



**Save the Children**  
UK

**Briefing Paper**

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# **FORCED DISPLACEMENT IN THE OCCUPIED PALESTINIAN TERRITORY**

A mother of 11 children in al Jiftlik village in the Jordan Valley stands in front of the section of her house that Save the Children UK is helping to renovate as part of its forced displacement project funded by the Humanitarian Aid department of the European Commission. PHOTO/Osama Dāmo

**‘Water is another crisis in al Jiftlik. We receive piped water through the Israeli water company approximately 3.5 days a week. Thanks to the 1,000-litre water tank provided to us by Save the Children UK, we have water when there is limited or no supply.’ – 57-year-old Adeeba, mother of 11 children in al Jiftlik village.**



Save the Children UK distributed water tanks to 30 families in the Jordan Valley as part of its forced displacement project funded by the Humanitarian Aid department of the European Commission. PHOTO/Osama Damo

## KEY POINTS

- Forced displacement in the occupied Palestinian territory (OPT) is a legal and political concern. It is also both a root cause and consequence of the conflict.
- Forced displacement in the OPT occurs in the context of the Israeli occupation and results from political policies and actions or natural or human-made disasters. Primary causes of displacement include house demolitions, forced evictions of families and/or communities and land confiscation. These actions take place in the context of construction of the Separation Wall, construction and/or expansion of settlements or military incursions. Secondary causes of displacement include movement restrictions, loss of livelihoods, lack of access to basic services, revocation of residency rights and safety concerns as a result of settler violence and Israeli military actions.
- The internally displaced persons (IDPs) classification does not dilute or compromise existing refugee status of Palestinians.
- In the short term, displacement results in loss of shelter, property and sources of livelihoods, and restricted access to essential services, threatening the stability of families and causing them to become increasingly reliant on humanitarian assistance. Longer term displacement results in increased poverty, unemployment and food insecurity for families, reduced academic achievement among children, and signs of psychological distress among children and adults alike.
- International humanitarian and development agencies in the OPT are mandated to respond to displacement and the UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement offers a framework for an inter-agency response.
- According to recent Save the Children UK research,<sup>1</sup> 51% of households surveyed in high risk areas<sup>2</sup> in the West Bank said that humanitarian assistance was not available underscoring the urgency for an inter-agency response to forced displacement.

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<sup>1</sup> In June 2009, Save the Children UK conducted a research survey through Near East Consulting of 472 households located in areas at high risk of forced displacement in the occupied Palestinian territory, including the West Bank and Gaza. The survey sample included 240 households in the Gaza buffer zone area and 232 households in West Bank high risk areas. The survey also sampled more than 1,000 households among the general population in the OPT for comparative purposes. Publication of the research findings is forthcoming.

<sup>2</sup> High risk areas are those areas in the West Bank under complete Israeli control, Area C under the Oslo Accords. Approximately 61% of the West Bank is classified as Area C.

## What role can the humanitarian community play in addressing internal displacement?

The Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement is the global reference for internally displaced persons (IDPs), providing guidance for response. According to the Guiding Principles, IDPs are defined as *'persons or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognized state border.'* Although not a legal definition, nor binding, the Guiding Principles are based on international humanitarian and human rights law.

In the occupied Palestinian territory (OPT), the responsibility to protect civilians, including IDPs, ultimately rests with Israel as the Occupying Power, but the Palestinian Authority also holds responsibility for reaching and responding to IDPs living in areas under its jurisdiction. In addition, humanitarian organizations present in the OPT, in line with their mandates and the suggestions present in the Guiding Principles, have a duty to respond to meet the needs of IDPs and work to uphold their rights. However, no single UN agency is responsible for assisting IDPs. Instead a coordinated inter-agency response is recommended whereby the agencies responsible for each sector lead the response in that area.

### *Adopting an inter-agency response has four main advantages:*

1. It promotes a rights-based approach based on the internationally recognised UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement;
2. It ensures a professional response that is proactive, predictable and transparent;
3. It allows for systematic identification and information collection for programming, advocacy and litigation;
4. It can reduce aid dependency.

