



Save the Children
UK

FACT SHEET: JORDAN VALLEY

October 2009



Residents in al Jiftlik village are forced to expand their homes to accommodate their growing families despite the threat of demolition as building permits are near impossible to obtain from the Israeli authorities. PHOTO/Sara Mabger

The Jordan Valley represents approximately 30% of the land area of the occupied West Bank. It is situated along the eastern border with the Jordan River and extends from the Green Line in the north to the Dead Sea in the south. The Jordan Valley has abundant land and water resources, including one-third of the underground water reserves for the West Bank. It is home to predominantly agricultural and herding communities which rely on the land and water resources for their livelihoods. Today, settlements control half of the land of the Jordan Valley, and closed military zones and nature reserves comprise an additional 44 percent. Access restrictions to these areas have had a particularly devastating impact on the Palestinian population that lives and works in the Jordan Valley.

Background

- Prior to the Israeli occupation in 1967, the Palestinian population of the Jordan Valley was estimated at between 200,000 and 320,000. [MA'AN]
- Today, the population is approximately 56,000 with roughly 70% of residents concentrated in the city of Jericho. [PLO NAD]
- Approximately 40% of the population is comprised of semi-nomadic Bedouin and herder communities that traditionally have grazed their animals across the Jordan Valley. [PLO NAD]
- Given its geographical size, abundant land and water resources, and temperate climate, the Jordan Valley was historically known as the breadbasket of the region. [PLO NAD]
- Today, settlements control up 50% of the Jordan Valley land area and closed military zones and nature reserves take up an additional 44%, leaving only 6% of the land for the Palestinian population. [MA'AN]
- More than 90% of the Jordan Valley is designated as Area C¹ where Israel maintains full military and civil control. The Israeli Civil Administration has authority over building and planning and issues permits for construction in accordance with master zoning and planning schemes. [OCHA]
- Palestinians cannot build homes or other infrastructure in Area C without first obtaining permits from the Israeli Civil Administration, but these permits are rarely issued. According to the UN, based on data provided by the Israeli Ministry of Defense, between January 2000 and September 2007, over 94 % of applications for building permits in Area C submitted by Palestinians to Israeli authorities were denied. [OCHA]



Save the Children UK and its local partner renovated houses for 30 families in the Jordan Valley as a means to prevent forced displacement. PHOTO/Hiba Qaraman

Forced Displacement - House demolitions and forced evictions:

- According to a Save the Children UK research study,² 31% of surveyed households in high risk areas in the West Bank, including the Jordan Valley, have been either temporarily or permanently displaced at least once since the year 2000 primarily as a result of Israeli military orders (31%) and house demolitions (23%). [Save the Children UK / NEC research]
- Approximately 9,400 Israeli settlers illegally³ reside in settlements in the Jordan Valley. Israeli settlements and lands held in reserve by settlement councils for future settlement expansion take up about 50% of the Jordan Valley. [PLO NAD]
- More than 20% of the West Bank has been declared closed military areas by the Israeli authorities. These closed areas⁴ are mostly located in the Jordan Valley and are populated primarily with small herding and farming communities which have lived in the area since well before 1967. [OCHA]



Following a demolition in Ras al Ahmar, a family's belongings are piled outside. PHOTO/Sara Mabger

¹ Area C refers to those parts of the West Bank that are under full Israeli military and civil control. Approximately 61% of the West Bank, including 90% of the Jordan Valley, falls within Area C. Under the 1966 Jordanian Planning Law, which remains in effect, virtually any Palestinian construction requires a permit. In Area C, permits are issued by the Israeli Civil Administration and are only granted in line with approved 'master' planning schemes.

² In June 2009, Save the Children UK conducted a research survey through Near East Consulting (NEC) of 472 households located in areas at high risk of forced displacement in the occupied Palestinian territory (OPT), including the West Bank and Gaza but excluding East Jerusalem. The survey sample included 232 households in Area C locations in the West Bank, including the Jordan Valley, and 240 households in locations near the Gaza buffer zone. The survey also sampled more than 1,000 households among the general population in the OPT for comparative purposes. The survey results for high risk areas in the West Bank are not limited to the Jordan Valley but are representative of many of the challenges families face in the area. Publication of the research findings is forthcoming.

³ Article 49 of the Fourth Geneva Convention, to which Israeli is a signatory, prohibits an occupying power from transferring parts of its civilian population into the territory it occupies. There is broad consensus among the international community that Israeli settlements stand in contravention to international humanitarian law.

⁴ In the Jordan Valley, five Palestinian communities – al Farisiya, al Malih, Khirbet ar Ras al Ahmar, Khirbet Humsa and al Hadidiya – are located within Israeli-declared closed military zones.

