
THE STATE OF EDUCATION IN EAST JERUSALEM

2021-2022

ANNUAL EDUCATION REPORT

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Over two decades ago, the Israeli Supreme Court established that Israeli authorities were violating their legal obligations in the field of education in light of the severe classroom deficit in East Jerusalem¹.

This annual education report and its predecessors indicate that the classroom deficit in East Jerusalem has continued to grow, despite the court's declaration back in 2001. The lack of classrooms has spurred steep dropout rates and contributed to the staggering fact that the education authorities do not know the location or educational status of nearly one third of school-age children in East Jerusalem – hereinafter referred to as “invisible children”.

Government Decision 3790 for the Reduction of Socio-Economic Gaps and Economic Development in East Jerusalem from 2018 offers a significant financial investment in the education system in East Jerusalem. However, a plurality of the Decision's education budget is earmarked for investing in transitioning students to studying the Israeli matriculation curriculum (*bagrut*) as opposed to the nearly ubiquitously studied Jordanian *tawjihi*. Over 43% of the budget intended for education in East Jerusalem is conditioned on schools enacting this change, for a curriculum studied by a mere total of 16% of students in the official and recognized but unofficial educational institutions, and less than 13% of all Palestinian school-age children in East Jerusalem. This clear bias is predicated on political motives intended to deny the collective identity of Palestinian children in East Jerusalem – an identity which no alternative education system can succeed in taking from them.

The investment allocation would be more beneficial would it have focused on remedying the classroom shortage, reducing the high dropout rate, and verifying the educational status of “invisible children” instead of conditioning much needed funds on the transition of students to a curriculum hardly studied by the population the Decision is ostensibly intended to help.

¹ HCJ 3834/01 *Hamdan et al. v. Jerusalem Municipality*, HCJ 5185/01 *Badriya et al. v. Jerusalem Municipality* [unpublished partial ruling granted August 29, 2001]; HCJ 5373/08 *Abu Libda v. Education Minister*, granted February 6, 2011

CONTENTS

I.	SUMMARY OF FINDINGS	4
II.	DISTRIBUTION OF PALESTINIAN STUDENTS IN JERUSALEM’S EDUCATION SYSTEM	5
1.	Distribution of Students in Jerusalem’s Educational Institutions	5
2.	Distribution of Palestinian Students in Jerusalem’s Education System	6
III.	“INVISIBLE CHILDREN”	7
IV.	STUDENT DROPOUT RATE	9
V.	THE CLASSROOM SHORTAGE IN EAST JERUSALEM	11
3.	The Classroom Shortage Grows – 3,517 Classrooms Lacking in East Jerusalem	11
4.	The Pace of Classroom Construction – 2001-2022	14
VI.	NUMBER OF STUDENTS STUDYING THE ISRAELI CURRICULUM	15

