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CASH AND TREASURY MANAGEMENT COUNTRY REPORT

ISRAEL

Executive Summary

Banking

The Israeli central bank is the Bank of Israel. Bank supervision is performed by the Bank of Israel's Banking Supervision Department.

Israel applies central bank reporting requirements. All transactions between residents and non-residents are reported to the Bank of Israel.

Resident entities are permitted to hold fully convertible domestic and foreign currency bank accounts domestically and outside Israel. Non-resident entities are permitted to hold fully convertible domestic and foreign currency bank accounts within Israel.

The banking system is dominated by Bank Hapoalim and Bank Leumi le-Israel. There are also another 16 commercial banks in operation, one non-bank financial institution plus five branches of foreign banks.

Payments

Israel has three principal payment systems: the RTGS system (Zahav), the Banks' Automated Clearing House (Masav) and the Banks' Paper-based Clearing House (BCH).

The increased use of electronic and internet banking has led to growth in the use of electronic transfers and direct debits. Card payments are increasing rapidly, especially in the retail sector. Checks remain commonly used.

Liquidity Management

Israel-based companies have access to a variety of short-term funding options. There is also a range of short-term investment instruments available.

Both cash concentration and notional pooling are used by companies in Israel to manage company and group liquidity.

Trade Finance

Israel has established free trade arrangements with the European Union (EU), the European Free Trade Association (EFTA), Mercosur (a common market comprising Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay), the USA, Panama, Colombia, Canada, Mexico, Egypt, Russia, Jordan, Vietnam, Sri Lanka and Turkey.

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PNC's International Services

PNC can bring together treasury management, foreign exchange, trade finance and credit capabilities to support your international needs in a coordinated and collaborative way.

International Funds Transfers

International Funds Transfers to over 130 countries in USD and foreign currency can be accessed through PINACLE®, PNC's top-rated, online corporate banking portal.

Multicurrency Accounts

Set up demand deposit accounts that hold foreign currency instead of U.S. dollars. These accounts offer a simple and integrated way to manage and move money denominated in more than 30 currencies, including offshore Chinese Renminbi. You can easily view deposit and withdrawal details through PINACLE.

PNC Bank Canada Branch ("PNC Canada")

PNC Bank, through its full service branch in Canada, can help you succeed in this important market. PNC Canada offers a full suite of products including payables, receivables, lending, and specialized financing to help streamline cross border operations.

Multibank Services

PNC's Multibank Services provide you with balances and activity for all your accounts held with PNC and other financial institutions around the world. PINACLE's Information Reporting module can give you a quick snapshot of your international cash position, including USD equivalent value, using indicative exchange rates for all your account balances. You can also initiate Multibank Transfer Requests (MT101s), and reduce the time and expense associated with subscribing to a number of balance reporting and transaction systems.

Establish accounts in foreign countries

Establishing good banking relationships in the countries where you do business can simplify your international transactions. PNC offers two service models to help you open and manage accounts at other banks in countries outside the United States.

- PNC Gateway Direct comprises an increasing number of banks located in many European countries and parts of Latin America. PNC's team will serve as a

point of contact for setting up the account helping with any language and time barriers and will continue to serve as an intermediary between you and the bank you select. You can access reporting and make transfers via PINACLE.

- PNC's Gateway Referral service can connect you to a correspondent banking network that comprises more than 1,200 relationships in 115 countries.

Foreign Exchange Risk Management

PNC's senior foreign exchange consultants can help you develop a risk management strategy to mitigate the risk of exchange rate swings so you can more effectively secure pricing and costs, potentially increasing profits and reducing expenses.

Trade Services

PNC's Import, Export, and Standby Letters of Credit can deliver security and convenience, along with the backing of an institution with unique strengths in the international banking arena. PNC also provides Documentary Collections services to both importers and exporters, helping to reduce payment risk and control the exchange of shipping documents. We assign an experienced international trade expert to each account, so you always know your contact at PNC and receive best-in-class service. And PNC delivers it all to your computer through advanced technology, resulting in fast and efficient transaction initiation and tracking.

Trade Finance

For more than 30 years, PNC has worked with the Export-Import Bank of the United States (Ex-Im Bank) and consistently ranks as a top originator of loans backed by the Ex-Im Bank both by dollar volume and number of transactions.¹

Economic Updates

Receive regular Economic Updates from our senior economist by going to pnc.com/economicreports.

(1) Information compiled from Freedom of Information Act resources.

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Financial Environment

Country Information

Geographical Information

Capital	Jerusalem Although Jerusalem has been proclaimed by Israel as its official capital since 1950, most countries maintain their embassies at Tel Aviv.
Area	20,770 km ²
Population	8.52 million
Official languages	Hebrew, Arabic (officially used by Arab minority)
Political leaders	Head of state — President Reuven Rivlin (since July 24, 2014) Head of government — Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu (since March 31, 2009).

Business Information

Currency (+ SWIFT code)	New Israeli shekel (ILS)
Business/Banking hours	08:30–18:30 (Sun–Thu), 08:30–14:00 (Fri)
Bank holidays	2019 — March 22, April 20, 26, May 9, June 9, August 11, September 30, October 1, 8, 9, 14, 21 2020 — March 11, April 9, 15, 29, May 29, July 30, September 19, 20, 27, 28, October 3, 10 Source: www.goodbusinessday.com
International dialing code	+ 972

Country Credit Rating

FitchRatings last rated Israel on April 17, 2018 for issuer default as:

Term	Issuer Default Rating
Short	F1 +
Long	A +
Long-term rating outlook	Stable

Source: www.fitchratings.com, January 2019.

