, 2024.



- **Definition of Physical Conditions in EPS Units** – Despite the impact that the physical conditions of EPS units have on both service providers and recipients, as well as on the quality of services delivered, the Ministry of Education has not formulated guidelines or recommendations regarding the work environment, physical working conditions, or the physical aspects of service provision in EPS units. The Ministry of Health has established standards regarding the physical conditions and required facilities in EPS units, as a prerequisite for recognizing them as accredited institutions for specialization in educational psychology. However, EPS units that are not officially recognized by the Ministry of Health are not obligated to comply with these standards.
- **Compliance of Reviewed EPS Units with the Ministry of Health's 2022 Recognition Procedures** – Although the EPS units in the municipalities of **Ashkelon, Tiberias, Lod, and Netanya**, as well as in the **Eshkol and Mateh Asher** regional councils are officially recognized for specialization in educational psychology, they do not fully meet the Ministry of Health's standards regarding the physical conditions and facilities required for recognition as accredited institutions. The EPS unit in **Tayyiba** is not recognized for specialization and is therefore not obligated to meet the detailed requirements outlined in the Ministry's recognition procedures. However, the building in which the **Tayyiba** EPS unit operates does not meet these requirements, and this is one of the reasons it cannot be approved as a recognized institution for specialization in educational psychology.
- **Protection and Safety of EPS Facilities** – The EPS units in the municipalities of **Tiberias, Tayyiba, and Netanya** and in the **Eshkol** Regional Council are not fortified. In the EPS units of the **Netanya** municipality and the **Mateh Asher** Regional Council, the existing protective solutions are inadequate, as the distance and time required to reach the protected space do not allow full protection for all staff and visitors, particularly those with disabilities.

Operation of EPS Units in the Digital Environment and Their Interface with the Ministry of Education and the Local Authority

- **Development of a Computerized System for Managing EPS Activities by the Ministry of Education** – The 2021 State Comptroller's report¹⁹ found that the Ministry of Education does not maintain a national database documenting the scope of EPS involvement with students, and that at the time of the audit, the Ministry was in the process of designing such a system. Nearly four years after the completion of the previous audit, and approximately three and a half years after the Ministry reported that it had addressed the deficiencies, the issue has still not been resolved. The Ministry of Education has yet to establish a computerized system for managing the work of the EPS units and remains in the planning stage. As a result, the Ministry does not collect or analyze critical data needed for monitoring

¹⁹ State Comptroller, Special Audit Report – Preparedness of Local Authorities for Treating Anxiety Victims in Emergency Situations (2021).



and oversight, decision-making, and policy development in the area of educational psychology services.

- **Information Management in the EPS Units Reviewed** – In three of the seven local authorities examined – the municipalities of **Tiberias** and **Tayyiba** and the **Eshkol** Regional Council – no dedicated computerized system exists. In three of the four EPS units where such a system is in place – in the municipalities of **Ashkelon** and **Netanya**, and in the **Mateh Asher** Regional Council – information is fully documented, including the number of assessments and evaluations, interventions, and consultations. In one EPS unit, in the **Lod** municipality, information is only partially documented. However, the data collected through these dedicated systems does not allow for the extraction of information regarding all the students who received EPS services. Of the three EPS units lacking such a system, in **Tiberias** and **Tayyiba** no such documentation is carried out at all; and in **Eshkol** Regional Council, only partial documentation is maintained.
- **Data Security in EPS Units** – Despite the importance of having clear guidelines on information security and the retention of virtual records in both routine and emergency operations of EPS units, it was found that, apart from limited and general instructions issued by the Ministry of Education in 2014 regarding the retention of virtual records, and the guidance provided during the COVID-19 pandemic on the use of personal email accounts, the Ministry has not issued any updated guidelines on information security during remote work or on the documentation and retention of virtual psychological records in EPS units, whether in routine times or emergencies. Moreover, despite the unprecedented scale and geographic dispersal of the population evacuated from their homes, the Ministry of Education issued updated guidelines on safeguarding confidential information and saving digital files only approximately eight weeks after the outbreak of the Swords of Iron War.
- **Remote Work Infrastructure and Adherence to Information Security Procedures in the Local Authorities Reviewed** – The municipalities of **Tiberias**, **Tayyiba**, and **Lod**, as well as the **Eshkol** Regional Council, do not provide laptops to EPS psychologists. In **Tiberias**, most psychologists in the EPS unit are not even provided with desktop computers. As a result, educational psychologists rely on their personal laptops for routine work, and remote work is conducted without a connection to the municipal server. Furthermore, the municipalities of **Tiberias** and **Lod** have yet to establish information security procedures. In **Ashkelon**, **Netanya** and the **Eshkol** Regional Council, the existing procedures do not include guidance on the use of personal laptops for routine work. The Municipality of **Tayyiba** stated that it had prepared an information security procedure; however, as of the conclusion of the audit, this procedure had not yet been submitted to the State Comptroller's Office.