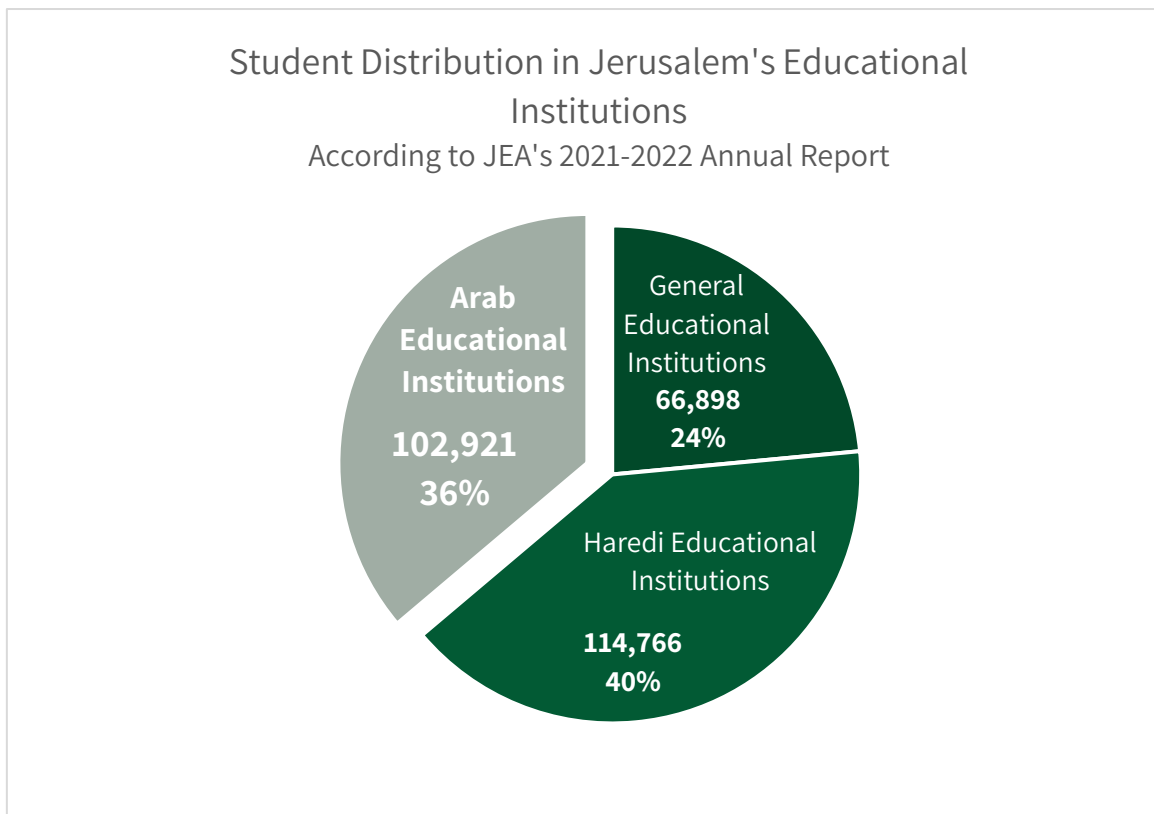
I. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Percentage of Palestinian students in the education system (recognized but unofficial & official) out of the total number of students in Jerusalem	36%
Percentage of Palestinian students studying in the <u>official</u> educational institutions out of the total number of Palestinian students in East Jerusalem	35.2%
Percentage of Palestinian students studying in <u>recognized but unofficial</u> educational institutions	36.8%
“Invisible Children” – number of Palestinian children of compulsory school-age unaccounted for in official municipal data and records	40,963
Percentage of “invisible children” out of the total number of Palestinian school-age children in East Jerusalem	28.6%
Number of additional classrooms needed to serve all school-age children in East Jerusalem	3,517
Number of student dropouts from 1st-11th grades throughout the 2021-2022 school year:	
Boys	1,657
Girls	1,025
Total	2,682
Percentage of Palestinian students studying for <u>Israeli matriculation</u> out of the total number of students in <u>Arab educational institutions</u> in Jerusalem (excluding kindergarten)	16.2%
Percentage of Palestinian students studying for <u>Israeli matriculation</u> out of the <u>total number</u> of Palestinian school-age children in East Jerusalem	12.9%

II. DISTRIBUTION OF PALESTINIAN STUDENTS IN JERUSALEM'S EDUCATION SYSTEM

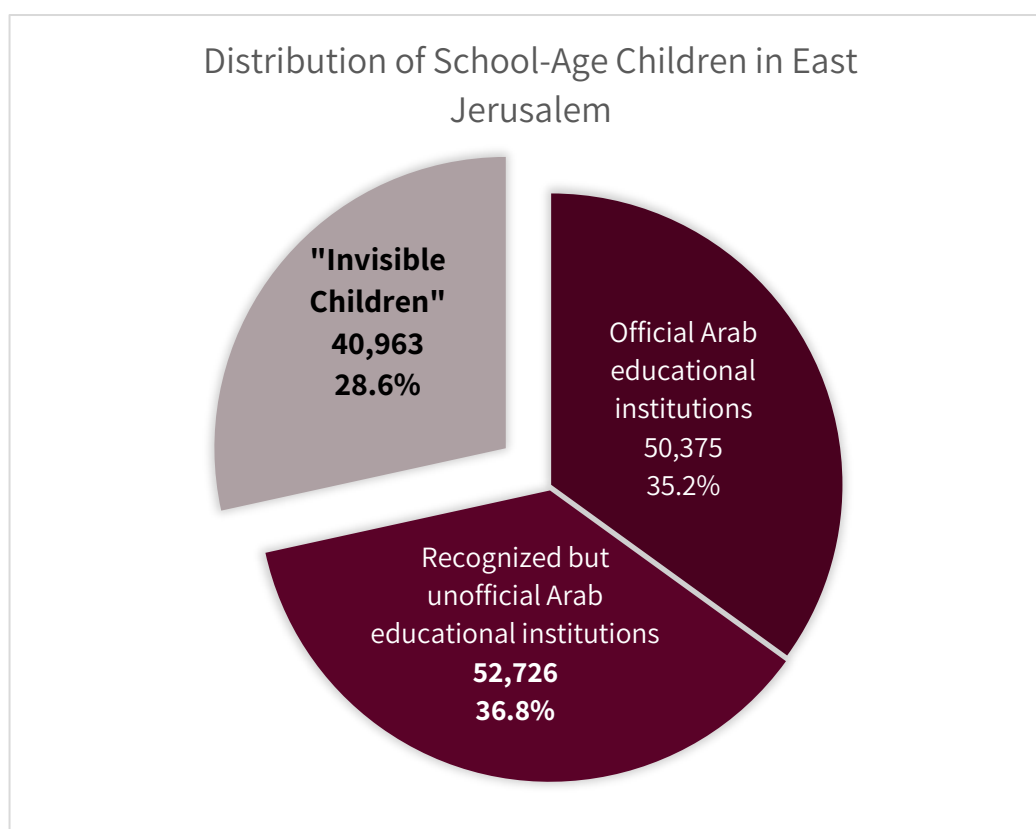
1. Distribution of Students in Jerusalem's Educational Institutions