Economic Statistics

Economics Table

		2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
GDP per capita	(USD)	33,760	37,392	38,498	36,724	38,828
GDP	(ILS billion)	1,001	1,056	1,094	1,150	1,223
GDP	(USD billion)	260	292	306	296	318
GDP volume growth*	(%)	+ 2.9	+ 3.3	+ 2.6	Ø	+ 3.4
BoP (goods, services & income) as % GDP		- 2.5	+ 0.3	+ 0.8	+ 1.8	+ 0.9
Consumer inflation*	(%)	+ 1.7	+ 1.5	+ 0.5	- 0.6	- 0.5
Population	(million)	7.69	7.82	7.94	8.06	8.19
Unemployment	(%)	6.8	6.2	5.9	5.3	4.8
Interest rate (lending rate)[†]	(%)	5.227	4.195	3.587	3.449	3.484
Exchange rate[‡]	(ILS per USD)[†]	3.8559	3.6108	3.5779	3.8868	3.8406

		2017		2018		
		Q4	Year	Q1	Q2	Q3
GDP per capita	(USD)	-	42,167	-	-	-
GDP	(ILS billion)	-	1,263	-	-	-
GDP	(USD billion)	-	351	-	-	-
GDP volume growth*	(%)	+ 3.4	+ 3.5	+ 4.5	+ 4.1	NA
BoP (goods, services & income) as % GDP		-	+ 0.8	-	-	-
Consumer inflation*	(%)	+ 0.3	+ 0.2	+ 0.2	+ 0.7	+ 1.3
Population	(million)	-	8.32	-	-	-
Unemployment	(%)	4.2	4.2	3.6	3.9	4.3
Interest rate (lending rate)[†]	(%)	3.494	3.497	3.513	3.460	3.434
Exchange rate[‡]	(ILS per USD)[†]	3.510	3.600	3.462	3.561	3.635

*Year on year. †Period average. ‡Market rate.

Source: International Financial Statistics, IMF, January 2019 and 2018 Yearbook.

Sectoral Contribution as a % of GDP

Agriculture - 2.4%

Industry - 26.5%

Services - 69.5% (2017 estimate)

Major Export Markets

USA (28.8%), UK (8.2%), Hong Kong (7.0%), China (5.4%), Belgium (4.5%)

Major Import Sources

USA (11.7%), China (9.5%), Switzerland (8.0%), Germany (6.8%), UK (6.2%), Belgium (5.9%), Netherlands (4.2%), Turkey (4.2%), Italy (4.0%)

Political and Economic Background

Economics

Interest Rate Management Policy

Israel's independent central bank, the Bank of Israel, is responsible for monetary policy and, through its monetary committee, sets interest rates to achieve the goal of price stability. It has set a policy targeting a long-term inflation rate of between 1% and 3%. When setting the interest rate, the Bank of Israel seeks to manage expected inflation over the next year.

In December the Bank of Israel raised its benchmark interest rate to 0.25% from a record low 0.1%.

Foreign Exchange Rate Management Policy

The new Israeli shekel (ILS) is a floating currency determined by market forces. The Bank of Israel has a policy of non-intervention in the currency market, although it retains the power to intervene if it deems intervention to be necessary. The conditions have been widened to include when changes in the exchange rate of the shekel are inconsistent with underlying economic conditions or when Bank of Israel feels the foreign exchange markets are not functioning properly.

Major Economic Issues

Israel's economy remains strong despite preliminary figures suggesting its economy expanded at an annualized rate of 3.2% in 2018, the slowest rate of growth since 2015. Exports, which account for nearly a third of the economy, grew 4% (5% in 2017), consumer spending rose 4.1% and government spending 4%. Investment in fixed assets increased 2.7%, down from 3% in 2017. Israel's 2018 budget deficit was 2.9% of GDP, as predicted. However, with a 3.1% GDP growth rate forecast for 2019, it is likely the budget deficit will rise to 3.5% of GDP.

Despite Israel enjoying GDP per capita of USD 42,120, more than 20% of the country's population, in particular Arab-Israeli families and ultra-orthodox Jews, live below the poverty line (Israel has the highest rate of poverty of any OECD country). Recognizing the extent of the problem, the government has launched its Leading Change program aimed at reducing the social divide between Palestinian neighbourhoods in East Jerusalem and the Jewish western part of the city. The program will invest USD 560 million in education, infrastructure and helping Palestinian women enter the work force.

Politics

Government Structure

Israel is a parliamentary democracy.

The president is head of state but plays a largely ceremonial role.

The prime minister is the head of government.

The government is based in Jerusalem.

Executive

Executive power belongs to the government, which is headed by the prime minister. The prime minister forms a government with the approval of the Knesset.

The current government is headed by Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu. Mr. Netanyahu became Prime Minister in March following the February 2009 elections.

Legislature

Israel has a unicameral legislature, the 120-member Knesset.

Members are directly elected to represent single-member constituencies via simple majority voting. Elections to the Knesset must be held at least every four years. The next legislative election must be held by 2019.

International memberships

Israel is a member of the Bank for International Settlements (BIS), the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), which Israel joined in May 2010.

Major Political Issues

Since its creation in 1948 in the wake of the Second World War, Israel has perpetually been the center of conflict within the Middle East. Israel's politics remains dominated by the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. Relations with neighboring countries are also difficult to manage. The UN has accused Israel of imposing an 'apartheid regime' of racial discrimination against Palestinian people. More recently, the parliament passed a law enabling the expulsion of Palestinians from Jerusalem and agreed the terms of the Basic Law which defines Israel as 'the nation-state of the Jewish people'.

The opening of the US embassy in Jerusalem in May 2018 drew protests from the UN among other nation states. Prime Minister Netanyahu, who has not publicly endorsed the idea of a two-state solution, has appealed to the EU to join the US in recognizing Jerusalem as Israel's capital, a suggestion the EU has rebuffed. The EU has instead spoken of the need for Jerusalem to be the capital for both Israel and Palestine, and has assured Palestinian president, Mahmoud Abbas, it supported his ambition to have East Jerusalem as capital of a Palestinian state. Peace talks between Israel and Palestine have stalled.

Iran's nuclear weapons program and its president's anti-Israel rhetoric remain a threat to Israeli security. Israel is opposed to the Iran nuclear deal struck in 2016 and the lifting of economic sanctions against the country and recent protests in Iran have only heightened tensions between the two countries. In May 2018, the USA withdrew from the Iran nuclear deal and reimposed sanctions. Israel has increased its use of airstrikes against Iranian targets in Syria based on evidence that the country plans to establish a military presence in Syria after the war ends. Israel fears that a planned withdrawal of US troops from Syria may increase the risk of war with Iran.

