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WEST BANK MOVEMENT AND ACCESS UPDATE

[التنقل والوصول في الضفة الغربية - ورقة حقائق](#)

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The period between July 2011 and June 2012 was characterized by mixed trends regarding the system of internal movement and access restrictions implemented by the Israeli authorities within the occupied West Bank. A series of significant easing measures improved the connectivity between several villages and the nearest city and service center. However, little change was registered during this period in terms of the restrictions affecting Palestinian access to large rural areas, including those located behind the Barrier, in the Jordan Valley, and in the vicinity of Israeli settlements; movement within the Israeli-controlled part of Hebron City also remained severely restricted. Most of the restrictions addressed in this report are related, in one way or another, to the Israeli settlements established in contravention of international law. This includes restrictions aimed at protecting the settlements, securing areas for their expansion, and improving the connectivity between settlements and with Israel itself.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The period between July 2011 and June 2012 (hereafter: the reporting period) was characterized by mixed trends regarding the system of internal movement and access restrictions implemented by the Israeli authorities within the occupied West Bank. A series of significant easing measures improved the connectivity between several villages and the nearest city and service center, and facilitated access to East Jerusalem through one of the main Barrier checkpoints. However, little change was registered in the restrictions affecting Palestinian access to large rural areas, including those located behind the Barrier, in the Jordan Valley, and in the vicinity of Israeli settlements; movement within the Israeli-controlled part of Hebron City also remained severely restricted. Overall, the system of internal movement restrictions has continued to contribute to the fragmentation of the West Bank, impacting the daily lives of Palestinians.

The objective of this report is two-fold: to highlight access-related policies that are contributing to continuing humanitarian vulnerability; and to support improved targeting of humanitarian interventions aimed at addressing these vulnerabilities.

A number of easing measures adopted by the Israeli authorities during the reporting period reduced the travel time for nearly 100,000 villagers to six main cities (Nablus, Tulkarm, Salfit, Ramallah, Jericho and Hebron), thus facilitating their access to key services, particularly hospitals and universities, as well as markets, workplaces and other sources of livelihood. The large majority of the easings entailed the opening of blocked routes while maintaining some of the infrastructure on the ground, typically the replacement of roadblocks with road gates, which are generally kept open. These road gates, however, still allow for the re-closure of the respective routes at any given moment with minimum resources.

The opening of certain routes between urban centers in the past four years has been complemented by the development of a secondary road network serving Palestinians, which has involved the upgrading of roads and the construction of over 40 tunnels and underpasses. This network provides Palestinians with alternatives to routes that have remained partially or totally blocked to them, some of which are used primarily by Israeli settlers.

Notwithstanding these easing measures, by the end of the reporting period 60 Palestinian communities, with a combined population of about 190,000, are still compelled to use detours that are two to five times longer than the direct route to the closest city. As a result, their access to livelihoods and basic services, including health, education and water supply, continued to be impaired.

With respect to access to East Jerusalem from the remainder of the West Bank, a number of easing measures implemented since mid-June 2012 at the checkpoint controlling the northern entrance to the city (Qalandiya), have significantly reduced the time spent by some 15,000 Palestinians travelling to and from Jerusalem every day. However, more generally, access for West Bank ID holders to the city continued to be restricted by the Barrier, the checkpoints and the permit system. The situation of West Bank ID holders living in communities trapped on the 'Jerusalem side' of the Barrier is of particular concern.

Palestinian movement into and within large rural areas of the West Bank has remained significantly restricted during the reporting period.

Firstly, the agricultural livelihoods of farmers living in 150 villages, who own land isolated on the other side of the Barrier, continued to be undermined by the permit and gate regime. Additionally, the access to basic services for communities located behind the Barrier (over 11,000 people), including civil defense teams and ambulances, remained of particular concern. While only very few new sections were constructed during this period, approximately 62 percent of the Barrier route is now complete, contrary to the Advisory Opinion issued by the International Court of Justice in July 2004.

Secondly, some 94 percent of the Jordan Valley and Dead Sea area have remained off-limits for Palestinian use, due to their designation as closed military areas and nature reserves, or their allocation to Israeli settlements. Entry of Palestinian-plated vehicles into these areas has also remained restricted throughout the reporting period. While the restrictions through the two northern checkpoints were eased during August 2012, on the occasion of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, it is currently unclear whether this easing will be maintained. Combined, these restrictions have had a particularly negative impact on the living conditions of Bedouin and other herder communities.

Thirdly, access to private agricultural land in the vicinity of Israeli settlements has remained significantly constrained due to the fencing off of those areas, or due to settler violence. Palestinian farmers who own land close to 55 Israeli settlements have access only through 'prior' coordination with the Israeli army. This restricted access has continued to undermine the agricultural livelihoods of farmers from some 90 Palestinian communities.

Finally, Palestinian movement within the Israeli-controlled section of Hebron City (H2) remained subject to severe restrictions. This area is segregated from the rest of the city by over 120 closure obstacles, and Palestinian movement by car, and in some cases also on foot, remained banned along certain streets. As a result, those Palestinians still living in the area continue to suffer from poor access to basic services, including education.

As the Occupying Power, Israel is responsible for the welfare of the Palestinian population under its control and for ensuring that they are able to exercise their basic human rights. While Israel is allowed under international law to restrict the right to freedom of movement of Palestinians to address legitimate security

needs, it can do so only "to the extent strictly required by the exigencies of the situation", in a non-discriminatory manner and taking into account other legal obligations.

However, most of the movement restrictions addressed in this report are related, in one way or another, to the Israeli settlements established in contravention of international law. This includes restrictions aimed at protecting the settlements, securing areas for their expansion, and improving the connectivity between settlements and with Israel itself. Palestinian movement along some of the main traffic arteries in the West Bank, (including Road 5, 90 and 443) has been gradually reduced in past years by means of physical obstacles and administrative restrictions, transforming these roads into rapid 'corridors' used by Israeli citizens to commute between the settlements and Israel, and, in some cases, between various areas within Israel via the West Bank.

To reduce the vulnerability of Palestinians affected by poor access to services and livelihoods and to comply with its legal obligations under international law, Israel must aim at dismantling the system of movement restrictions to the fullest possible extent. This should include the opening of main routes to urban centers, the revocation of the permit regime associated with the Barrier and access to East Jerusalem, the opening up of 'closed military zones' for Palestinian movement and use of the land, and the lifting of restrictions within Hebron's Old City.

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