

East Jerusalem Education Report, Academic Year 2024-2023 (5784)

Ir Amim

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The 2023-2024 academic year took place under the shadow of the ongoing war that erupted after the October 7th massacre and under the continued assault by the right-wing government on the academic curriculum in East Jerusalem.

During the weeks that followed the outbreak of the war, several reports were received—including some from directors of the Jerusalem Education Administration—describing the use of severe violence against Palestinian students, principals, and teaching staff on their way to schools and at the entrances to educational institutions in East Jerusalem. Students and teachers encountered violence by security forces including verbal abuse, physical injuries, and intrusive body searches. Dozens of students were detained, most of whom were released shortly after.

The checkpoints and roadblocks erected throughout the city made the return to studies quite difficult, and, sometimes, educators' commutes were prolonged to three hours or more. Moreover, despite the fact that social workers in the education system received numerous reports about security forces harming children as young as first graders on their way to and from school, almost no emotional support was offered to students. At the same time, significant pressure was placed on the education system to report any statements made by individuals, even if they lacked any kind of incitement.

While there were considerable local efforts to resume routine studies even amid a very complex reality—including efforts by the Jerusalem Education Administration—the Knesset Education Committee continued its deliberations on the curriculum in East Jerusalem. The discussions, which had begun before the war, continued into this period, fanned by extreme right-wing incitement. In contrast, no discussion was held on the need to protect students and educational staff in East Jerusalem and on restraining the conduct of the police forces towards them.

Meanwhile, the Supreme Court ruling from more than a year and a half ago obligating the state to submit a plan for addressing the shortage of classrooms has not been implemented to date, with the state repeatedly requesting postponements. As a result of the most recent delay, the implementation of the ruling has now been set for December 2024, with the Jerusalem Parents' Association announcing that this is the last postponement they will agree to.

While the government was supposed to approve the new five-year plan for the reduction of socio-economic gaps in East Jerusalem in May 2023, its approval was delayed due to

the unwillingness of Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich to approve funding for the higher education chapter. Following many discussions among all concerned parties, in which the Minister of Finance refused to budge on his stance, a decision was made to omit the section on higher education and pass the remaining content, which was approved less than two weeks before the beginning of the 2023-2024 school year.

The budget of the education chapter was significantly reduced for the academic year, partly due to the war. This budget cut had a detrimental impact on existing programs in East Jerusalem, eroding the trust of the local population; despite that, the Jerusalem Municipality and the Ministry of Education made substantial efforts to continue the programming. As was the case before, the highest allocation of funds in the 2023-2024 academic year was directed toward increasing the number of students enrolled in the Israeli curriculum.

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Glossary of terms

Official institutions: Schools run and completely funded by the state and/or local authorities. These schools are under supervision of the Ministry of Education, and its teachers are civil servants or employed by the local authority.

Recognized non-official institutions: Privately owned schools (either by for profit and not-for-profit institutions) that operate under a license from the Ministry of Education and with its recognition. They receive partial funding from the Ministry of Education and local authorities (in this case, from the Jerusalem Municipality). Local authorities conduct school inspections on a limited basis.

Informal education: Learning that happens outside of a structured educational framework or program. It can include extracurricular activities, trips and tours, among others/

Parents' Association: This body is the official and budgeted parents' organization in Jerusalem.

Government Decision 3790 for the Reduction of Socio-economic Gaps and Economic Development in East Jerusalem: Decision adopted by Israel's government in May 2018 which allocated 2.2 billion NIS (approx. 630 million USD), to be spent over the course of five years, for investment in East Jerusalem, in particular in the following arenas: education and higher education, economy and employment, transportation, improvement of civil services and quality of life; health and land registration. [See our 3-year monitoring report for more information.](#)

Government Decision 880: Decision to renew Government Decision 3790 for another five-year period (2024-2028). This time, the budget allocated was of 3.2 billion NIS (1.5 times that of the previous decision, although there are some questions about artificial inflation of the budget). The decision was adopted by Israel's government in August 2023. [See our 2023 annual report for more information.](#)

Distribution of Students in Jerusalem's Education System

Overall

Table 1. Distribution of students by type of educational institution, 2023-2024 Academic Year

Type of educational institution	Number of students	Percentage of overall students
General Education (official)	68,292	23.3%
Ultra-orthodox Education	117,994	40.3%
Arab Education (recognized and official)	106,365	36.3%
Total	292,651	100%

Data source: [Jerusalem Educational Yearbook for the Jewish year 5784.](#)

Palestinian students

General

Table 2. Distribution of Palestinian students by type of educational institution (within Arab education), 2023-2024 Academic Year

Type of Arab education	Number of students
Arab education – Official	51,970
Arab education – Recognized non-official	54,580
Total	106,550

Data source: Answer to a freedom of information request to the Jerusalem Municipality (answered on August 15th, 2024).