In December 2018, the government agreed to hold early elections. The governing coalition (the government holds a slim majority: 61 seats in the 120 member parliament) has been split on a number of issues for many months, including the government's decision to use a tax surplus to further reduce corporate and income tax and VAT rather than to invest in social services. (Income inequality in Israel is ranked third in the world behind Mexico and the USA and Netanyahu's government is accused of doing little to address this.) In December, the government lost a vote on a new law extending the military draft to ultra-Orthodox men which subsequently triggered the announcement for early elections. If Netanyahu secures victory in the elections, it will mark his fifth term in office.

Israeli police have recommended indicting Mr. Netanyahu for bribery and breach of trust. A decision is expected to recommend the prime minister be indicted. If indicted, it is likely the prime minister will have to resign his position. In June 2018, his wife Sara Netanyahu was indicted on fraud charges. Her trial began in October.

Taxation

Resident/Non-resident

A company is considered resident if it is either incorporated in, or controlled and managed from Israel.

A foreign corporation managed and controlled by a new Israeli resident or a senior returning resident (i.e. an individual who spent ten years abroad) generally will not be classified as an Israeli resident company for a period of ten years.

Tax Authorities

Ministry of Finance, Israel Tax Authority (ITA).

Tax Year/Filing

The tax year begins in January. Certain companies, including subsidiaries of foreign companies, may apply for a special tax year but the application will only be approved in special circumstances.

Companies must file an annual tax return no later than five months following the end of the tax year (an extension to file may be obtained in certain circumstances). The tax authorities determine advance tax payments, with some taxpayers required to pay tax according to their monthly turnover.

The filing of a consolidated return generally is not permitted in Israel and each company in a group is required to file its own return. However, if certain conditions are satisfied, qualified 'industrial companies' may file a consolidated tax return.

Companies are required to make monthly advance payments of tax based on a fixed ratio of the company's turnover. Alternatively, a company may make ten monthly payments, based on its previous year's tax liability, starting in the second month of the tax year. The balance of any tax payable is due at the beginning of the following tax year, linked to the consumer price index, and bears interest at a rate of 4%.

Corporate Taxation

Resident companies are subject to tax on their worldwide income with a credit granted for overseas taxes paid. Non-resident companies are only liable to tax in Israel on Israeli-sourced income.

The corporate income tax rate is 23%.

An Israeli company classified as a preferred enterprise is taxed depending on where its facilities are located (7.5% if located in "Area A" and 16% if located elsewhere).

An Israeli company classified as an approved or benefited enterprise is entitled to a reduced tax rate of between 0% and 25%, with the period of benefits depending on where the company's facilities are located and whether certain conditions are satisfied. The benefits will be revoked if profits deriving from the benefited income are distributed.

An Israeli company classified as a preferred technological enterprise is entitled to a reduced rate of 12% (7.5% if its facilities are located in Area A) on technological earnings. Special preferred technological enterprises are entitled to a reduced tax rate of 6% on technological earnings.

Qualified companies may be eligible for both reduced corporate tax rates and grants from the investment center.

There are no basic differences in the tax regime as applied to different forms of business organisations. However, partnerships are transparent for tax purposes.

There is no surtax or alternative minimum tax.

Trading or business losses may be offset against income from any source in the same year. Losses may be carried forward indefinitely to be offset against business income and business capital gains. Losses may not be carried back.

Various programs are available, e.g. foreign investment incentives (approved enterprise, various tracks), a holding company regime and R&D incentives.

Advance Ruling Availability

The Israeli Tax Authorities (ITA) are authorized by law to provide advanced tax rulings on all tax matters (income tax, VAT, land-betterment tax and encouragement laws).

Advanced tax rulings may be given in an agreement with the taxpayer or without such an agreement. Taxpayers can only make an appeal against tax rulings that were given without an agreement.

After filing a request for an advanced tax ruling, the taxpayer cannot withdraw the request without the approval of the Commissioner. Generally, the ITA will be committed to its tax rulings unless they were based on false or incomplete information.

Withholding Tax (Subject to Tax Treaties)

Payments to:	Interest	Dividends	Royalties	Other income	Branch Remittances
Resident companies	23%, unless a withholding tax approval is required	None/23%	0%/20%/30%	0%/20%/30%	NA
Non-resident companies	0%/23%	4%/5%/20%/25%/30%	23%	23%	15%

There is no withholding tax on dividends paid to resident companies so long as distribution is made out of corporate taxed income.

Corporate income tax (23%) will be imposed if the recipient of the interest is a "body of persons," although the rate may be reduced under a tax treaty. A 0% withholding tax applies to interest on certain bonds.

Dividends paid to a non-controlling foreign resident (i.e. one that holds less than 10% of the Israeli company) are subject to a 25% withholding tax; otherwise, the rate is 30%. These rates may be reduced under a tax treaty or incentives regime.

Dividends distributed by a preferred enterprise are taxed at a 20% rate. Dividends distributed by an approved/benefited enterprise generally are taxed at a 15% rate if the distribution is made from profits attributable to the approved enterprise, or at a reduced rate of 4% on the alternative incentive track (the 'Ireland Track').

Tax Treaties/Tax Information Exchange Agreements (TIEAs)

Israel has exchange of information relationships with 55 jurisdictions through 55 double tax treaties and no TIEAs (www.eoi-tax.org, January 2019).

Transfer Pricing

The transfer pricing rules, which are based on the OECD guidelines, apply to transactions between an Israeli resident and its related non-resident. A hierarchy of transfer pricing methodologies applies, with preference given to transaction-based methods over profit-based methods.

Documentation requirements mandate that the taxpayer attach a statement to the annual tax return and provide a detailed transfer pricing study at the request of the tax authorities. Advance pricing agreements may be obtained.

The taxpayer generally must disclose all facts relevant for taxation, especially with respect to transactions with related parties.

