

State of Access to Israeli Government Archives

Data Sheet, January 2026

Background

Akevot Institute monitors access to records kept in government archives on a yearly basis. This data sheet, which follows previous data sheets published in 2017 and 2023, presents the current scope of access to materials kept in the major governmental archives. The figures are sourced from replies provided by the Prime Minister's Office and Ministry of Defense to requests under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA).¹

The Israeli Archives Law, which stipulates the obligation to store material in government archives and regulates how it is presented to the public, sets the principle that: "any person may consult the archival materials deposited in the Archive." Nevertheless, current figures received by Akevot Institute with regards to effective access to archival records kept in the major governmental archives – the Israel State Archives (ISA) and the IDF and Defense Establishment Archives (IDEA) - **show the overwhelming majority of these archival records are still entirely inaccessible to the public.**

State of Access to Archive Files

Of the roughly 17 million files kept by the Israel State Archives and the IDF and Defense Establishment Archives² - 755,171 files (4.06% of the total number of files) are accessible to the public.³

¹ The data presented here concern only document files and not other types of records found in these archives, such as video and audio recordings, photographs, etc.

² These are the two government archives that provide services to the public. The figure does not include the archives of the Shin Bet, the Mossad, the Israel Atomic Energy Commission and the Israel Institute for Biological Research, most of which are completely closed to the public (Following the High Court ruling in the Hazkani case [HCJ 15/19 Dr. Shai Hazkani et al. v. Shin Bet Archives and et al.], the Shin Bet Archives began providing very limited services to the public via the ISA). The figure also excludes the many archival records kept by various governmental and public bodies that have not been handed over to the ISA. For example, the Ministry of Justice stores 4.5 million archival files that are entirely inaccessible to the public.

³ Discounting personal files (files related to specific individuals) kept in the IDEA, 55% of all files stored in the archive, the figure stands at 11.25%. Unless otherwise stated, figures related to the ISA in this document were sourced from the response provided by the PMO to an application made by Akevot Institute under the FOIA, dated December 20, 2025; figures related to the IDEA in this document were

Of the 3,685,776 files⁴ registered in the **Israel State Archives**, 700,645 have been fully or partially declassified (19% of the registered files). However, the scope of files that are accessible to the public is lower: The ISA website provides access to 639,279 scanned files (about 17% of the registered files).⁵

In general, the positive trend with respect to granting public access to ISA materials (declassification) noted in Akevot's previous data sheet is continuing: To illustrate, in 2017, the proportion of files accessible to the public was about 5% of all files stored in the ISA.⁶ Still, the proportion of publicly available files in the ISA remains low, less than 20% of the files stored in the ISA.

The scope of access to materials held in the **IDF and Defense Establishment Archives**, the largest government archive in Israel remains close to zero. This archive contains 13,422,974 files,⁷ of which 54,526 are fully or partially accessible to the public, constituting 0.41% of all files in the archive, or 0.91% of the files that are not personal files.⁸ This means that about 99% of the document files kept in the IDF and Defense Establishment Archives are still inaccessible to the public. According to information provided to Akevot Institute by the IDEA, in 2024, only 1,515 files were reviewed for the purpose of providing public access, of which 1,452 files were opened in full or in part.⁹

sourced from the response provided by the Ministry of Defense to an application made by Akevot Institute under the FOIA, dated November 24, 2025.

⁴ The ISA storage facilities contain an unknown number of files that have not been registered in the Archive's systems.

⁵ In November 2023, the ISA website, the main tool for accessing records that have been opened for public access, was hacked by parties described as "pro-Palestinian hackers." According to a [report in Haaretz](#), some of the data stored on the site was deleted, and user information kept on the site was leaked. The hacked site was taken offline and, a few weeks later, replaced with a temporary site. According to an [undated notice on the ISA website](#) (Hebrew), the current site "is intended to provide only basic services," and a new site was supposed to go online in two phases, in November and December 2025. In late December 2025, shortly before this report's publication, Phase 1 of the new site was launched.

⁶ See, [State of Access to Israeli Government Archives](#), Data Sheet, September 2017, Akevot Institute; [State of Access to Israeli Government Archives Data Sheet](#), May 2023.

⁷ Of these, 4,644,011 files (35% of all files in the archive) are subject files (files of correspondence and various documents on specific topics), 1,365,712 files (10%) are case files (for example, files of commissions of inquiry, Military Police investigation files, and military court files), and 7,413,251 files (55%) are personal files (personal files of soldiers, prisoners, candidates for military service, and the like).

⁸ The IDEA maintains that case files and personal files have no restricted access period and are, as a rule, sealed in perpetuity unless a competent authority orders them opened.

⁹ It should be noted that in addition to document files, the IDEA also reviews maps, leaflets, videos, audio tapes, and catalogue titles for declassification using external consultants.