- **Use of Municipal Email Addresses** – It was found that, contrary to the directive prohibiting the use of private email accounts – and in violation of the Ministry of Education’s instruction requiring the use of official municipal email addresses for both internal and external EPS correspondence – approximately 69% of the email addresses for EPS unit directors published on the Ministry’s website were private accounts. This indicates that such addresses are used for routine communication between the Ministry and EPS directors, and that the Ministry’s Psychology Division – which is responsible for enforcing the ban on private email use – is itself corresponding with directors via private accounts. In addition, the Municipality of **Tiberias** has not provided municipal email addresses to any of its EPS staff; the Municipality of **Tayyiba** has done so for only part of its staff; and the Municipality of **Lod** has provided them to only approximately one-third of the staff. This implies that educational psychologists in these authorities have no choice but to use their private email accounts for work-related communication. In the **Eshkol** and **Mateh Asher** regional councils, EPS staff also use their private email accounts for routine work, even though the local authorities have issued municipal email addresses.

Functioning of the Ministry of Education In Regard To EPS Units Following the Outbreak of the Swords of Iron War

- **Collection of EPS Data After the Outbreak of the Swords of Iron War** – The Ministry of Education collected data on the number of psychologists providing services in reception centers and on psychological interventions due to the emergency situation only for the first two months of the war, despite the fact that the number of evacuees remained high beyond that period. In the absence of a computerized system for managing the work of EPS units, data collection during those months concerning psychological interventions in response to the emergency was conducted via a survey distributed among psychologists. The survey was completed anonymously and without mandatory identification on a publicly accessible website operated by private entities. This method may have led to inaccuracies in the data collected and compromised the security of the information.
- **Expansion of Psychological Services in EPS Units** – During the Swords of Iron War, the Ministry of Education facilitated the expansion of psychological services in EPS units through two budgetary channels: the establishment of a reinforcement framework staffed by psychologists contracted through a Ministry-designated provider, with a budget of approximately NIS 21 million for the 2023–2024 school year (September 2023 – August 2024), and the expansion of EPS services via supplementary budget packages (“reinforcement baskets”) totaling an additional planned budget of approximately NIS 16 million. It was found that only a limited number of local authorities made use of the reinforcement framework – six EPS units between October 2023 and January 2024, and eight in March 2024 – without the Ministry examining the reasons for its limited uptake in other local authorities. In addition, following the publication of the option to expand services through the reinforcement baskets, 164 out of 257 EPS units (64% of the total) submitted



requests. Despite the demonstrated need to expand services in light of the war, as reflected in the number of requests submitted, it was only about three months after the outbreak of the Swords of Iron War that most EPS unit directors were able to expand the support provided to students, parents, and education staff during the ongoing emergency through this channel.