Controlled Foreign Companies

A foreign company that is controlled by Israeli shareholders and that has accumulated undistributed passive profits taxed at a rate lower than 15% will be considered a controlled foreign company. In such a case, the Israeli controlling the CFC will be treated as if it had received its proportionate share of the profits as dividends. Upon the distribution of profits, the Israeli controlling shareholder will be eligible for a deduction in the amount of the gross notional dividends that were subject to Israeli tax, in addition to a tax credit for foreign tax paid.

Anti-avoidance and Disclosure

The Israeli tax authorities can challenge artificial transactions.

The taxpayer generally must disclose all facts relevant for taxation, especially with respect to transactions with related parties.

Cash Pooling

There are no specific tax rules for cash pooling arrangements in Israel.

Financial Transactions/Banking Services Tax

Financial institutions are not liable to VAT; instead they pay a salary tax at 17% of the salaries paid.

Thin Capitalization

There are no thin capitalization rules.

Stamp Duty

Stamp duty was abolished altogether in 2006; however, it is still applicable to some documents signed before 2006.

Sales Taxes/VAT (incl. Financial Services)

VAT is levied on the supply of goods and performance of services taking place in Israel at a rate of 17%. Generally, all companies must register for VAT. A non-resident who has a business in Israel must nominate a local representative for VAT purposes within 30 days of initiating activities in Israel.

Certain items are subject to a 0% rate, including exported goods, intangible goods and the provision of certain services to non-residents (i.e. tourism services), the transport of cargo to and from Israel, the sale of goods and services to the Eilat free-trade zone, and the sale of fresh fruit and vegetables.

Financial institutions, including banks and insurance companies, pay an equivalent tax at the rate of 17% based on their payroll and profits.

Non-profit organizations pay an equivalent tax at the rate of 7.5% based on their payroll.

Capital Gains Tax

The capital gains tax rate depends on the purchase date and the nature of the asset. The general capital gains tax rate for a corporation is the standard corporate tax rate. The inflationary component of the gain (accrued as from January 1, 1994) is exempt from taxation.

An Israeli resident is subject to capital gains tax in Israel on the disposal of assets, regardless of whether the assets are located in Israel. Capital gains derived from the sale, exchange, transfer or other disposition of tangible and intangible capital assets located in Israel or constituting a direct or indirect ownership interest of assets in Israel, are treated as Israeli-source income and are subject to Israeli capital gains tax, regardless of whether the seller is a resident of Israel for Israeli tax purposes. Shares and other securities of Israeli companies, or shares and other securities of non-Israeli companies holding their main assets in Israel, also may be treated as Israeli assets.

Persons who are not residents of Israel for tax purposes are exempt from Israeli capital gains tax on gains from the sale of shares traded on the Tel Aviv stock exchange and on gains from the sales of shares of Israeli companies traded on stock exchanges overseas acquired after listing, unless the gain is attributable to a Permanent Establishment that the seller maintains in Israel.

A broad exemption from capital gains tax applies to gains derived from the sale of securities in Israeli or Israeli-related companies acquired on or after January 1, 2009 by all non-residents (both entities and individuals), regardless of whether the non-resident is eligible for tax treaty benefits. This exemption is subject to several restrictions. The exemption does not apply:

- (1) to shares of companies whose assets consist primarily (directly or indirectly) of real estate (i.e. land or buildings);
- (2) if the shares sold were purchased from a related party or by way of certain tax-deferred reorganizations;
- (3) if the shares were held through a PE; or
- (4) when the non-resident selling entity is 25% or more controlled by Israeli residents.

Payroll and Social Security Taxes

Payroll tax is levied only on non-profit organizations (at a rate of 7.54% of wages) and financial institutions (at a rate of 17% of wages). It is in lieu of VAT on their services.

National insurance is required by law. Some employers pay part or all of employees' compulsory contributions to the national insurance scheme.

Contributions may be offset for corporate tax purposes.

Real Property Taxes

'Property betterment tax' is applicable to the sale of real property. The principles of property betterment tax are similar to those of capital gains tax. The betterment is calculated from the date of purchase until the date of sale, and the amount of betterment is subject to the corporate tax rate at the date of sale.

Furthermore, in certain circumstances (especially when real property is sold), the municipal authorities may levy a 'betterment levy' at the rate of 50% on the betterment that the real property has gained as a result of the local municipal authorities' actions. Any betterment levy paid may be deducted from the betterment subject to property betterment tax.

The purchaser of real property is subject to purchase tax (acquisition tax) of 6%. When the asset purchased is a residential apartment, the purchaser is subject to tax at progressive rates ranging from 0-10%..

Other Taxes

A purchase tax (also applicable to individuals) is levied on certain imports or local industrial production and is collected from local manufacturers 15 days after the end of the month in which the goods are sold. Importers are required to submit the collected tax when the goods are released from customs.

All tax information supplied by Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu and Deloitte Highlight 2019 (www.deloitte.com).

Cash Management

Banking System

Banking Regulation

Banking Supervision

Central bank

The independent Israeli central bank is the Bank of Israel. It was established on December 1, 1954, and is based in Jerusalem. Its authority derives from the new Bank of Israel Law, which came into force from June 1, 2010. It also operates in accordance with the Banking Law and the Currency Control Law.

Within Israel, it is the banker to the government and to other banks. It issues currency, manages the country's monetary reserves, regulates Israel's payment and clearing systems, supervises and regulates the banking system in Israel and supports government economic policy.

Other banking supervision bodies

Bank supervision is performed by the Bank of Israel's Banking Supervision Department (headed by the Supervisor of Banks).

Central Bank Reporting

General

Israel applies central bank reporting requirements.

What transactions - listed

Foreign currency transactions are reported on a daily and weekly basis to the Bank of Israel for balance of payments statistics purposes.

Foreign exchange transactions relating to foreign currency derivatives are required to be reported on a T+1 basis by both Israeli residents and for non-residents if, during the period of the 12 preceding months, the reporting entity executed (whether on its behalf or on behalf of others) eligible currency transactions with a daily average of at least USD 15 million. The reporting requirements will continue to apply until 12 months following the last day on which initial reporting was first required. A monthly report should also be filed detailing executed reportable transactions and open positions of reportable transactions.