***'Far from being confined to a discrete war in 1948, the conflict which triggered Palestinian flight has persisted over six decades... In the occupied Palestinian territory, refugees are repeatedly displaced in the wake of armed incursions, home demolitions and air strikes — and even checkpoints and the separation barrier.'* — UNRWA Commissioner General, January 2008.**

## Internal displacement in the Palestinian context

While forced displacement is far from a new concept for Palestinians, it has often been discussed as a historical and predominantly refugee issue. At the same time, Palestinians, both refugee and non-refugee, continue to be displaced as a result of Israeli actions and policies. In Gaza, displacement results mainly from Israeli military operations, which tend to be large in scale and has often displaced hundreds or thousands of people at a time. In the West Bank, the scale of displacement is different, though the rate appears to be increasing. Palestinians living in the West Bank – including Jerusalem – are displaced by house demolitions; forced evictions; land confiscation; lack of access to essential services; the Separation Wall and its associated regime; revocation of civil documentation and family reunification policies.

Despite the fact that forced displacement has continued unabated throughout Israel's occupation, the needs of IDPs in the occupied territory have only in recent years been addressed in the operations and programming of the international community, which has a key role to play in their protection.

## The scale and scope of internal displacement in the OPT

Monitoring and documentation of internal displacement in the OPT has been largely ad hoc and numbers of internally displaced have been systematically recorded only since 2006. Nevertheless it has been estimated that:

- Approximately 44,100 Palestinians reside in 130 villages that lie entirely in Area C,<sup>3</sup> an area which has been defined as high risk by the humanitarian community. (OCHA)
- An additional 69,900 Palestinians reside in 32 villages that have more of their built-up area within Area C than in Areas A and B. (OCHA)
- In total, more than 228,600 Palestinians reside in 418 West Bank villages that have at least part of their built up areas in Area C.<sup>4</sup> (OCHA)

House demolitions, eviction orders and other land confiscation policies are major contributing factors to forced displacement in the OPT. UN-led research has revealed that over 94% of applications for building permits in Palestinian communities located in Area C submitted to the Israeli authorities between January 2000 and September 2007 were denied. During the same period,

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<sup>3</sup> Area C is the area of the West Bank that is under full Israeli civil and military control and comprises approximately 61% of the West Bank. Population figures in Area C are difficult to estimate as the division of the West Bank into Areas A, B and C (in accordance with the 1995 Israeli-Palestinian Interim Agreement on the West Bank and Gaza Strip) did not reflect or take into account the boundaries of existing population centres, with the result that towns and villages rarely fall entirely within one area. See UN OCHA, Special Focus: "Lack of Permit" Demolitions and Resultant Displacement in Area C, May 2008.

<sup>4</sup> An additional factor impeding the ability to precisely determine the Area C population is that the distribution of the population within a particular village is unknown, i.e. while it is generally possible to ascertain what percentage of a locale's built-up area is located in Area C vs. Area A or B, no data exists indicating the distribution of population in these areas.

5,000 demolition orders were issued, and over 1,600 Palestinian buildings were demolished (OCHA). In Area C, demolitions and displacement are on the rise – in the first half of 2009, monthly averages for Area C demolitions increased by 29% compared to 2008 (OCHA).

In East Jerusalem, Israeli authorities demolished more than 670 Palestinian buildings between 2000 and 2008 due to lack of building permits. At least 28% of all Palestinian homes in East Jerusalem risk being demolished for this reason, placing some 60,000 residents at risk of displacement (OCHA). In all of 2008, only 18 buildings permits were issued to Palestinian families in East Jerusalem (OCHA). In the same year, Israeli authorities demolished approximately 90 Palestinian buildings, the highest figures recorded in the four year period 2005–2008 (OCHA).

The findings of Save the Children UK's recent research on families living in high risk areas, which included Area C in the West Bank and areas located adjacent to or within the buffer zone in Gaza, revealed:

- At least 49% of respondents living in high risk areas have been either temporarily or permanently displaced at least once since 2000.
- In the areas near the Gaza buffer zone, 22% of respondents were living in a partially destroyed house and 12% in a tent over the rubble of their damaged house at the time of the study interview.
- 23% of respondents in high risk areas have had their houses threatened with demolition since 1993 compared with 8% for the rest of the OPT.
- 29% of the high risk area respondents said that they have received land confiscation orders since 1993, compared with 9% in the rest of the OPT. In the West Bank high risk areas alone, 39% of respondents said they had received land confiscation orders since 1993.
- In the West Bank high risk areas, the main displacement triggers were Israeli orders (31%), house demolition (23%) and inadequate shelter<sup>5</sup> (15%).
- In Gaza, the main factors causing displacement were house demolition (48%) and lack of personal security. (28%)
- More than one quarter of Palestinians living in high risk areas would like to move to a new residence. In the West Bank, the main reason cited was lack of access to services (36%). In Gaza, respondents who wished to move cited concerns for personal security (42%) as a primary reason.
- 38% of households in high risk areas changed their place of residence following loss of their job/source of income.
- 78% of displaced families said they wanted to return to their homes.