- In June 2009, the UN recorded the highest monthly total⁵ of demolitions in Area C since it began to systematically track this data in 2005. 79% of Palestinians displaced during this period were residing in the Jordan Valley in areas declared closed military zones by the Israeli authorities. [OCHA]
- In May 2009, Israeli authorities distributed eviction and demolition orders to all but one household in al Hadidiya village, threatening the very existence of this small herder community of approximately 162 residents. Families in al Hadidiya have been displaced several times in the past, the last of which took place in February and March 2008 when about 30 people were displaced in each incident. The most recent orders were issued on the grounds that the families were living in an area designated by the Israeli authorities as a closed military zone. [OCHA]
- In al Hadidiya, the community estimates that as a result of multiple waves of evictions and demolitions, approximately 13-14 households have been permanently displaced to other nearby locations in the Jordan Valley. [OCHA]

In June 2009, a combined 92 structures, including residential tents, were demolished in four Jordan Valley communities including al Hadidiya. The demolitions displaced 148 individuals, including 75 children, and affected an additional 93 individuals, including 65 children. [OCHA]

Movement and access restrictions:

- Three checkpoints⁶ restrict access into and movement within the Jordan Valley, separating Palestinians from their land, their families and their jobs. [OCHA]
- Between May 2005 and April 2007, only those Palestinians with an identity card proving their residency in the Jordan Valley were allowed to enter or reside in the area. Palestinians who owned land in the Jordan Valley but did not reside there were not permitted access. [OCHA]
- Access to the Jordan Valley is restricted for non-residents, including land and property owners and laborers, who must obtain a permit from the Israeli authorities in order to enter the area in private vehicles. [OCHA]
- Palestinians who do not have residency in the Jordan Valley must obtain a permit from the Israeli authorities in order to travel on the main highway (Road 90) running north through the Jordan Valley. [OCHA]
- According to Save the Children UK's research, checkpoints were cited by 38% of respondents as the primary obstacle confronting breadwinners on his or her way to work (including accessing agricultural land) in high risk areas in the West Bank. [Save the Children UK / NEC research]
- Checkpoints and other Israeli-imposed movement restrictions also impacted respondents' ability to market agricultural goods. 4% of surveyed respondents in high risk areas in the West Bank stated they did not face obstacles marketing their products compared with 34% for the general West Bank population. [Save the Children UK / NEC research]

Livelihoods:

- 58% of families in high risk areas in the West Bank own land. 39% of respondents in West Bank high risk areas said they had received land confiscation orders since 1993 compared with 12% among the general West Bank population. [Save the Children UK / NEC research]
- 42% of households in high risk areas in the West Bank depend on agriculture or animal husbandry as their main sources of income. [Save the Children UK / NEC research]
- Only 4% of respondents from high risk areas who work in agriculture are able to market their products without difficulty compared with 34% among the general West Bank population. [Save the Children UK / NEC research]

⁵ 109 Palestinian-owned structures were demolished, displacing 162 Palestinians.

⁶ As of September 2009, the Ma'ale Efrayim checkpoint was partially removed and will no longer be regularly staffed although random vehicle checks may still take place. The Tayasir, Hamra and Yitav checkpoints remain fully staffed and operational although flying checkpoint in the area remain a reality. [OCHA]

- 41% of respondents living in high risk areas have lost their jobs or sources of livelihood since 2000; 34% changed their residence and 33% have considered changing their residence as a result. [Save the Children UK / NEC research]
- 6% of households in high risk areas in the West Bank said that assistance from international organizations was available either 'all the time' or 'most of the time.' [Save the Children UK / NEC research]

Inability to access community services:

Lack of access to community services is a trigger for forced displacement in high risk areas in the West Bank: 21% of households surveyed would like to move to a new residence; the main reason cited was lack of access to services (36%). [Save the Children UK / NEC research]

Education

- 39% of households living in high risk areas in the West Bank said that educational services were 'available' compared with 65% among the general population. [Save the Children UK / NEC research]
- 38 schools in the Jordan Valley provide elementary education to approximately 13,000 students and employ about 700 teachers. [PLO NAD/PMG]
- Students and teachers must commute long distances through difficult checkpoints to access schools and universities in Jericho, Nablus and Tubas. As a result, children and young adults have moved in with extended families or families have split up in separate locations to avoid the long commutes and delays that disrupt their education. [PLO NAD/PMG]

Health

- 8% of households living in high risk areas in the West Bank said that health services were 'available' compared to 66% among the general West Bank population. [Save the Children UK / NEC research]
- Jordan Valley residents depend on the Jericho public hospital as the sole public hospital in the area. Given the movement and access restrictions within the Jordan Valley, residents face tremendous difficulty accessing health services. [PLO NAD/PMG]

Water and Sanitation

- 37% of households surveyed in high risk areas in the West Bank stated that water was 'available' compared to 86% among the general West Bank population; 2% of respondents in West Bank high risk areas said that sanitation services were 'available' compared with 61% among the general West Bank population. [Save the Children UK / NEC research]
- In the Jordan Valley, 9,400 Israeli settlers consume approximately 6.6 times more water per capita annually than the 56,000 Palestinian residents. [PLO NAD]
- In Area C more generally, settlers receive discounts from the Israeli water company of up to 75% while Palestinians connected to the Israeli water network are charged significantly higher prices. [Badil]



Families in the Jordan Valley suffer from inadequate water supply and must spend a significant portion of their income on tanker water to meet their household needs. PHOTO/Sara Mabger

Lack of personal security:

- 5% of households living in high risk areas in the West Bank said they felt secure in their area of residence compared to 55% among the general West Bank population. 70% of respondents cited the policies and practices of the Israeli occupation as the main reason. [Save the Children UK / NEC research]
- 21% of households living in high risk areas in the West Bank have considered changing their residence citing greater security as one of the top three reasons. [Save the Children UK / NEC research]

Response

With funding from the Humanitarian Aid department of the European Commission, Save the Children UK has focused its work in seven vulnerable communities⁷ in the Jordan Valley in order to prevent displacement, promote protection among communities threatened by displacement and provide emergency responses to families that have been displaced in an effort to help them return to their communities.