Whom responsible

The financial intermediary (bank) usually transmits the required information to the Bank of Israel on behalf of its customers.

Additional reporting for liquidity management schemes

Transfers between resident and non-resident bank accounts participating in the same liquidity management scheme are not subject to additional reporting requirements.

Exchange Controls

Exchange structure

Israel's official currency is the new Israeli shekel (ILS). Its value is determined by market forces.

Classification

The currency is floating.

Exchange tax

There is no exchange tax.

Exchange subsidy

There is no exchange subsidy.

Forward foreign exchange market

Non-residents ILS and foreign currency swap transactions and foreign currency forwards are subject to a 10% reserve requirement.

ILS and foreign currency forwards are required to be reported to the BOI.

Capital flows

There are no restrictions on capital transactions.

Loans, interest and repayments

There are no controls on the provision of loans by commercial banks.

Royalties and other fees

There are no restrictions.

Profit remittance

There are no restrictions on the remittance of profits into or out of Israel.

Bank Account Rules

Resident entities are permitted to hold fully convertible domestic currency (ILS) and foreign currency bank accounts domestically and outside Israel.

Non-resident entities are permitted to hold fully convertible domestic currency bank accounts and foreign currency bank accounts within Israel.

Anti-money Laundering and Counter-terrorist Financing

- Israel has implemented anti-money laundering and counter-terrorist financing legislation (Prohibition on Money Laundering Law No. 5760 of 2000, most recently amended by Laws 5772 of 2012 and Law 5774 of 2014, along with various subsequent Regulations and Orders, most recently Combatting Terrorism Law No 5776 of 2016). Israel is in the process of revising Proper Conduct of Banking Business Directive No. 411. The revisions came into effect on January 1, 2018.
- Israel is a member of the Council of Europe's MONEYVAL Select Committee as an active observer. In December 2018, Israel became a full member of the Financial Action Task Force (FATF).
- Israel has a financial intelligence unit, the Israeli Money Laundering and Terror Financing Prohibition Authority (IMPA), which is a member of the Egmont Group.
- Account opening procedures require formal identification of the customer as well as beneficial owners and beneficiaries and any third parties acting on their behalf.
- Authorized signatories are required to provide proof of their authorization to act on behalf of individuals or legal entities.
- Banks must identify parties who perform transactions that are subject to reporting requirements in accounts for which they are neither the owner nor signatory.
- Relationships with shell banks are prohibited.
- Financial institutions are required to conduct risk-based ongoing due diligence.
- Financial institutions must record and report transactions deemed to be 'unusual' in view of the information in the financial institution's possession to the IMPA.
- Financial institutions must also record and report transactions if it is suspected that the transaction is related to terrorist property or the transaction may be related to an act of terrorism.
- Financial institutions must identify parties making electronic cross-border transactions exceeding ILS 1,000,000 (unless the transfer is to/from a high-risk country in which case the threshold is ILS 5,000).
- Currency transactions above ILS 50,000, or the equivalent in foreign currency, in the form of cash, travellers' checks or bearer bills must be reported as soon as possible. All transactions with a high-risk country or territory exceeding ILS 5,000 must be reported.
- The issue of all checks of ILS 200,000 and above must be reported.
- Individuals are required to report cross-border currency transportations above ILS 100,000 to the customs authorities. If the person entering the country is a new immigrant, the threshold is ILS 1,125,000.
- Transfers to or from Israel through an account and to or from a correspondent account of a financial institution, unless the institution is incorporated in an OECD member country, in an amount equivalent to at least ILS 1,000,000, must be reported.
- Individuals who carry cash or assets into or out of Israel must complete a Customs declaration. The

threshold for completing the declaration is ILS 100,000 or ILS 12,000 if crossing to the Gaza Strip.

- Records of particulars of identification must be kept for a minimum of seven years. Additionally, records must be kept for reported transactions as well as transactions in the amount of at least ILS 10,000 for a period of at least seven years from the date on which the transaction was recorded.

Data as at January 2019.

Banking Sector Structure

Major Domestic Banks

Bank	Total assets (USD million) December 31, 2017
Bank Hapoalim	130,928
Bank Leumi le-Israel	129,895
Mizrahi Tefahot Bank	69,025
Israel Discount Bank	63,738
First International Bank of Israel	39,103

Source: www.accuity.com.

Overall Trend

The Israeli banking sector comprises 16 commercial banks, one non-bank financial institution and two joint service companies. In addition, four foreign banks (Barclays Bank, Citibank, HSBC and the State Bank of India) have a branch in Israel.

Bank Hapoalim and Bank Leumi le-Israel dominate the Israeli banking market (their combined market share is 56% in terms of assets) and have sought to grow by establishing a presence abroad. Israel's five largest banks control 94% of the domestic banking sector's total assets.

In 2016, the Israeli government approved legislation to increase competition in Israel's highly concentrated financial sector. The key change the bills seeks to effect, is the separation of the major Israeli banks from credit companies. Hapoalim, Leumi, and Discount control about 76% of credit in Israel and will, under the new law, be forced to sell their existing credit card companies within three years. In December 2018, the country's banking regulator approved the purchase of Bank Leumi's credit card unit by Warburg Pincus. The law also provides incentives for new financial institutions to enter the market; in June 2018 the central bank published a new policy making it easier and faster to set up a new bank. Under the new policy, any party wishing to establish a bank will be able to obtain a limited license within six months with initial capital of just USD 14 million. It also permits any new institution to manage limited deposits and extend a certain amount of credit. Until now, the regulator's policies provided only for the establishment of regular sized commercial banks.

In January 2018, the central bank introduced changes to the banking sector making it possible to move accounts from one bank to another within a week. It also, in order to increase competition in the sector, introduced a central computerization office to make it easier for new banks to deal with entry barriers that currently exist.

In January 2019, Israel joined the automatic exchange of information (AEOI) system between tax authorities. Banks will be required to report residents of foreign countries owning bank accounts in Israel to the tax authorities of those countries. Full reporting will start in September 2020.