<i>Per Jerusalem Education Administration (JEA) Data, 2021-2022 (as of July 2022)</i>	Number of Students	Percentage of Students
General Education Schools (state secular & state religious)	66,898	23.5%
Haredi Schools	114,766	40.3%
Arab Schools (recognized but unofficial & official)	102,921	36.2%
Total	284,585	



2. Distribution of Palestinian Students in Jerusalem’s Education System

<i>Per the Jerusalem Municipality’s response to a Freedom of Information Request, July 26, 2022²</i>	Boys	Girls	Total Students	Percentage of Students
Total number of school-age children (age 3-18) in East Jerusalem, per the municipality’s figures	73,942	69,279	143,221	--
Students in official Arab educational institutions	27,364	23,011	50,375	35.2%
Students in recognized but unofficial Arab educational institutions	26,973	25,753	52,726	36.8%
“Invisible children” – Palestinian children of compulsory school-age unaccounted for in official municipal data and records	20,076	20,887	40,963	28.6%



² [Response from the Jerusalem Municipality to a Freedom of Information Request on July 26, 2022 \[Hebrew\]](#)

III. “INVISIBLE CHILDREN”

Findings from the 2019 State Comptroller’s report already noted that the vast number of “invisible children” – school-age children in East Jerusalem whose place of education is unaccounted for by education authorities – is illegal:

These findings the inaction and weakness of the Jerusalem Municipality and the Ministry of Education in locating these children of East Jerusalem in order to provide a basic education ... the Jerusalem Municipality and the Ministry of Education must act without delay in accordance with their legal duty, in order to locate these children’s place of schooling or their location... who are not registered in any educational framework recognized by the authorities.

Moreover, they must establish a database of all children of compulsory school-age in East Jerusalem and create a mechanism for locating unregistered children in the future, as well, to ensure that they receive a basic education.”³

Not only has the situation not been remedied, but it has become worse over the years.

[Per the Jerusalem Municipality’s reply to Ir Amim’s Freedom of Information Request](#), **40,963 children’s educational framework remains unknown, amounting to approximately 29% of school-age children in East Jerusalem**⁴. Up until three years ago, the Jerusalem Municipality’s data in the JEA annual report included the number of children studying in private education institutions run by the Waqf, UNRWA, and others.

Per JEA estimates, 15,380 children studied in private schools over the course of the past academic year.