- **Guidelines for Coordination Between EPS Units** – The Ministry of Education issued its first written guidelines on coordination between EPS units only eight weeks after the outbreak of the Swords of Iron War. These written guidelines did not include operational instructions for establishing the necessary connections between directors of receiving EPS units and those of evacuated ones, nor did they include supporting documents to facilitate coordination.
- **Psychological Support for EPS Staff** – Despite the critical importance of monitoring the mental health of psychologists and providing professional support when needed, the Director General's Circular of the Ministry of Education does not mandate the provision of psychological support for EPS staff, nor does it recommend it. In addition, it does not instruct EPS units to take initiative in identifying psychologists experiencing secondary traumatization²⁰, particularly during emergencies.



Level A Services in Most Official Educational Institutions for Ages 5–15 – A nationwide survey of EPS unit directors found that these educational institutions receive Level A services from approximately 91% of EPS units.

Changes to Internship Requirements – In December 2023, the Ministry of Health issued updated guidelines for internships in educational psychology, in order to reduce the gap between internship requirements and the needs of the education system, and to shorten the duration of the internship.

Group Support and Guidance Sessions for Educational Psychologists – In the first month following the outbreak of the Swords of Iron War, the Ministry of Education organized group support and guidance sessions, and also funded professional support for three EPS directors in the Gaza Envelope who faced large-scale population displacement. These efforts helped provide support, training, and guidance to address the psychological needs of EPS units as well.




Professional Support for EPS Psychologists – Beginning on the second day of the Swords of Iron War, the Ministry of Education held online lectures for EPS staff

²⁰ A situation in which individuals who come into close contact with a victim of a traumatic event – such as parents, family members, teachers, caregivers, and members of the emergency or security forces – may experience emotional distress and, over time, become secondary victims themselves.








nationwide. In the first three months of the war, the Ministry conducted 24 lectures and learning sessions, with 4,593 psychologists participating.

Key Recommendations

-  The Ministry of Education, in collaboration with heads of education departments and EPS unit directors in local authorities, should develop strategies to raise awareness among parents and educational institutions about the existence of educational psychology services, the range of services they provide, and the procedures for accessing them. In addition, it is recommended that the Ministry of Education, together with heads of education departments and EPS unit directors in local authorities with Arab and Haredi populations, map the reasons for the particularly low level of awareness of EPS services among these groups, as indicated in the survey. Based on this mapping, the Ministry should formulate an action plan that includes goals, objectives, and performance indicators designed to increase awareness of EPS services, with a focus on encouraging these populations to seek assistance from their local EPS units when the need arises.
-  The Ministry of Education should work to formulate updated indicators and criteria for the allocation of educational psychologist positions for treating children and adolescents, in light of the current and expected increase in their emotional and mental health needs. It should also review the existing staffing formula based on these indicators and criteria. It is recommended that the staffing formula be updated according to the findings of this review, and thus enable the Ministry to obtain a reliable picture of the extent of understaffing relative to current and future needs. As part of this process, targets should be set for the staffing of positions, along with the means to achieve them, and maximum timeframes should be defined for reviewing the need to update the staffing formula. In addition, it is recommended that the Ministry of Education update the allocation of educational psychologist positions in accordance with the Director General's Circular, ensuring that the required staffing standard for students eligible for inclusion in general education settings is taken into account.
-  The State Comptroller admonishes the Ministry of Education for failing, over the years, to examine the implementation of its directives regarding compliance with the professional qualifications required for the appointment of EPS unit directors in local authorities. This failure may impair the professional quality of services provided to residents. The Ministry of Education should seek solutions to improve the professional qualifications of EPS managerial staff who do not meet the formal eligibility criteria for the position of EPS director. In light of these findings, it is recommended that the Ministry of the Interior issue a reminder to local authorities of the requirement that EPS unit directors must meet the mandated professional qualifications as a condition for their appointment.