Files Remaining Sealed Past the Restricted Access Period

The Access Regulations,¹⁰ first enacted in 1966 and replaced in 2010 with a new version that has since been amended several times, regulate public access to archival records stored in the ISA and its branches. The Access Regulations stipulate periods of time during which access to the records is restricted (Restricted Access Period, RPA) and provide for a procedure for removing the restriction (declassification), whether on the archive's own initiative or prompted by a request from the public. The Access Regulations currently allow for Restricted Access Periods ranging from 15 to 90 years, depending on the nature and origin of specific materials.¹¹ Once the RPA expires, archives are expected to open the records for public access without prompting.

Nevertheless, contrary to common perception, archival records are not fully confidential even during the Restricted Access Period. An archive (or representatives of the government bodies that deposited the records there) may consider a specific request to access archival records and open them for public access if there is no pertinent impediment to doing so, according to the guidelines set forth in Sections 8 and 9 of the Access Regulations.

Despite this, the data show that **many files remain closed for public access past their restricted access period:**

1,323,379 files registered in the ISA are still sealed, despite the expiration of their restricted access period. They make up about 36% of the files in the archive.

1,334,971 of the subject files kept in the IDEA remain sealed despite the expiration of their restricted access period. They make up about 29% of the subject files.

¹⁰ Archives Regulations (access to archival material held in the archive) 2010 (hereinafter: Access Regulations), enacted pursuant to the Archive Law 1955.

¹¹ The default restricted access period is 15 years from the time the material was produced, unless the origin or content of the archival record in question is restricted under Schedule 1 of the Access Regulations. Several examples of restricted access periods stipulated in Schedule 1 of the Access Regulations: 20 years for transcripts of confidential meetings of Knesset committees; 25 for "foreign relations" material created by government ministries; 30 for archival records produced by the Israel Police, the Israel Prison Service, the Ministry of Public Security, as well as some material produced by the IDF and the Ministry of Defense. Security Cabinet decisions and transcripts are under a 50-year restricted access period, as is "material concerning security matters" produced by the Ministry of Defense, the IDF, and other agencies. Material vaguely described as "private and personal documents" is under a 70-year restricted access period. Raw intelligence material was put under a 90-year restricted access period, as was material produced by security agencies: the Shin Bet, the Mossad, and the Israel Institute for Biological Research. An identical restricted access period was stipulated for archival records produced by the Israel Atomic Energy Commission, and the "research facilities" under its purview, as well as archival records concerning it kept in other institutions. The Minister of Defense was given powers to secretly list additional security agencies and IDF units whose archival records would be put under a 90-year restricted access period.

State of Access to Catalogues

Of the roughly 17 million file titles kept by the ISA and the IDEA, **no more than 4,611,882 (about 26%) are listed** in the archives' publicly accessible online catalogues. Despite significant improvement in the scope of public access to the lists of titles included in the ISA, and particularly, in the IDEA, catalogues, the titles of about 74% of the files in these archives are still not available for public access. A catalogue is an archive's basic search tool: it is the full list of items found in it, at all levels of documentation, files, file series, divisions, collections, etc. A good catalogue informs consulting parties as to what materials can and cannot be found in the archive, what materials are missing, and whether or not materials are restricted, for what reason and for how long. **Publicly accessible catalogues are a necessary condition for proper access to information even when, and perhaps because, such a significant proportion of the materials are closed and inaccessible.**

The ISA allows access to the titles of 1,985,139 files - about 54% of the 3.7 million files registered in it.

The IDEA allows access to the titles of 2,626,743 files - about 44% of the roughly six million subject and case files stored in it.¹²

Conclusion

The figures Akevot Institute received from the ISA and the IDEA indicate the trends we identified in the previous data sheet, released in May 2023, are continuing. **The rate of declassification at the IDEA remains particularly low, and the proportion of publicly accessible materials is infinitesimal.** This means that, in practical terms, Israel's largest archive is inaccessible to researchers and fails to provide adequate services to parties interested in using it. Nevertheless, there has been a marked increase in the declassification of titles in the archive's catalogue.

In the ISA, the number of files listed on the archive's system has increased by about 23%, yet only 17.3% of the files kept in the archive are available and accessible to the public. About a third of the document files in the ISA remain sealed, despite the expiration of the Restricted Access Period assigned to them by the Archive Regulations. Additionally, the slow processing of declassification, spanning months and sometimes several years, also prevents researchers from basing their work on materials located in the government archives.

Put together, these make Israel's two largest archives nearly irrelevant to research and preclude the public from relying on knowledge found in governmental archives to advance public, political, artistic and cultural discourse - all of which are essential to a liberal and democratic society.

¹² The number of listed titles is about 19.5% of the total 14 million files at the ISA and IDEA.