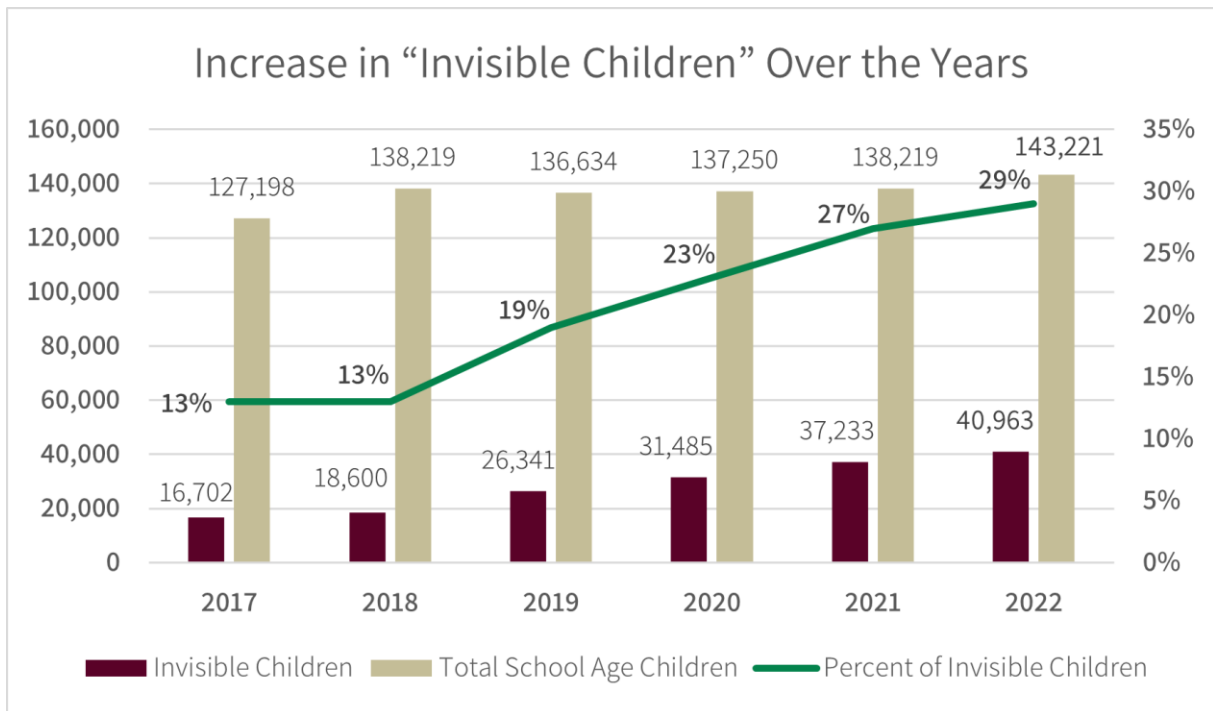
The growing trend in the number of “invisible children” is quite troubling. In light of this growth, the JEA has exacerbated and further violated its duty to monitor all children of compulsory school-age.

³ State Comptroller, [Special Report: Developing and Strengthening the Status of Jerusalem – Part 2](#) (Hebrew), (June 2019), p. 384.

⁴ 12,097 are children 3-6 years of age

“Invisible Children” Over the Years

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Number of Palestinian children of compulsory school-age (age 3-18) in Jerusalem	127,198	138,219	136,634	137,250	138,219	143,221
Number of Palestinian “invisible children” of compulsory school-age, per the Municipality’s lower calculation	16,702	18,600	26,341	31,485	37,233	40,963
Percentage of “invisible children” from among all Palestinian children of compulsory school-age in Jerusalem	13%	13%	19%	23%	27%	29%



*Number of “invisible children” per the lower number in municipality’s calculation

** Total number of Palestinian children of compulsory school-age in East Jerusalem

***Percentage of “invisible children” from among all Palestinian children of compulsory school-age in Jerusalem

IV. STUDENT DROPOUT RATE

[Per the Jerusalem Municipality’s reply to Ir Amim’s Freedom of Information Request](#), throughout the course of the school year 1,657 boys and 1,025 girls dropped out of school. **This amounts to 4% of the boys studying in the 1st-11th grades and 3% of the girls studying in the 1st-11th grades.** This enormous number can’t be overstated. Altogether, a total of 2,682 children dropped out of school during one academic year.

In a rough calculation, this adds up to **nearly 100 classes of students.**

These numbers indicate an increase in boys who dropped out compared to the previous year, when a total of 1,405 boys and 1,154 girls dropped out of school.

As noted in the key recommendations section of the State Comptroller’s Report:

In view of the scale of school dropouts in East Jerusalem, the Ministry of Education and the Jerusalem Municipality must significantly increase activities related to tackling the issue of school dropouts in East Jerusalem. (p. 346).

The JEA reports that 83 social workers, the vast majority of whom hold part-time salaried positions of 75% or more, were placed in official schools within the Arab education system over the course of the past three years. Additionally, throughout the 2021-2022 school year, 1,200 hours of treatment by educational psychologists were allocated to East Jerusalem. Furthermore, the JEA reports that within the framework of Government Decision 3790, 10 youth development social worker positions were added, and that throughout the coming school year, a significant aspect of social workers' roles at all official schools will be directed towards preventing dropouts.