-  It is recommended that the Ministry of Education expedite the completion of the specification and development process for the computerized system for managing EPS units. Such a system is essential for enabling the Ministry to obtain a reliable and up-to-date picture of EPS activities at any given time – particularly during emergencies – and to facilitate a rapid and effective response to evolving needs. A computerized system would also help improve decision-making and policy development, enhance oversight of EPS operations, and support institutional learning processes, as "what is not measured cannot be managed".
-  It is recommended that the municipalities of **Tiberias** and **Tayyiba**, as well as the **Eshkol** Regional Council, instruct the EPS units under their jurisdiction to compile data on their activities until the Ministry of Education develops and implements a dedicated information management system. This is essential for obtaining a reliable and up-to-date picture of EPS operations, enabling ongoing monitoring and oversight, drawing lessons at the end of each period, and optimally planning the use of resources as part of their annual work plans.
-  Recognition for internship programs affects the professional training of educational psychologists at all levels of certification, as well as the scope and quality of services provided by EPS units. It is recommended that the Ministries of Education and Health, in collaboration with local authorities, formulate a joint work plan that includes clear objectives, timelines, and success indicators for advancing recognition of EPS units that are not currently accredited for internship. In parallel, it is recommended that both ministries continue advancing efforts and developing solutions for the recognition of non-accredited EPS units, while also promoting alternative frameworks for collaboration between accredited and non-accredited units. These alternatives would help support EPS units that currently fall outside the existing recognition structures; namely, regional EPS units or EPS consortia. It is further recommended that local authorities operating EPS units without internship recognition remove any barriers preventing them from meeting the Ministry of Health's requirements for recognition as internship institutions in educational psychology. Where such barriers cannot be removed, the authorities should allow these EPS units to operate within the available alternative recognition frameworks.
-  The Municipality of **Tayyiba** should complete the appointment approval process for the selected EPS unit director, recruit a professional management team for the unit, and make the necessary physical adjustments to the EPS facility in order to meet the Ministry of Health's requirements for recognition as an accredited internship institution in educational psychology.
-  It is recommended that the Ministry of Education stipulate in the Director General's Circular the need to provide educational psychology services to educational settings serving children up to the age of three as well. It is further recommended that the Ministry require that such services be delivered regularly and consistently to children in preschool and pre-kindergarten settings, in order to enable early psychological



intervention at the onset of symptoms and difficulties – an approach that may help prevent or mitigate the development of mental health disorders at later stages. It is also recommended that the Ministry of Education mandate the provision of regular and ongoing psychological services to upper secondary schools, given that adolescence is marked by numerous developmental challenges and risk factors.



In addition, the Ministry should update the allocation of educational psychologist positions in accordance with Director General's Circular 0332, ensuring that the allocation reflects the staffing standard required for students eligible for inclusion in general education settings. The Ministry should also ensure that the scope of tasks assigned to educational psychologists aligns with the available workforce in EPS units, particularly in light of the growing number of special education placement committees following legislative amendments, the increased resources allocated to their operation, and the resulting impact on educational psychologists' workloads.



All local authorities must comply with the provisions of the law and ensure that, as a prerequisite for applying for educational psychologist positions through personnel tenders, candidates present police confirmation that there is no legal impediment to their employment under the Law for the Prevention of Employment of Sex Offenders. The municipalities of **Tiberias**, **Tayyiba**, and **Lod** must act without delay to obtain such confirmation for all psychologists currently employed in their EPS units. The municipalities of **Ashkelon** and **Netanya** and the **Eshkol** and **Mateh Asher** regional councils must ensure that male psychologists submit this confirmation prior to hiring and before beginning work involving the treatment of children and adolescents. It is recommended that the Ministries of Interior and Education, as well as the Ministry of National Security and the Israel Police, instruct all local authorities to act in accordance with the law and monitor compliance in institutions serving vulnerable populations, such as EPS units and educational institutions, in addition to the information already published on the Israel Police website.