“Invisible children”: Missing students in Jerusalem's Education System

For years, we have been warning about the existence of thousands of 'missing' or 'invisible' children in East Jerusalem, meaning school-aged children (3-17 years old) who are unaccounted for in official municipal data and records, i.e. whose educational whereabouts are unknown by the authorities. This failure was even highlighted in a [report by the State Comptroller in 2019](#). This year, for the first time, the Jerusalem Municipality provided us with detailed information on thousands of these children, claiming to know their names and places of study.

According to the municipality's response to a freedom of information request, of the 30,529 children aged 3-17 known to the municipality who are not registered in an official school or in a recognized non-official institution, we were informed that the municipality has identified many of them.

Approximately 10,400 are studying in private schools (the municipality has their names, received from the Palestinian Ministry of Education); approximately 800 are studying in two schools run by the Ministry of Labor; about 4,400 are children aged 3-4 whose parents prefer not to send them to an institution yet or who have been sent to private institutions.

On top of that, the municipality estimates that there are hundreds of Jerusalem children studying in the West Bank, and hundreds more studying in boarding schools and shelters across Israel pursuant to court orders—the latter’s data is held by the municipality’s welfare department. There are also approximately 3,000 students who dropped out at the end of the previous school year.

Table 3. Information on Palestinian students who are not enrolled in official or recognized non-official schools

Category	Total number	Percentage of total
(1) Children aged 3-18 in East Jerusalem entitled to education, according to municipality’s response	148,140	100%
(2) Children enrolled in official and recognized non-official educational institutions, according to municipality’s response	106,550	71.9%
(3) Children not enrolled in official or recognized non-official educational institutions, according to municipality’s response	30,529	20.6%
(4) Children enrolled in private institutions whose details are known by the municipal authorities	10,400	
(5) Children enrolled in schools run by the Ministry of Labor whose details are known by the municipal authorities	800	
(6) Children who dropped out during the last school year	3,000	
(7) Children aged 3-4 whose parents prefer not to enroll them in an educational institution or who attend a private institution	4,400	
(8) Remaining children (including those who live in Jerusalem but study in the West Bank and those who study in boarding schools and shelters across Israel),	11,929	

according to the municipality's assessment		
(9) Remaining children whose educational framework is unknown to the authorities	11,061	7.5%
<i>Notes:</i> 8 is calculated as the total number of children not enrolled in an official or recognized institution (3) minus those for whom the municipality provided specific whereabouts (4-7). 9 is calculated as the difference between the number of school-aged children according to the municipality (1) and the number of children whose educational whereabouts are accounted for, or known, by the municipality (2 and 3).		

The fact that the Municipality now collects this information after years of not doing so is commendable. We hope that, in the year to come, it will also have information on the children detailed in lines number 8 and 9 above.

Classroom Shortage in East Jerusalem

Classroom shortage

According to the response from the Jerusalem Municipality following a freedom of information request filed by Ir Amim, there is a shortage of 2,037 classrooms in East Jerusalem:

Table 4. Classroom shortage in East Jerusalem, 2024

Type of classroom needed	Number of classrooms
Official municipal education	447
Official special education	97
Natural growth of student population of 3% per year	218
Additional classrooms needed assuming 50% of students would move from recognized non-official institutions to official ones if there were space	734
Additional classrooms needed assuming 50% of students would move from private institutions to official ones if there were space	338
Additional classrooms needed to accommodate 50% of unregistered (or drop-out) students	203
Total	2,037
<i>Data source:</i> Answer to a freedom of information request to the Jerusalem Municipality.	

To this number must be added, at the very least, the number of classrooms required for children whose educational framework is unknown (row 9 in table 3). In any case, this shortage is likely conservative, given that it's calculated on the basis of a minimal transfer of students from recognized non-official and private institutions to the official education. It also does not consider possible changes that would occur to the number of students studying in the West Bank or in boarding schools were there to be sufficient classroom space in East Jerusalem.

Table 5. Classroom shortage in East Jerusalem in lead up to the 2024-2025 academic year

	Number of classrooms
Missing classrooms based on municipality's response	2,037
Additional classrooms needed for the children whose educational frameworks are unknown by the municipality*	410
Total number of missing classrooms	2,447
*Assuming an average of 27 students per classroom.	

More than a year and a half ago, on January 4, 2023, in a petition filed by the Parents' Association regarding the shortage of classrooms in Jerusalem (HC 6183/16), the Supreme Court ruled—after hearing the arguments of the plaintiffs, including those of Ir Amim in its request to join as *amicus curiae*—that the state and the municipality must, within four months, develop a phased plan for the planning and construction of the missing classrooms in the official education system in East Jerusalem. As stated then:

"If, within four months, the respondents of the government do not reach an agreement with the Jerusalem Municipality regarding the plan, it will be determined by government agencies within an additional two months... We recall that the differential treatment of East Jerusalem stems from the data presented by the respondents, who acknowledge the significant gaps between East Jerusalem and other authorities..."