Payment Systems

Overview

Israel has three interbank payment systems: the RTGS system (Zahav), the Banks' Automated Clearing House (Masav) and the Banks' Paper-based Clearing House (BCH).

Zahav is primarily used for large-value (over ILS 1 million) credit transfers; Masav is a multilateral net settlement system used to process salary payments and low-value retail payments; and the BCH operates as a paper-based multilateral net settlement system. The Electronic Check Clearing Law was fully implemented in November 2017.

The national ATM and POS communication networks, operated by Automatic Banking Services Ltd (a company belonging to Israel's five leading banks) can also be used to process interbank card payments.

The ILS is traded in the Continuous Linked Settlement (CLS) system. CLS settles both legs of a foreign exchange transaction simultaneously.

High-value

Name of system	Zahav
Settlement type	Real-time gross settlement
Settlement cycle	Payments are settled in real time with immediate finality.
Links to other systems	NA
Payments processed	Large-value and urgent credit transfers, as well as interbank obligations from Masav and BCH
Currency of payments processed	ILS
Value and other limits to processing	Generally any payment in excess of ILS 1 million has to be executed in the Zahav system.
Operating hours	07:45-18:30 IST (Israel Standard Time) Sunday to Thursday 07:45-14:00 IST Fridays and holidays
System holidays	2019 – March 22, April 20, 26, May 9, June 9, August 11, September 30, October 1, 8, 9, 14, 21
Cut-off times	Customer payments = 18:30 CET (14:00 on Friday) Interbank payments = 19:30 CET (14:15 on Friday)
Participants	There are 20 participants in Zahav.
Access to system	Using SWIFT format
Future developments	NA

Name of system	Paper-based (Checks) Clearing House (BCH)
Settlement type	Multilateral net settlement
Settlement cycle	Payment instruments are transferred in two sessions: the first starts at 22:30, for the presentation and return of non-magnetic instruments (non-checks); and the second session starts at 01:00 (23:00 on Mondays and public holidays) for the electronic presentation and return of magnetic instruments (checks). At 18:30, each bank sends the files to the other members of the clearing house and also sends a summary file to the clearing house to the BCH. At night, the clearing house performs a presettlement procedure and creates a multilateral entry of debits and credits of participants which are sent for final settlement in the Zahav system the next morning (T+1) during the Paper-based Clearing House settlement window from 09:30.
Links to other systems	NA
Payments processed	Checks, paper-based credit and debit transfers (since June 2017, only checks and payment vouchers have been processed)
Currency of payments processed	ILS
Value and other limits to processing	There is a maximum value threshold of ILS 1 million.
Operating hours	09:00-18:30 each banking business day
System holidays	The system is closed on Fridays and the days preceding most public holidays.
Cut-off times	Payments must be submitted to banks by 18:30 IST (14:00 on Friday) for settlement on a next-day basis.
Participants	All commercial banks in Israel are participants, plus the Bank of Israel. The BCH currently has 29 members.
Access to system	Payment instructions are submitted to the BCH using the ABS Communication network.
Future developments	NA

Low-value

Name of system	Automated Clearing House (Masav)
Settlement type	Multilateral net settlement
Settlement cycle	Masav processes all electronic credit transfers and direct debits from 10:00 each day for settlement on a same-day basis. Payments received after 18:00 IST (14:30 on Friday) are processed on a next-day basis. Final settlement takes place across participants' accounts at the Bank of Israel via Zahav between 10:00–18:30 IST (14:00 on Friday) on an end-of-day basis.
Links to other systems	NA
Payments processed	Most low-value automated transactions in Israel, including salary payments, direct debits and credit transfers.
Currency of payments processed	ILS
Value and other limits to processing	There is a maximum value threshold of ILS 1 million.
Operating hours	The ACH is available to receive payment instructions 24 hours a day seven days a week.
System holidays	The system is closed on weekends and public holidays.
Cut-off times	10:00 IST for same-day settlement 18:00 IST (13:30 on Friday) for end-of-day (T+1) settlement
Participants	All organizations that can submit payment instructions to Masav can participate in the system. Masav currently has 41,939 participants.
Access to system	Payment instructions are submitted to the ACH using the ABS Communication network.
Future developments	All paper-based instruments, apart from checks, are expected to be processed by the ACH in the near future.

Payment and Collection Instruments

Overview and Trends

The most important cashless payment instruments in Israel are electronic transfers and checks. There has been a steady increase in the use of direct debits and payment cards over recent years, especially for retail transactions and electronic credit transfer have also rapidly gained in popularity.

As of January 2019, the Minimizing Use of Cash Bill, 5778-2018, came in to effect. The bill provides a monetary ceiling above which dealing in Israeli legal tender or in foreign currency in cash is prohibited. The law forbids individuals from paying over ILS 11,000 in cash to any businesses. This limit could be reduced to ILS 6,000 in 2020. The law also states that checks will be limited to ILS 10,000.

Statistics of Instrument Usage and Value

	Transactions (thousands)		% change	Traffic (value) (ILS billion)		% change
	2016	2017	2017/2016	2016	2017	2017/2016
Checks*	109,605	104,267	-4.87	945	886	-6.25
Direct debits	200,092	207,247	3.58	517	568	9.82
Direct credits	150,822	159,527	5.77	2,345	2,573	9.74

* Since June 2017, only checks and payment vouchers have been settled via the BCH. All other transactions have switched over to Masav.

Source: Payment and Settlement Systems in Israel. The Red Book for 2016-2017.

Paper-based

Checks

The check is a widely used payment instrument in Israel, but has experienced a steady fall in popularity in recent years as a result of the increasing availability and usage of electronic alternatives. In addition, a number of merchants in Israel no longer accept checks.

Checks up to ILS 10,000 can be deposited via a mobile application. Since June 2017, only checks and payment vouchers have been settled via the BCH. All other transactions have switched over to Masav. From November 21, 2017, check imaging was implemented across all banks for all checks deposited for payment.