It is further recommended that the Ministry of Education establish maximum wait times for initial responses from EPS units. The Ministries of Education and Health should work to reduce wait times in both EPS units and health maintenance organizations (HMOs), to ensure that children from low-income families can also receive optimal mental health care.



It is recommended that the municipalities of **Ashkelon**, **Tiberias**, **Tayyiba**, **Lod**, and **Netanya**, as well as the **Eshkol** and **Mateh Asher** Regional Councils, conduct a comprehensive mapping of the employment conditions of all psychologists in their respective EPS units. This mapping should be based on their defined role and professional status, scope of employment, seniority at the workplace, required availability, and assigned responsibilities. It is further recommended that the local authorities address the disparities identified through this assessment and allocate additional resources to support the operation of educational psychology services, in alignment with the psychologists' actual duties and workload.



It is recommended that the Ministry of Education, in collaboration with the Ministry of Health, establish official standards for the working conditions of psychologists, which local authorities would be required to meet. This is to ensure that EPS staff can offer the public a respectable setting that safeguards their privacy. It is further recommended that the municipalities of **Ashkelon, Tiberias, Lod, and Netanya**, as well as the **Eshkol** and **Mateh Asher** Regional Councils – where accredited EPS units operate – adjust the physical conditions of their EPS units to comply with the standards set out in the recognition procedure and to maintain the units' accreditation. The Municipality of **Tayyiba** is advised to implement the physical adjustments required by the recognition procedure in order to obtain accreditation.



The Ministry of Education should update its written guidelines concerning information security, remote work, the retention of digital psychological records, and the transfer of such records between parties both within and outside EPS units during routine times and emergencies. It is recommended that local authorities update their information security procedures with regard to these matters and ensure that their guidelines are implemented. The municipalities of **Tiberias, Tayyiba, and Lod** should develop information security procedures that include work processes designed to protect the personal and medical data of those seeking services from the EPS unit, and municipal management should ensure their implementation. It is further recommended that the municipalities of **Ashkelon, Tiberias, Tayyiba, Lod, and Netanya**, as well as the **Eshkol** Regional Council, include in their information security procedures specific instructions regarding the use of personal laptops for routine work.



