

## BEDOUIN CITIZENS OF ISRAEL IN THE NAQAB (NEGEV): A PRIMER

### History

- **Pre-1948:** 90,000 Bedouins inhabit the Naqab. During this period, the Bedouins continue their traditional semi-nomadic livelihoods. Under the British Mandate (1923-1948) Bedouin tribes begin to settle in permanent villages.
- **1948:** During the Nakba (“catastrophe”) 750,000 Palestinians are externally displaced across the borders to Syria, Jordan, Egypt and Gaza. 11,000 Bedouins remain in the Naqab, most of whom lose their lands and become internally displaced within the new State of Israel, forced into the Siyaj (“fence”) region in the northern Naqab.
- **1969-1989:** The Israeli government builds seven townships for the Bedouin: Tel el-Sabe, Rahat, Shegab al-Salam (Segev Shalom), Ara'ra, Kseiffe, Lagiyya and Hura. All of the other Bedouin villages are viewed as illegal (“unrecognized”) settlements by the state.
- **From 1999 onwards,** the Israeli government recognizes eleven Bedouin villages in the Naqab. Many of these villages existed prior to the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948. During this time the Israeli government accelerates plans to expand the Jewish population in the Naqab.
- **2009:** Under the Prawer Plan, the Israeli government seeks to forcibly relocate over 30,000 Bedouins into recognized townships, using home demolitions and other pressures. The plan is frozen in 2013, after much local and international condemnation.
- **2017:** The Knesset enacts the Kaminitz Law, expanding the state’s administrative power to demolish homes and seek harsher punishments for breaches of the state’s planning and building laws. The law disregards the state’s rejection of Bedouin historical claims to their ancestral land and decades of discrimination in land planning and allocation that forced them to build illegally. Under the law, all homes in the 35 unrecognized villages are subject to demolition.



### Key Figures

- **258,000 Bedouin citizens of Israel** currently live in the Naqab.
- There are **35 unrecognized Bedouin villages** in the Naqab, home to more than **28% (72,000 people)**
- **More than two-thirds** of Bedouin citizens in the Naqab live below the poverty line, **three times more** than Jewish Israelis.
- In 2017, the number of demolitions reached a record high of **2,220** structures, over **70%** of which Bedouin citizens were pressured into carrying out themselves.
- **2018:** After a 15-year legal struggle against their eviction from the village, and under extreme pressure from the authorities, most residents of **Umm al-Hiran** sign an agreement to abandon their village and to relocate to the township of Hura.
- **2019:** Israel’s Bedouin Settlement Authority details a plan to **forcibly transfer 36,000 Bedouin citizens living in unrecognized villages** in order to expand military training areas and implement “economic development” projects, including the extension of Highway 6 (Israel’s main north-south route), the opening of a weapons testing facility, and the establishment of a phosphate mine.

## Unrecognized Villages

About 72,000 Bedouins reside in 35 unrecognized villages in the Naqab. Due to their status, these villages are not registered on official Israeli maps and face the constant threats of home demolitions and loss of ancestral land.

Based on the Planning and Construction Law of 1965, any housing construction outside of the Siyaj region is considered illegal (even if built prior to the law). This law denies the recognition of traditionally claimed Bedouin land; as a result, these villages are in constant conflict with the Israeli government.

Without official recognition, these villages lack basic infrastructure. They remain disconnected from the national electricity grid, lack water services and sewage disposal, and are not provided with schools or safe roads.

### *Legal Action: Adalah's Key Cases*

- In 2006, the state issued home demolition orders for all homes in the unrecognized Bedouin village of **Alsira**, to force residents to relocate to a government-planned town. In 2011, after three years of hearings, Adalah **secured the cancellation of the demolition orders**.
- In 2012, after a seven-year legal struggle waged by Adalah and the Bedouin community, **a high school was opened in Abu Tulul**, the first in any of the previously unrecognized villages.
- In 2001, the Health Ministry **opened mother-and-child clinics** in six unrecognized villages, following Adalah's litigation. After the ministry closed three clinics in 2009, Adalah filed a petition to the Supreme Court and three were reopened over the next two years.
- In 2011, Adalah won a Supreme Court ruling that **guaranteed the right to water as a constitutional right**, regardless of the legal status of the community. According to the Court, however, the unrecognized villages are only entitled to "minimal access" to water, and in the long-term Bedouin citizens should relocate to townships.
- In 2013, Adalah petitioned the Supreme Court demanding electricity in seven schools in three newly-recognized Bedouin villages, which were depending on unreliable generators. By 2015, **six Bedouin schools were connected to the electricity grid**.
- Hundreds of Bedouin children in the Naqab face serious safety hazards on their daily trips to and from school. In 2018, following Adalah's petition, the state agreed to **build bus stops adjacent to 47 schools**.

## Recently Recognized Villages

There are around 20,000 residents living in 11 villages newly recognized by the government: Tarabin as-Sani; Umm Batin; As-Sayyid; Mulada'h; Kuhlih; Drijat; Makhul; Abu Tulul as-Sahbi; Abu Grinat; Gasir as-Sirr; Bir Haddaj. Seven of these villages were recognized in 2003. They still face demolitions and are regularly denied building permits. Out of 11, 10 villages have no electricity access or sewage disposal. All new Jewish towns, on the other hand, are connected to the state's electricity grid and receive all services.

## Government-Planned Townships

There are seven government-planned townships that were formed since 1969: Tel el-Sabe, Rahat, Shegab al-Salam, Ara'ra, Kseiffe, Lagiyya, and Hura. With 160,000 residents, these towns are connected to main infrastructure. However, they still receive much less funding as compared to Jewish towns, and frequently struggle to obtain planning permits for new buildings.



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