The use of post-dated checks is common among both businesses and households, as both collateral against the receipt of credit for a business activity or for the payment of periodic tax payments, for example. As such check discounting services are widespread.

Demand Drafts

Demand drafts are also processed by the BCH.

Electronic

Credit Transfer

Most credit transfers in Israel take the form of direct credits, the majority of which are used for salary and pension payments and are initiated electronically. They are also used to make tax and benefit payments. Paper-based credit transfers are usually used by consumers and small businesses.

Large-value and urgent credit transfers are settled through Zahav, with immediate finality. Low-value electronic transfers are processed by Masav. All paper-based credit transfers are processed by the BCH.

Cross-border transfers are processed by bilateral correspondent banking arrangements. The majority of these are processed via SWIFT.

Direct Debits

Direct debits are commonly used for recurring low-value payments such as utility bills, mortgage payments and insurance premiums.

Direct debits are processed by Masav while paper-based debit transfers are processed by the BCH.

Payment Cards

The use of payment cards continues to increase in Israel, especially among retail consumers. There were approximately 8.7 million credit cards in circulation at the end of September 2018. Three companies control the market: Isracard, with a 50% market share; Leumi Card; and ICC-Cal, whose market share is 25% to 27%. In 2017, the Bank of Israel approved a fourth credit card processor, Tranzila and in March 2018 granted a license to Cardcom Acquiring Ltd.

There are an estimated 819 thousand debit cards in circulation, and 6.5 million deferred debit cards. Deferred debit card holders have their account debited by an allocated monthly amount, as opposed to the immediate debiting of conventional debit cards. The Bank of Israel has actively encouraged the use of debit cards in Israel. For example, companies are prohibited from charging a fee for a debit card from a customer who has a credit card, for a period of three years; and an individual who does not hold a credit card, will receive lower fees for a debit card than those for a credit card. In January 2018, the Bank of Israel's announced plan to reduce the interchange fee for deferred debit cards to 0.5% (from 0.7%) in three stages: 0.6% from January 1, 2019; 0.55% from January 1, 2021; and 0.5% from January 1, 2024.

The international card issuing companies Visa and MasterCard are the leading issuers of credit cards in Israel.

Each bank in Israel has its own clearing and settlement arrangements with card issuers.

Israel is in the process of implementing the EMV standard; the majority of cards issued in Israel are EMV compliant.

ATM/POS

There is an increasing availability and use of ATMs and POS terminals.

Israel's national ATM and POS communication networks are operated by Auto Banking Services Ltd (Shva, a company belonging to Israel's four leading banks) which has also established over 110,000 POS terminals and 7,545 bank ATMs. There are approximately 3,691 non-bank ATMs.

All new terminals are EMV-compliant.

Electronic Wallet

Electronic money schemes are available in the form of reloadable pre-paid cards. As of end September 2018, there were 167,352 pre-paid cards in circulation in Israel.

Liquidity Management

Short-term Borrowing

Overdrafts

Both resident and non-resident companies can access unlinked shekel (ILS) overdrafts (i.e. not linked to price increases).

Interest is charged at a margin over the prime rate. Penal interest is charged for exceeding agreed open-ended overdraft limits.

There is usually a fixed annual charge, which is collected quarterly in advance.

Bank Lines of Credit / Loans

Resident and non-resident entities can arrange short-term bank loans denominated in local currency (unlinked and consumer-price-index linked) and major foreign currencies from local and foreign banks.

A floating interest rate is usually charged on foreign currency loans at a margin over Libor (London interbank offered rate). Domestic currency loans usually have fixed rates of interest.

Collateral – receivables, pledged deposits, securities or even a floating charge – is usually required.

Trade Bills – Discounted

Discounting trade bills is not a recognized method of short-term financing in Israel.

Deferred checks are discounted by banks, as are credit card payments, for periods of up to three years.

Factoring

Factoring is available in Israel and used by small and medium-sized enterprises for domestic receivables and export proceeds. Large companies do not tend to use factoring.

Commercial Paper

Commercial paper is rarely used in Israel for legal and regulatory reasons.

Bankers' Acceptances

Bankers' acceptances are not used in Israel.

Supplier Credit

Supplier credit is commonly used, although buyer credit is increasingly being preferred in international trade.

Intercompany Borrowing, including Lagging Payments

Israeli groups are permitted to establish intercompany loans. However these intercompany loans only take place between parent and subsidiary companies. Subsidiaries belonging to the same parent group and unrelated companies do not tend borrow from each other.

Short-term Investments

Interest Payable on Bank Account Surplus Balances

Banks are permitted to pay interest on current account surpluses.

Demand Deposits

Interest-bearing demand deposit accounts are available to both resident and non-resident entities in ILS or major foreign currencies.

Time Deposits

Banks usually offer time deposits in ILS or a widely traded foreign currency with maturities ranging from one week to 12 months. Interest is usually paid upon the maturity date but can be paid periodically for one-year short-term deposits. Foreign banks offer higher rates of interest.

Certificates of Deposit

Certificates of deposit are issued in Israel.

Treasury (Government) Bills

Treasury bills (*Makam*) have experienced a significant increase in popularity among investors in the last few years. The principal investors in T-bills are commercial banks, money-market funds, insurance companies and provident funds. Makam, which are issued for various terms up to one year, are unindexed and bear no coupon interest. They are sold and traded at a discount to their par value. Makam are issued to the public via auction. The minimum investment amount is ILS 1 million.

Commercial Paper

Commercial paper has been issued by companies on only a few occasions, most of which have involved the sale of non-tradable paper to investors via private placement. Bank financing is a cheaper method of investment.

Money Market Funds

Mutual funds are increasingly available.

Repurchase Agreements

In October 2009, Bank of Israel repo auctions were halted until further notice.

Bankers' Acceptances

Bankers' acceptances are not used in Israel.

Liquidity Management Techniques

Cash Concentration

Cash concentration is the more common technique used by companies to manage company and group liquidity in Israel and is offered on a selective basis by international cash management banks and, increasingly, leading domestic banks.