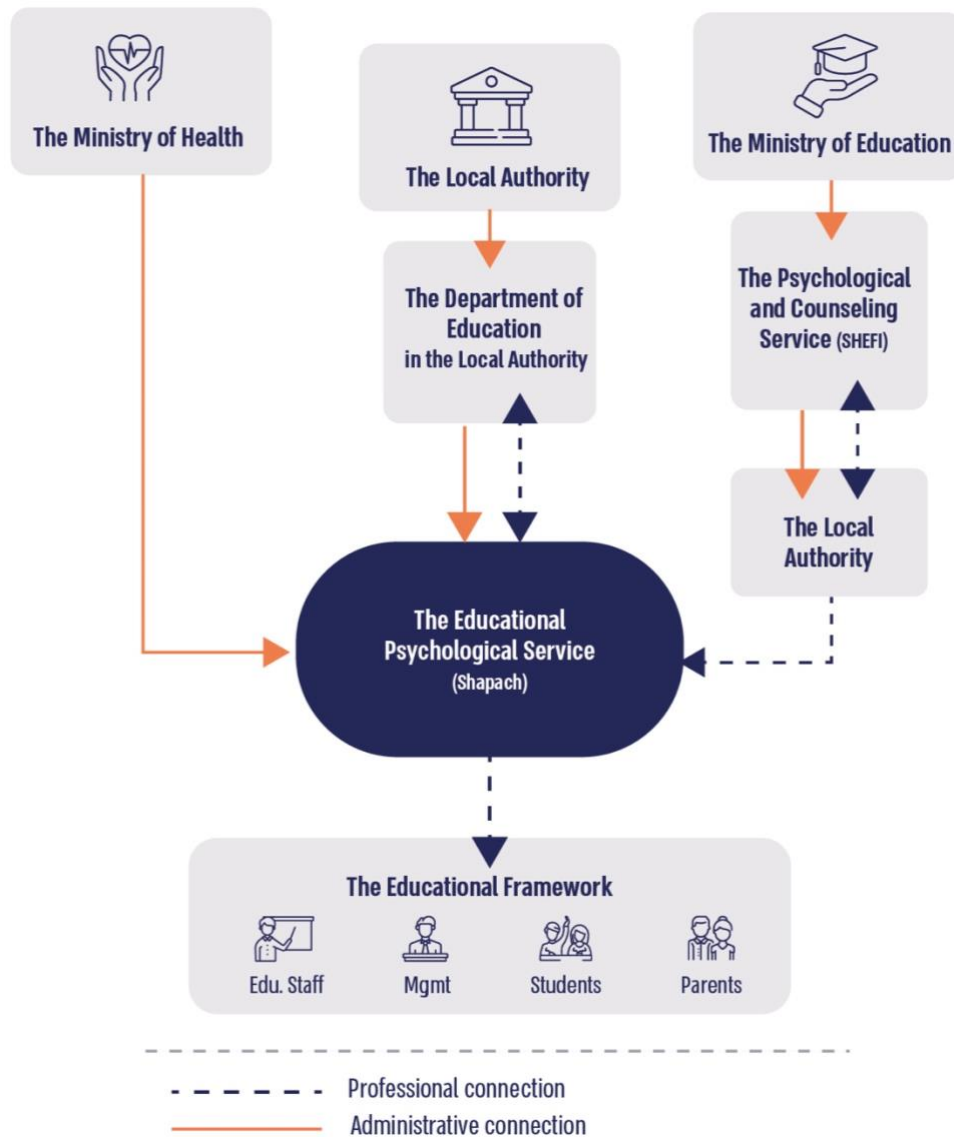
All local authorities – and particularly the municipalities of **Tiberias, Tayyiba, and Lod** – should provide an official municipal email account to all EPS psychologists, for their exclusive use in routine work. They should also instruct all EPS staff to comply with guidelines regarding the use of municipal email addresses. EPS unit directors in local authorities must enforce these guidelines. The Ministry of Education should ensure the implementation of the directive on exclusive use of municipal email accounts and enforce it by updating the contact details of EPS directors with their official municipal email addresses and by using these addresses in its routine communications with them.



It is also recommended that the Ministry of Education establish appropriate mechanisms for proactively identifying cases of secondary traumatization among educational psychologists and for providing individualized psychological support when needed. Safeguarding the mental health of educational psychologists is in the public interest, as they are responsible for supporting the psychological resilience of educators, students, and their families.



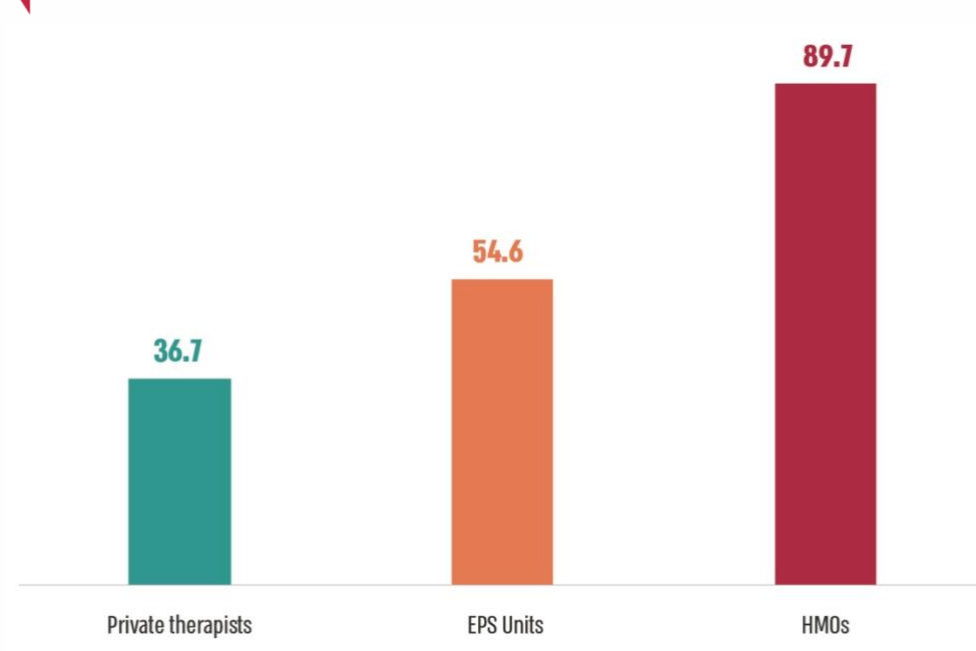
Interfaces of the Educational Psychology Service



