

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

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History

Pre-1948: 90,000 Bedouins inhabit the Naqab. They are largely a semi-nomadic community, engaged in cattle herding, grazing, and agriculture. Under the British Mandate (1922-1948), some Bedouin tribes begin to settle in permanent villages in the region.

1948: During the *Nakba* ("catastrophe"), 750,000 Palestinians flee or are expelled from their native land. 11,000 Bedouins remain in the Naqab, most of whom are dispossessed of their land and become internally displaced within the new State of Israel. The remaining tribes are forcibly transferred into a closed zone in the northeast Naqab known as the *Siyaj* ("fence"), and are placed under military rule until 1966.



1969-1989: The Israeli government establishes seven townships for the Palestinian Bedouin in the Naqab: Tel as-Sabi' (Tel Sheva), Rahat, Shaqib as-Salam (Segev Shalom), Ar'arat an-Naqab (Ar'ara BaNegev), Kuseife, Lakiya, and Hura. The townships are created to concentrate and forcibly urbanize Bedouin communities, allowing for Israeli authorities to increase control over the population and expropriate their ancestral land. All other Bedouin villages are considered illegal, or "unrecognized".

1999-2003: The Israeli government "recognizes" eleven Bedouin villages in the Naqab, many of which existed prior to 1948. After recognition, the living conditions in these villages remain very poor. By contrast, all new Jewish localities in the Naqab – which Israel actively seeks to expand – are connected to public infrastructure and utilities.

2013: The Israeli Knesset approves the *Prawer Plan*, through which the Israeli government seeks to destroy the unrecognized villages and forcibly relocate over 70,000 Bedouin citizens into cramped government-planned townships and recognized villages. Although the plan was formally halted in late 2013, following strong local and international protest and condemnation, the government continues to pursue the policy of forced displacement and dispossession.

2013 onwards: The Israeli government continues to conduct home demolitions and other coercive practices across the Naqab, and implements various projects predicated on the forcible displacement of Bedouin citizens, including industrial zones, military firing and training areas, man-made forests and the establishment of new Jewish towns.

Key Figures

- Over **300,000** Palestinian Bedouin citizens of Israel currently live in the Naqab.
- There are **37 unrecognized Bedouin villages** in the Naqab, home to more than **80,000 people**.
- 34,750 Palestinian Bedouin citizens live in recognized villages, **most of which still lack essential services**.
- 192,000 Bedouins reside in **government-planned townships** that, though connected to public infrastructure, are still severely under-funded.
- Over two-thirds** of Palestinian Bedouin citizens in the Naqab live below the poverty line, **three times higher than the poverty rate for Israel's general population**.
- 2,241** structures were demolished in 2019 alone, **85%** of which were demolished by the owners of the structures, under immense pressure by Israeli authorities and under the threat of exorbitant fines.

Legal Action: Adalah's Key Cases

- In 2001, the Health Ministry **opened mother-and-child clinics** in six unrecognized villages, following Adalah's Supreme Court litigation. Due to inadequate public transportation, among other factors, accessing clinics outside the villages is extremely difficult for many Palestinian Bedouin, particularly women. In 2009, the Ministry closed three clinics, despite **mortality rates in the unrecognized villages being the highest in the country** (four times the rate in the Israeli Jewish population). Adalah filed a petition, and three clinics subsequently reopened over the following two years.
- In 2006, Adalah petitioned the Supreme Court on behalf of residents of six unrecognized villages to demand that the villages be supplied with **drinking water**. The residents are forced to purchase their drinking water from a central location, before **transporting it at their own expense in metal containers**, or to access it from water access points located several kilometers from their villages via improvised and unhygienic plastic hose connections. In 2011, Adalah won the case: the Supreme Court **guaranteed the right to water as a constitutional right**, regardless of the legal status of the locality. However, the Court held that the unrecognized villages are only entitled to "minimal access" to water, without specifying what constitutes "minimal".
- In 2015, after 13 years of litigation, the Supreme Court ruled in the case of **Umm al-Hiran** (numbering around 350 Bedouin residents), allowing Israel to carry out its racist plan to **demolish the village and forcibly displace** its residents, for the sole purpose of establishing the Jewish-only town of Hiran over its ruins. Under extreme pressure from the authorities, in 2018 most residents signed an agreement to abandon their village and to relocate to the township of Hura. The state later abandoned the agreement. A number of residents remain on their land in Umm al-Hiran, while Israel continues promoting the development of the Jewish-only town of Hiran. Many other unrecognized villages are under **imminent threat of evacuation**.
- After a seven-year legal struggle, in 2021, Adalah secured the **opening of the first high school** in a newly-recognized Bedouin village, Abu Tulul. Further, following Adalah's legal actions, in 2019, the first high school opened in the unrecognized village of Al-Zarnouq, serving more than 300 students in the village, which has a population of 5,000 Bedouin residents. Before the school's opening, students had to travel up to **90 kilometers to attend school**, an obstacle that contributed to low levels of educational achievement and high drop-out rates, especially for girls.

State Policies of Forced Displacement, Dispossession of Land and Segregation

Israel has been using an array of policies, laws, and planning mechanisms to dispossess Palestinian Bedouins of their land, reduce their living space, and forcibly displace them to a segregated, concentrated, urban area in the northern Naqab. They include:

"Development-induced displacement". Israel locates "development" projects – e.g. highways, weapons testing facilities, military firing zones, high-voltage electricity lines, and mines – on or near Bedouins' land as a means of asserting state control over the land and evacuating them. An example is the planned construction of a phosphate mine that would displace thousands, cause the demolition of 500 homes, and create serious health and environmental hazards for nearby communities.

Denial of basic services. Most of the unrecognized villages have no schools or health clinics. They all lack vital infrastructure, including electricity, running water, paved roads, and sewage disposal systems. Even the recognized villages lack adequate infrastructure to meet the needs of the residents. Israel aims to achieve force displacement by creating a coercive environment that is not suitable for living in.

Evictions and demolitions to expand Jewish settlement. All the structures in unrecognized villages are considered by the Israeli government as unlawful, and thus subject to high fines and violent demolitions, frequently carried by heavily-armed state forces. The passage of [the 2017 Kaminitz Law](#) expanded the state's administrative power to demolish homes, making it even easier for it to pursue demolitions without judicial review.



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