



## DISPLACEMENT AND INSECURITY IN AREA C OF THE WEST BANK

### Executive summary

#### Introduction

In spring 2011, OCHA carried out a series of field visits to 13 Palestinian communities located in Area C, the over 60 percent of the West Bank where Israel retains control over security and the planning and building sphere. These visits focused on the issue of displacement from Palestinian communities.

Since 2006, OCHA has monitored the Israeli authorities' demolition of Palestinian homes in Area C due to lack of building permits, and, since 2008, has monitored the level of displacement resulting from this policy. Other incidents of displacement have not been systematically monitored. In this context, OCHA's recent visits were designed to gain a better understanding of displacement taking place in Area C, where some of the most adverse impacts of Israel's continued occupation are felt. OCHA particularly wanted to examine whether Palestinians are being forced out of their communities because Israeli policies have created conditions that leave them with no other choice but to move. The visits were intended to identify any push factors causing displacement and placing others at-risk of future displacement.

The total Palestinian population of Area C is estimated at around 150,000, two-thirds of whom live in localities which are partly located in Area A and B, and one-third in communities located entirely in Area C. This report focuses on the latter, which generally face more severe humanitarian and protection needs, compared to those that are only partially located in Area C. Of those living entirely in Area C, approximately 18,500 live in small, sedentary villages and 27,500 reside in Bedouin and other herding communities, many in remote areas.

Those living in the Bedouin and other herding communities are the most vulnerable of West Bank residents; they live in very basic structures (e.g. tents, tin shelters, etc.); have limited access to services; and have no service infrastructure (including water, sanitation and electricity infrastructure). Food insecurity among these communities is high, at 55 percent, post-assistance, compared to the overall level of 22 percent for the West Bank.

In selecting the targeted communities, OCHA sought a geographically diverse group that represented sedentary villages and Bedouin and other herding communities, including refugee and non-refugee populations. In each community, OCHA carried out semi-structured interviews with community representatives, either members of the village council or the community mukhtar, or leader, and small groups of residents.

The 13 communities visited by OCHA identified a number of policies and practices that contribute to displacement and create conditions which make it difficult for residents to meet basic needs and maintain their presence on the land, ultimately threatening the viability of their communities. The majority of these policies are implemented by the Israeli authorities and include:

- restrictive and discriminatory planning and zoning policies that severely limit Palestinian construction and limit Palestinian use of land;
- restrictions on movement and access, including the Barrier, that make access to land, water and basic services difficult;
- lack of effective law enforcement in response to settler attacks; and
- military violence and harassment.

Additional factors raised were insufficient support from the Palestinian Authority to assist communities in dealing with the negative impact of Israeli practices in Area C and drought conditions affecting Bedouin and herding communities.

## Main Findings

The findings, along with field observations, highlight worrying trends regarding the displacement of Palestinians in Area C and demonstrate the significant extent to which others are at-risk of displacement. In particular, the following emerged:

***f Clear patterns of displacement are occurring in the Area C communities visited, with residents being forced to move in order to meet their basic needs:***

Ten of the communities reported that families are moving out of their communities. The single most common reason causing people to move stems from the restrictive planning regime applied by the Israeli authorities in Area C, which makes it virtually impossible for Palestinians to obtain permission to build; in many cases, it is due to a combination of other factors, such as settler violence, movement restrictions, including the Barrier, reduced income, demolitions, or difficult access to services/resources (e.g. education, water, etc). Displaced families are moving to Areas A and B as well as to other parts of Area C. Thousands of others are at-risk of displacement due to the same factors.

***f Israeli policies and practices in Area C are undermining livelihoods among the herding and agriculture-based communities visited, contributing to displacement:*** Eleven of the 13 communities visited by OCHA reported that their sources of livelihood have eroded over the past 10 years, as a result of Israeli practices in Area C. For example, Bedouin and other herders consistently reported reduced herd sizes and farmers reported deteriorated access and ability to cultivate agricultural land. Both cases are due to Israeli authorities' restrictions on land use, access to water resources and ongoing settlement activity.

***f Israeli settlements and the impunity surrounding settler activity are central to the range of hardships forcing many families to leave the visited communities:*** Ten of the 13 communities identified factors related to Israeli settlement activity as key to the difficulties they are facing on a daily basis; six communities reported that they regularly face physical violence and other harassment from Israeli settlers, while these communities and the remaining ones identified other settlement-related problems, particularly restrictions on access and land use due to settlements. Almost all interviewed residents noted that while the development of their communities has been restricted in the past 10 years, adjacent Israeli settlements have continued to develop in contravention of international law.

***f Many of the residents report living in a state of pervasive insecurity and instability due to administrative practices implemented by the Israeli authorities.*** In each of the communities visited, this feeling of insecurity was extremely evident with multiple residents commenting on its effect on day-to-day life and the extent of its impact on the psycho-social health of community members, particularly children. This is particularly true for refugee communities, many of which often express feelings of helplessness over having been displaced multiple times since their original displacement in 1948.