To date, Save the Children UK with its local partner has renovated 30 houses in Jordan Valley communities, in addition to providing families with 1,000-litre water tanks to assist households in meeting their water needs. These efforts benefited approximately 240 individuals, including at least 70 children. Prevention efforts also included the rehabilitation of four kindergartens and two play areas, benefitting approximately 170 children. Rehabilitation of a health clinic in Bardala benefits the entire community of approximately 6,000 individuals that it serves.

Following displacement events, primarily house demolitions, Save the Children UK and its local partner, MA'AN Development Center, were among the first responders providing emergency assistance to families in need. In the Jordan Valley, water and food plus shelter support were provided to 183 individuals, including 55 children. Through the YMCA, Save the Children provided psychosocial support activities to 20 mothers and 55 children also as part of its emergency response. The interventions focused on stress releasing activities for affected mothers and children, building coping mechanisms, and providing mothers with the skills to provide psychosocial support to their children.

“One of the major problems we are facing here, of course in addition to house demolitions, is lack of schools and affordable transportation to and from school. My daughter who is in the 3rd grade walks 2 kilometres every day to reach her UNRWA school. And then she walks the same distance back home, under the burning sun.” – Daoud, father of five in al Jiftlik, Jordan Valley

⁷ Includes Bardala, Ein al Baida, al Jiftlik, al Auja, al Hadiya, Fasayel, and Ibzaq.



Case Study: Jordan Valley

Awad Ibderat lives in the Jordan Valley village of al Jiftlik with his wife and two children, Ali (12 years) and Mahmoud (9 years). In 2006, the Israeli Civil Administration issued a demolition order against the family's house on the grounds that it was built without the requisite permit. The Ibderat family sought legal assistance to challenge the demolition order, which the Israeli military court upheld. Two days following the court decision, the Israeli military demolished the family's house. The family moved into a house belonging to relatives who reside elsewhere. But this is just a temporary solution. The house is more than 40 years old and the walls, constructed of mud mixed with hay, are at risk of collapsing when it rains. Awad Ibderat, an agricultural laborer who earns between \$12 - \$14 US per day, works in a nearby Israeli settlement. Save the Children UK recently spoke with the Ibderat family about this experience.

They [Israeli military] came and demolished the house in the summer, when the weather is hottest. This was three years ago. They came at around 12 noon that day. I was at work at the time. My wife and children were home. I left work but by the time I got home, the house was gone.

Our house had two rooms, a kitchen and a bathroom. Everything was destroyed. It was a mess of concrete and corrugated metal. They did not give us a chance to remove our things...our refrigerator was lost in the rubble. A cabinet that cost a thousand shekels was destroyed. Our gas oven was lost too. Many things were lost under the rubble.

The children were afraid when they saw the army come to the house. There were more than 40 Israeli soldiers, their jeeps and the bulldozer.

Representatives from UNRWA, the Red Cross and the local governing council came within hours after the demolition. They took photos and gave us tents but they were small and it was too hot to stay inside them. We're now staying in a house that belongs to extended family. They took pity on us and let us stay here. They have another house in Jenin Governorate and they went to stay there.

About a year ago, we constructed another house made of corrugated metal (zinco) as an alternative. But we cannot live there...it is too hot in the summer and too cold in the winter and we now use it for storage. But this house is not ours, we cannot stay here permanently.

We are refugees from 1948. We are from Khudeira (Hadera) originally. My father came to al Jiftlik and I was born here. They forcibly displaced us from our original village and then they destroyed our house here a second time. They will not leave us alone...

My children were very affected by the demolition. For one month they would keep asking me, "Daddy, why did they destroy the house. What did we do?" and what was I supposed to say to them? What did we do to them? This is oppression.

Twelve-year-old Ali told us, "I liked my previous house and everything inside. I would have salvaged some of my toys if I had the chance."

"I miss my red bicycle the most," said his younger brother Mahmoud (9 years).

Ali's message to children around the world: "God willing, what happened to us will not happen to you."



The Ibderat family stand in front of their temporary home in al Jiftlik village. PHOTO/Sara Mabger



Ali (right) and Mahmoud (9) miss their previous home and the toys they lost in the demolition. PHOTO/Sara Mabger



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Addendum: Full citations for Save the Children UK Fact Sheet

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2. See note #1 in this section.

3. See note #1 and #2 in this section.

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6. See note #5 in this section.

Livelihoods:

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Health

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