Prepared by the State Comptroller's Office.



Average Waiting Time (in Days) Reported by Parents Seeking Emotional Treatment for Their Children Until Receiving Initial Response, by Type of Service Framework, August–September 2023



According to data from a parent survey conducted by the State Comptroller's Office.



Summary

The Educational Psychology Service (EPS) is the only mental health framework available to every child in the State of Israel and therefore plays a critical role in identifying and preventing psychological distress among children and adolescents. The COVID-19 pandemic, which broke out in 2020, led to a sharp increase in the number of children and adolescents experiencing distress, depression, and other mental health challenges. The events of October 7, 2023, and the Swords of Iron War primarily affected those directly harmed, but also impacted children and adolescents across Israel, who were exposed to varying levels of danger – including missile attacks – and experienced psychological effects during the war.

Given the critical role of the educational psychology service in addressing these difficulties, the Ministry of Education – together with heads of education departments and EPS unit directors in local authorities – should work to raise awareness among parents and educational settings of the emotional and psychological support the service provides and how to access it.

To ensure the provision of high-quality educational psychology services for all segments and populations in Israel, the Ministry of Education should align EPS staffing levels with actual needs on the ground, and establish standards for the physical and digital environments in which educational psychologists operate – with particular emphasis on the development of integrated and coordinated information systems that provide a reliable national picture of the service. In addition, the Ministry of Education and local authorities must strengthen the protection of sensitive patient information stored in EPS information systems and ensure the full implementation of their directives in this regard. Furthermore, local authorities must comply with the law regarding EPS staff recruitment, including obtaining police confirmation that no legal impediment exists to employing candidates under the Prevention of Employment of Sex Offenders Law as a prerequisite for applying to EPS psychologist positions. They must also work to promote recognition of non-accredited EPS units as internship institutions in educational psychology – or alternatively enable them to operate under one of the existing recognition frameworks – and position the EPS as a central agent in promoting students' well-being and mental health within the local authority.

To ensure the effective and professional functioning of educational psychology services in future emergencies, it is recommended that the Ministry of Education, in collaboration with local authorities, conduct a thorough and comprehensive lessons-learned process based on the experience gained during the Swords of Iron War. Based on the conclusions of this process, the Ministry should update its guidelines for the operation of educational psychology services in emergencies, develop practical tools for use by EPS directors and regional psychologists during such events, and incorporate their use into emergency preparedness drills conducted by the Ministry and local authorities.

The Educational Psychology Service is entrusted with safeguarding the mental health of future generations in Israel, and thus, the very future of the country. Harm to this service or its



impaired functioning affects hundreds of thousands of Israeli students and their parents, depriving them of their fundamental right to receive equal, free health and education services. Implementing the recommendations presented in this report may enable Israel's educational psychology services to operate effectively and resiliently, both in routine times and amid the recurring emergencies the country faces and the challenges they entail.