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<sup>5</sup> Also includes, for example, lack of electricity, running water and sewage network in the house.

## Communities vulnerable to internal displacement

Several communities and populations can be identified as especially vulnerable to displacement. These include East Jerusalem, predominantly rural Area C communities in the West Bank including Bedouin and herder communities, communities in proximity to the Separation Wall, communities located near settlements, and areas inside or near the Gaza buffer zone. Nearly all of the West Bank communities located in these areas have large numbers of outstanding house demolition and/or community eviction orders against them. Areas identified by the international community as high risk are significantly poorer, more marginalized and less protected than the general population.

According to Save the Children UK's recent research:

- Approximately 70% of respondents in high risk areas live below the poverty line<sup>6</sup> compared to 35% among the general population of the OPT.
- 45% of breadwinners in high risk areas in both the West Bank and Gaza have lost their job or sources of livelihood since 2000.
- In the West Bank, 58% of families in high risk areas own land. 50% of households in high risk areas stated that their land was located behind the Separation Wall; 68% cannot access their land as a result.
- Movement restrictions and checkpoints also restricted respondents' ability to market agricultural goods with 96% of surveyed respondents in high risk areas stating they either faced difficulty marketing goods or could not market their goods at all.
- In Gaza, 42% of families living near or in the buffer zone own land. 30% of households stated that their land was located within the buffer zone; 55% cannot access their land as a result.
- 88% of households surveyed in areas near the buffer zone either faced difficulty marketing goods or could not market their goods at all
- More than 50% of all respondents in high risk areas said they feel insecure citing the practices of the Israeli occupation as the main reason.
- International organizations are not reaching those most in need of assistance, particularly in high risk areas in the West Bank. 51% of households surveyed in high risk areas in the West Bank said that humanitarian assistance from local and international organization is 'not available,' in contrast with 7.5% in Gaza high risk areas who said that humanitarian assistance was 'not available.'

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<sup>6</sup> The poverty line is set by the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS) at 2,200 NIS (583 USD) per month for a family of two adults and four children.

## Displacement: A Humanitarian and Political Concern

Case Study: Khirbet Ras al Ahmar, Jordan Valley

Khirbet Ras al Ahmar is a small herding community located in Tubas governorate in the northern Jordan Valley. It is situated in an area declared a 'closed military zone' by Israeli authorities, leaving families increasingly vulnerable to displacement. In late May 2009, Israeli authorities distributed 18 evacuation orders affecting one-third of the community. Days later, Israeli authorities demolished 15 residential structures, 30 animal pens and 18 traditional 'taboun' ovens displacing 128 people, including 66 children as a result. [OCHA]



"We have no place to go," says Souna, who cradles her two-month old baby following the demolition of her home. PHOTO/Sara Mabger

The Bisharat family in ar Ras al Ahmar relies on herding activities for their livelihoods, deriving their income from the dairy products they produce and market.

Ten members of the family live in Ras al Ahmar while other members of the family are based in Tammun because their children are enrolled in the school there. Save the Children UK spoke with 24-year-old Souna, a mother of three young children aged 2 months to 3 years, shortly after the demolition of their home and other structures.

*The Israeli Civil Administration came two days ago and gave us an eviction order, informing us we had 24 hours to leave our homes. This morning, the Israeli military and Civil Administration came and demolished all our structures. The soldiers removed our things and tore down our structures. They tore down the tent where we live and sleep, the pens for the sheep, and where we make bread (taboun, or traditional oven). They took our water tank, drained the water and then confiscated it.*

*We were not prepared for the demolition. We had not removed our things. The Civil Administration came and told us to leave within 24 hours but we were not expecting them to come because this is not a military zone as they claim, it is an agricultural area.*

Save the Children UK and local partner, MA'AN Development Center, implemented a project funded by the Humanitarian Aid department of the European Commission to prevent and respond to forced displacement in the OPT. Through this project, the Bisharat family received immediate emergency assistance including a water tank and food basket. In the month that followed, Save the Children UK, through the YMCA, also provided psychosocial support activities to 20 mothers and 55 children 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 .

Emergency assistance is one component of a comprehensive humanitarian response to forced displacement. Save the Children UK also calls for interventions focused on prevention and protection as well as rehabilitation, and durable solutions for families affected by forced displacement in the OPT.