Both resident and non-resident bank accounts and separate legal entities can participate in a cash concentration structure provided by international cash management banks. Cross-border sweeping may however be subject to income tax deductions. The country's domestic banks are still developing their cross-border liquidity management facilities.

Notional Pooling

Notional pooling is available in Israel. However, it is less common than cash concentration.

Both resident and non-resident bank accounts and separate legal entities can participate in a notional cash pooling arrangement located in Israel. Domestic banks are still developing their cross-border liquidity management facilities, however cross-border notional pooling can be offered by international banks.

Trade Finance

General Rules for Importing/Exporting

Israel has established free trade arrangements with the EU, The European Free Trade Association (EFTA), Mercosur (a common market comprising Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay), the USA, Bulgaria, Colombia (yet to be ratified), Canada, Czechia, Hungary, Mexico, Romania, Russia, Sri Lanka, Egypt, Jordan, Turkey, Panama, Poland and Vietnam. Israel is also in negotiations for trade agreements with Russia, Ukraine, South Korea and India.

Israel is in negotiations to join the Eurasian Economic Union.

Imports

Documentation Required

Imports will need to be accompanied by a bill of lading, a commercial invoice, a customs declaration and a packing list. A certificate of origin may also be required.

Import Licenses

Agricultural products are subject to quantitative restrictions and require import licenses.

Imports from countries prohibiting or restricting imports from Israel are subject to a special control regime.

Import Taxes/Tariffs

Customs duties apply to imports from countries with no free trade agreement with Israel. The majority of trade involving Israel is covered by the country's free trade agreements.

Financing Requirements

There are no particular financing requirements for imports.

Risk Mitigation

Israel does not operate a national risk mitigation program for importers.

Prohibited Imports

Imports are also prohibited for moral reasons, to preserve wildlife and to protect national security.

Exports

Documentation Required

Exports will need to be accompanied by a bill of lading, a commercial invoice, a customs declaration, a certificate of origin, a packing list and a certificate of origin.

Proceeds

There are no restrictions on the use of export proceeds.

Financing Requirements

There are no particular financing requirements for exports.

Export Licenses

Oil and defense equipment require export licenses.

Export Taxes/Tariffs

Israel does not levy taxes or tariffs on exports.

Risk Mitigation

The Israel Foreign Trade Risks Insurance Corporation (ASHRA) is a government-owned entity which provides medium and long-term export credit insurance for periods of between one and ten years. Export financing is usually provided by commercial banks. Private export credit insurance is available.

Prohibited Exports

Israel operates a list of prohibited exports.

Information Technology

Electronic Banking

An increasing number of companies have access to electronic banking services, as they are now widely available and offered by the majority of banks in Israel. There is no national bank-independent electronic banking standard in Israel. The services on offer usually include balance and transaction reporting as well as payment initiation. Browser-based banking services are offered by all the leading banks and are popular with individuals and small companies.

Israel's online banking policy allows online bank accounts to be set up remotely by retail users and small companies. The Bank of Israel is enabling the country's shift towards digital banking by extending the number of products banks are able to offer customers online; removing restrictions on the maximum value of funds a customer can transfer; and reducing the age limit for opening accounts remotely to 16, from 18 years of age. The central bank has amended the fees for all customer-executed banking services, making it less expensive (by 10-100%) for a customer to execute a transaction via direct means than through a bank teller.

Online banking is widespread and usually retail-orientated. Israel has a 79.7% internet penetration rate. Mobile broadband penetration is over 100%.

External Financing

Long-term Funding

Bank Lines of Credit/Loans

Commercial banks and now insurance companies provide medium-term loans. In addition to bilateral loan agreements, syndicated loans are also available for larger funding requirements.

Bank loans can be arranged by both domestic and foreign-based companies in domestic and foreign currency.

Bank loans in unlinked shekels (ILS) (not linked to the consumer price index - CPI) are becoming more commonplace and are offered at margins over three- or six-month Treasury bills or the prime rate. These bank loans generally have a higher margin over cost. CPI-linked loans in ILS generally have the lowest margin.

Foreign currency loans or loans linked to a foreign currency are increasingly used.

Except for large companies with higher credit standing, banks require security with charges over physical or financial assets.

Leasing

Leasing is a popular form of longer-term finance mostly in the form of operating leases for vehicle purchases.

As with bank loans, interest is based on CPI-linked or unlinked ILS or denominated in or linked to USD. Both domestic and foreign currency financing can be at fixed or floating interest rates.

Bonds

Bond issuance remains the preserve of the largest and most successful companies in Israel.

Straight and convertible bonds are issued at fixed or floating rates.

Private Placement

Both domestic and foreign companies are permitted to place bonds privately. Detailed prospectuses are not required for privately placed bonds.

Asset Securitization / Structured Finance

Securitization of a variety of types of credit is permitted. Complex transactions such as CDOs are prohibited.

Government (Agency) Investment Incentive Schemes / Special Programs or Structures

Insurance companies and pension and provident funds are prominent providers of long-term finance for Israel's infrastructural development via private finance initiatives for roads, tunnels and light rail projects.

In October 2018, a committee for encouraging the establishment of funds for infrastructure investment submitted recommendations to the Israel Securities Authority and the Israel Tax Authority that would enable the public to invest in infrastructure projects through publicly traded funds.

Useful Contacts

National Investment Promotion Agency

Ministry of Economy and Industry — www.economy.gov.il

Central Bank

Bank of Israel — www.boi.org.il

Payment System Operator

Automated Banking Services Ltd — www.shva.co.il

Banks

Bank Leumi le-Israel — www.leumi.co.il

Bank Hapoalim — www.bankhapoalim.co.il

Israel Discount Bank — www.discountbank.co.il

Mizrahi Tefahot Bank — www.mizrahi-tefahot.co.il

First International Bank of Israel — www.fibi.co.il

Stock Exchange

Tel Aviv Stock Exchange — www.tase.co.il

Ministry of Finance

Ministry of Finance — www.mof.gov.il

Ministry of Commerce

Ministry of Economy and Industry — www.economy.gov.il

Chamber of Commerce

Federation of Israeli Chambers of Commerce — www.chamber.org.il