It is evident that efforts are being made by the Jerusalem Municipality towards mitigating student dropouts; yet, in light of the fact that dropout rates remain very high and given the severe classroom shortage facing the East Jerusalem education system, the Municipality cannot solely focus on official schools if they want to effectively lower the dropout rate.

V. THE CLASSROOM SHORTAGE IN EAST JERUSALEM

3. The Classroom Shortage Grows – 3,517 Classrooms Lacking in East Jerusalem

Number of Missing Classrooms in East Jerusalem – Ahead of the 2022-2023 School Year	
The municipality’s assessment of the number of missing classrooms per its response to the conditional order (HCJ 6183/16) dated May 25, 2022 ⁵ (see below)	2,000
Additional classrooms required to accommodate “invisible children” ⁶	1,517
Total Missing Classrooms in East Jerusalem	3,517

On June 27, 2018, Ir Amim submitted a [request to join a legal petition submitted by the Jerusalem Parents Association](#) concerning the classroom shortage in Jerusalem [as an amicus curiae](#) (HCJ 6183/16).⁷ As noted in the request, thorough assessments that Ir Amim carried out revealed substantial discrepancies between the municipality’s declarations within the framework of the petition on construction plans for classrooms in the Arab sector of East Jerusalem, and its own official data. **We sought to make clear that the obstacle toward classroom construction in East Jerusalem is not budgetary in nature, as the municipality sought to claim before the state.** On September 13, 2021, a hearing was held regarding the petition, in which Ir Amim insisted on presenting our position. In short, the court consequently issued a conditional order ordering the respondents to reply to the petition.

⁵ Despite repeated requests, this information was not provided as required in response to the freedom of information request

⁶ Per an average of 27 students per classroom.

⁷ HCJ 6183/16 The Parents’ Organization for the School System in Jerusalem et al. v. the Ministry of Education, et al.

Ir Amim claimed that prior discussions that took place between the Ministry of Education and the Jerusalem Municipality under the direction of the court, fell extremely short of examining the factors and obstacles that led to a classroom deficit in East Jerusalem, as opposed to the classroom shortage also prevalent in West Jerusalem. Ir Amim made clear that so long as these unique obstacles are not discussed, the discrimination and gaps in educational services will only intensify. The primary obstacles that were not addressed in any capacity include the central issue of discrimination in urban planning policies in East Jerusalem, and a minimal allocation in these plans for the construction of public buildings. The municipality itself responded in a document presented to the court regarding these issues, saying “the amount of land [public lands for building] is less than half the conventional amount of land for such residential areas.” Nevertheless, none of the respondents’ replies to the conditional court order reference the matter of planning.

In the municipality’s response to the conditional order dated May 25, 2022, the municipality candidly admits that the construction it has carried out in East Jerusalem is insufficient and that “the classroom gap still stands at approximately 2,000 classrooms... there has been no genuine reduction in the classroom gap.” Per the municipality, “the classroom gap in East Jerusalem may be bridged within approximately six years on the condition that the state will indeed grant budgetary authorization for each classroom available for budgeting.”

In the state’s response to the conditional order on July 25, 2022, it solely adheres to the budgetary aspects of the lack of classrooms, without addressing any other factors as listed above. The state also presents Government Decision 1520 for the “Allocation of Land to Establish an Educational Campus in Jerusalem – Kufr ‘Aqab,” as part of its efforts to improve education in East Jerusalem. However, a closer examination of the Decision reveals the true motives: a high school already exists in the area and serves the local residents of Kufr Aqab and the Qalandiya refugee camp - some of whom are students within the Jerusalem municipality. The state therefore appears to be focusing on the area in question in a struggle over legitimacy with a UN agency. Even then, this Decision is conditional upon the creation of classes that follow the Israeli matriculation curriculum as opposed to the more favored

Jordanian curriculum. That is to say, the government and this decision are not genuinely seeking to increase the total number of classes and reduce gaps in the classroom shortage, rather it is making use of ulterior political motives to condition needed improvements regarding education.

In its response to the conditional order, the state also posits that proof of its efforts is evident in Resolution 3790 for the Reduction of Socio-Economic Gaps and Economic Development in East Jerusalem. Yet this resolution does not directly refer to constructing classrooms, but rather solely to the physical development of educational institutions that teach the Israeli curriculum - studied by a minority of students, as indicated in the graph below. The Decision enables buildings to be rented, again only for educational institutions that teach the Israeli curriculum. The municipality reports that nine new buildings have been rented out over the past four years for the purpose of opening schools. Furthermore, in Ir Amim's monitoring of the implementation of Decision 3790 it has been revealed that despite the government's claim regarding the construction of roads to support educational institutions within the framework of the Decision, reports that previously appeared in government statements have since disappeared from later government reports on the Decision's implementation.