Time and again, the authorities have requested extensions to implement the ruling, each time for another four months. In that manner, they have recently requested an additional extension until December 17, 2024 (two years since the ruling). This time, the Parents' Association has stated that this is the last extension it will agree to.

Classrooms in the process of construction in East Jerusalem

According to the municipality's response to our freedom of information request, the number of classrooms under construction (including those currently in the planning

process) stands at 1,210 classrooms—only about half of the total number of classrooms needed to address the shortage.

Implementation of the Education Chapter in the New Five-Year Plan (Decision 880)

See glossary of terms for more information on Government Decision 880 and its precedent, government Decision 3790.

The government was supposed to approve the new five-year plan in May 2023, on the date of Jerusalem Day, in which Israel marks the capture of East Jerusalem and subsequent 'reunification' of the city (its occupation and unilateral annexation). However, due to the Jerusalem Ministry's inability to reach agreements on the plan—primarily due to the insistence of Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich to not approve funding for the higher education section—the approval was delayed for three months. Less than two weeks before the start of the 2023-2024 academic year, on August 20, 2023, Government Decision 880 was adopted, with the omission of the chapter on higher education.

The second five-year plan for East Jerusalem will be implemented during 2024-2028, and counts with an allocated budget of approximately 3.2 billion NIS, of which 800 million NIS were assigned to education. On the face of it, this was a significant increase in the education budget, and, when divided over the five years of the plan, was supposed to amount to around 160 million NIS per year. However, due to budget cuts related to the war, the actual budget in 2023-2024 amounted to little more than 60 million NIS—a reduction of tens of millions of shekels from the investment made in the 2022-2023 academic year (the last year of the previous five-year plan).

The significant budget cuts have, among other things, harmed programs and resources that were already in operation and upon which East Jerusalem residents relied. As a result, trust among the local population, which was already damaged in the period following October 7th, 2023, has been further eroded. Nevertheless, considerable efforts were made by the Jerusalem Municipality and the Ministry of Education to advance and implement the work plan for the 2023-2024 academic year, even in the face of real concerns that those responsible for promoting the five-year plan would not work to implement it.

Following the delay in approving the plan and with the outbreak of the war, those responsible for the education chapter were forced to approve a rapid emergency plan with a limited budget for the 2023-2024 academic year only, prioritizing funding for the most critical items, while making significant concessions.

Even in the 2023-2024 academic year, the highest budget was allocated to the first goal in the education chapter of the five-year plan, which aims to increase the number and

percentage of students studying the Israeli curriculum. This is a continuation of the trend in the previous five-year plan: A disproportionate amount of the budget is allocated to a minority of students in an attempt to create pressure for students to switch to the Israeli curriculum. Meanwhile, a much larger number of students (those who study in recognized non-official schools that teach the Palestinian curriculum [Tawjihii]), do not receive any funding from the five-year plan, even though they are in need of a higher investment, both in regular times, and especially during the past year.

The most significant innovation in the education chapter of the new government decision was the introduction of a new goal: Reducing dropout rates and providing individual attention to students. Its inclusion as a distinct goal within the education chapter, after being included in sub-sections and underfunded in the previous five-year plan, is of great importance and constitutes a significant correction made by professionals, as a key lesson from the previous plan. Among all the parties involved in leading the education chapter in the new plan, there was agreement on the importance of providing a significant and appropriate budget for this goal. Even when the limited budget for the 2023-2024 academic year became apparent, there was an understanding that, especially in light of the difficult situation in East Jerusalem, a large cut in this goal should not be allowed.

The municipality did not provide data on student dropout rates in response to the Freedom of Information request filed by Ir Amim. However, in its description of the classroom shortage, the municipality stated that under an "scenario in which 50% of students not registered in the system (dropouts) would enter school, there is a shortage of 203 classrooms". This is a relatively low number, because according to the calculation of the number of dropouts each year, as previously stated in the municipality's responses to freedom of information requests, more than 100 additional classrooms are needed due to dropouts annually.

The goal that was most significantly affected by budget cuts was the establishment and promotion of informal education. Towards the end of the previous five-year plan, professionals were proud of the significant investment in informal education during that period, the widespread exposure of children to informal activities, and the importance of the continuity and connection between formal and informal education. Even before the new plan was approved, and after it became clear that the budget size would be lower than previously stated, there were expectations of cuts in the budgets of informal programs.

Many programs, including some that were very significant during the previous five-year plan such as "An Extracurricular Activity for Every Child," were reduced or did not take place at all. In some cases, the cuts affected programs that were already unable to operate in the first few months after the outbreak of the war, due in part to the difficulty of being outside and the need to stay near shelters.

The goal of raising the level of linguistic literacy, with an emphasis on the Hebrew language, was the most limited in terms of budget in the 2023-2024 academic year. According to sources responsible for implementing the plan, this year's reduction in the budget for this goal was due, among other things, to the security difficulty of bringing Hebrew-speaking teachers to East Jerusalem following the outbreak of the war, and there is an intention to significantly increase the budget for this section from the amount allocated in the previous five-year plan.