In the majority of these communities, interviewees noted that their day-to-day life has deteriorated in significant ways compared to that of the previous generation, particularly with regard to the level of security, freedom of movement and access to livelihoods and services. Residents also reported that the level of difficulty these factors cause in daily life is shaping major life choices; for example, a number of communities indicated that one criterion being used to evaluate marriage proposals is where the prospective spouse resides.

Of the 13 communities visited by OCHA, four have experienced demolitions by the Israeli authorities since the time of their interview: Khirbet Yarza, Susiya, Al Hadidiya and Khamlet Sakariya. An additional community, Wadi Abu Hindi, has received tens of stop-work and demolition orders that have put most structures in the community at risk of imminent demolition.

Irrespective of the motivation behind the various policies applied by Israel to Area C, their effect on the visited communities has been to make development virtually impossible, to impose living conditions that are untenable for many and to prevent residents from earning a sustainable livelihood.

The difficulties raised by residents of the 13 communities are consistent with those highlighted by other Area C communities, about which OCHA and partner agencies regularly report (e.g. inability to build, movement and access restrictions, settler violence, etc.). Based on the recent field visits, along with our monitoring of Area C communities over the past several years, OCHA is concerned that trends identified in this report impact other Area C communities. This underlines the need for additional research on displacement in the oPt with a view to better understanding the full extent of the population affected.

Given the small size of the most vulnerable communities visited, there are real concerns that in the absence of concrete policy changes in Area C, along with a significant influx of support, some of these communities may disintegrate and disappear altogether over the course of the next generation, or sooner. This possibility, along with the other patterns of Palestinian displacement and Israeli settlement activity in Area C, give rise to concerns over demographic shifts and changes to the ethnic make-up of the West Bank.

## The Way Forward

The humanitarian community in the oPt is working to meet the most urgent needs of Area C communities. These interventions, however, are limited, with humanitarian organizations facing many of the same difficulties confronting Palestinian communities, particularly restrictive planning and zoning regulations. For example, tents provided by the international community to house poor families displaced following the demolition of their homes have been targeted with demolition orders by the Israeli authorities. Even the most successful humanitarian intervention, however, will be unable to resolve the core issues creating the pattern of displacement highlighted during OCHA's recent field visits. Only substantive changes to policies and practices applied by the Israeli authorities in Area C can do so. The humanitarian community, including senior UN officials, has repeatedly raised the urgency of making such changes to its Israeli counterparts on all levels, particularly with regard to the demolition of structures. Despite highlighting the negative humanitarian impact of policies applied by the Israeli authorities in Area C on vulnerable Palestinian communities, there has been no significant change on either a policy-level or in the day-to-day practices of the Israeli authorities.

As the occupying power, Israel is responsible under international humanitarian law (IHL) for administering its occupation in a manner that benefits the local Palestinian population. Likewise, under international human rights law, Israel must ensure that persons under its jurisdiction enjoy fulfillment of their human rights, including the right to be free from discrimination, to effective legal remedies, and an adequate standard of living, housing, health, education, and water. With particular reference to Bedouin communities, international law guarantees that their unique way of life as indigenous persons must be respected and protected.

There are a range of measures that would benefit the local Palestinian population and facilitate Israel's progress towards meeting its obligations under international law, including:

- End the displacement and dispossession of Palestinians in the oPt, including immediately ceasing demolitions of Palestinian-owned structures, including housing, schools, livelihood structures and rainwater collection cisterns, until Palestinians have access to a fair and nondiscriminatory zoning and planning regime, including community participation in all levels of the process;
- Families that have been forcibly displaced must be allowed to return to their homes in safety and dignity, and be given access to an effective remedy for any harm they have suffered, including the destruction of land, homes and property;
- Stop facilitating the transfer of Israeli civilians into the oPt, including by freezing all settlement activity in accordance with the Roadmap;

- Investigate and prosecute all forms of violence and intimidation by Israeli settlers in an independent, impartial, effective, thorough and prompt manner;
- Improve Palestinian access and movement in the West Bank, particularly to land and resources in the Jordan Valley, to areas behind the Barrier, to land in the vicinity of Israeli settlements, and to land designated closed for military training or as nature reserves;
- In decisions regarding the use of "state land" and water resources, priority should be given to the most vulnerable Palestinian communities in Area C; "state land" should not be allocated for the use of Israeli settlements;
- Implement measures that assist Bedouin communities in sustaining their traditional lifestyles. Decisions regarding these communities should be made only with the consultation, participation and acceptance of community members themselves;
- Stop all Barrier construction, dismantle or reroute the constructed sections to the Green Line, and repeal the gate and permit regime in compliance with the 2004 Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice; and
- Enable the humanitarian community to meet basic humanitarian needs in Area C (e.g. erecting a tent, rehabilitating a well, etc.) in accordance with the humanitarian imperative, without fear of prosecution or other recrimination to either agencies or beneficiaries by the Israeli authorities.

Further measures are encouraged from the Palestinian Authority, with the assistance of the donor community, to increase their support to Area C locales, particularly Bedouin and herding communities, which struggle to sustain both their livelihoods and their presence on their land, in the midst of the difficulties outlined in this report.

[Complete document in PDF format](#) (Requires [Acrobat Reader](#))