The state further notes that "to the best of the respondents' knowledge, places where classrooms are yet to be built were addressed through rented buildings and the allocation of portable structures." In doing so, it blatantly disregards three important data points: many students' transitions to recognized but unofficial educational institutions as a result of the absence of classrooms in the municipality's official educational frameworks; the existence of over 40,000 "invisible children"; and school dropouts in shocking proportions.

4. The Pace of Classroom Construction – 2001-2022

Classrooms in the Construction Pipeline						
At start of school year	Completed	Under construction	Planning and Implementation	Facing expropriation or legal complications	Planning yet to begin	Total in all stages
2001-09/2009	257					
09/2010	24					
09/2011	7	89	193	86		375
09/2012	32	85	173	84		374
09/2013	61	75	110	147		393
09/2014	57	56	157	108		378
09/2015	38	44	168	259		509
09/2016	42	46	124	245		457
09/2017	32	35	266	131		464
09/2018	35	444		355		834
09/2019	44	108	26	752	382	1312
09/2020	6	198	621	85	409	1319
09/2021	158	198	639	85	409	1489
08/2022	65		1076			1141

Total classrooms completed
858

VI. NUMBER OF STUDENTS STUDYING THE ISRAELI CURRICULUM

According to the [municipality's response to a previous freedom of information request from Ir Amim](#), throughout the 2019-2020 school year the number of students studying the Israeli curriculum stood at 18,953: 13,739 students in official educational institutions, and 5,214 in recognized but unofficial institutions. In 2020-2021, another response from the municipality [to Ir Amim's freedom of information request](#) from then indicated that only 11,776 students were studying the Israeli curriculum (9,375 in official schools, and 2,401 in unofficial recognized schools). Throughout the most recent 2021-2022 school year, the [municipality's response to Ir Amim's freedom of information request](#) indicated that 13,265 students studied the Israeli curriculum (11,520 in official schools, and 1,745 in recognized schools).

Number of Students Studying the Israeli Curriculum

	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022
Total number of students in recognized and official schools (excluding kindergartens)	91,354	77,003	80,208	81,780
Total number of students studying the Israeli curriculum in recognized and official schools	7,376	18,953	11,776	13,265
Percentage of students studying the Israeli curriculum in recognized and official schools	8.1%	24.6%	14.7%	16.2%

In [Government Decision 3790 for the Reduction of Socio-Economic Gaps and Economic Development in East Jerusalem](#), **over 43% of the budget** designated for education in East Jerusalem (approximately 193 million NIS out of 445 million NIS) is explicitly conditioned on schools transitioning to or already studying the Israeli curriculum.

Throughout the first year of the Decision's implementation, the data seemingly indicated a large jump in the number of students who shifted towards the Israeli curriculum, yet subsequent data seems to indicate that this was an anomaly.

Regardless, data from the past academic year that was completed within the framework of Government Decision 3790 (2021-2022) makes evident that even with the intensive budgetary investment, **the number of students studying the Israeli curriculum increased by less than 1.8%** - constituting a mere 16.2% of the total number of students in recognized but unofficial and official Arab educational institutions, and a mere 12.9% of the total number of school-age children in East Jerusalem.

That is to say that despite the significant efforts that Israel has invested in biasing schools toward the Israeli curriculum, the vast majority of students continue to study the Palestinian curriculum.

This report makes evident, therefore, that over 87% of children in East Jerusalem will continue to contend with the difficult circumstances of education within a severely neglected system; yet the much-needed financial investment from Government Decision 3790 will continue to focus on shifting students to the Israeli matriculation curriculum thereby avoiding contending with the real issues at heart.

Instead, it would be more beneficial for the majority of these educational resources to be devoted to resolving the central issues of classroom shortages, high dropout rates, and staggering numbers of "invisible children".



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Ir Amim thanks the organizations, countries, and people that support its work toward a future equitable agreement for Jerusalem. In accordance with draconian laws intended to stifle the critical work of human rights organizations, Ir Amim reports that we receive more than 50% of its funding from the civil society and peace-building budgets of foreign entities. The list of these future-minded entities can be found at the Israeli Registrar of Associations.

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