Souna emphasized the need for a comprehensive response, including durable solutions: ***We want to be able to stay and continue to live here and pursue our livelihood. Where else can we go? We have no place to go. We are originally from al-Hadidiya village where we were forcibly displaced four times in the past. We have been living in this area only since 2009.***



Top: The Bisharat family's income is based on marketing the dairy products derived from their sheep. Middle: The Israeli Civil Administration tore down the family's tent structures after declaring the area a closed military zone. Bottom: Cloth diapers for the baby hang to dry. PHOTO/Sara Mabger

## Vulnerabilities of IDPs

Protection for IDPs is a critical humanitarian concern. The Special Representative on Children and Armed Conflict has called for greater protection for IDP children in particular, saying that the international community *'must address more systematically the acute vulnerability of [forcibly displaced] children and should focus attention in terms of collective advocacy and programmatic interventions'* (SRSR CAAC). Observations of IDP communities as well as Save the Children UK research on the impact of house demolitions on children and their families has revealed numerous short- and long-term vulnerabilities that need to be addressed. These include:

### Immediate/short-term

- Increased household reliance on humanitarian assistance
- Restricted access to water and essential services
- Threat to family unity and stability
- Pressure on host communities
- Loss of shelter, property and sources of livelihood

### Long-term

- Reduced academic achievement
- Reduced agricultural productivity
- Destruction of traditional ways of life
- Increased poverty, unemployment and food insecurity
- Increased psychological distress in children and adults alike including withdrawal, depression, violent behaviour and anxiety.

## Response and protection for Palestinian IDPs

In 2007, local and international non-governmental organizations and UN agencies formed a Displacement Working Group (DWG) in an effort to develop a coordinated inter-agency response to displacement. The goal of this response is both to prevent displacement and protect those who have been displaced. The DWG also works to document and monitor displacement events with a view to improving programmatic responses and advocacy on the issue.



"I want to play games all the time," says eight-year-old Hamed (left) when he is with his six-year-old brother Omar (right). The brothers live apart for nine months out of the year as their family is separated between Tubas and al Jiftlik village in the Jordan Valley to facilitate the children's access to schools. PHOTO/Sara Mabger

In 2008 and 2009 Save the Children UK and its local partner, MA'AN Development Center, implemented an innovative project funded by the Humanitarian Aid department of the European Commission (ECHO) to prevent and respond to displacement pressures and events. This project targeted fourteen communities in the West Bank and Gaza, by providing assistance to relieve displacement pressures, create local protection mechanisms, and provide emergency assistance to families following displacement events.

Based on the experience and learning from the ECHO-funded project, and in line with the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, Save the Children UK calls for a comprehensive and coordinated inter-agency response to forced displacement in the OPT, including the following four components:

- **Prevention:** infrastructure and livelihoods support, health and education services, vocational training and capacity building, formation of Community Protection Committees, legal aid, psychosocial support and advocacy.
- **Emergency response:** shelter, livestock, water and food provisions, family reunification, legal aid, provision of educational and child recreational kits and mother-and-child psychosocial support; remedial education support, host family support and registration.
- **Rehabilitation:** shelter, livelihoods support, vocational and technical training, counselling and psychosocial care, remedial education support, host family support, identification of long-term solutions, and advocacy.
- **Durable solutions:** return to original location of residence, restitution, compensation, or integration.

Children in high risk communities need and deserve special attention, especially following a displacement event. Save the Children UK recommends the following child-focused response:

- **Prevention:** improvement of infrastructure related to education and health access, including support for transportation to schools, child participation in Community Protection Committees, dissemination of child rights information, livelihoods programming, psychosocial support and advocacy.
- **Emergency response:** provision of educational supplies and recreational kits, psychosocial support.
- **Rehabilitation:** counselling, educational support or tutoring, safe play activities, vocational and technical training for youth, youth-focused empowerment activities.
- **Durable solutions:** participation in decision making around long-term solutions for the family or community.



A child walks through the Izbet Abed Rabbu IDP camp in North Gaza.  
PHOTO/Osama Damo

## What works

Examples exist of communities that have been successfully resisting displacement pressures. In al-Aqaba village in the Jordan Valley, donor investment in education, health, water, agriculture, infrastructure, and livelihoods has been identified by residents as supporting those people to remain on their land. Parallel advocacy campaigns, organised visits and legal assistance have also provided a level of protection for residents.

In the Um al Nasser village of Beit Hanoun in Gaza, 1,450 people were displaced in March 2007 when a sewage lagoon in this area overflowed its banks. In this instance, though displacement was known to be possible, prevention efforts were not employed effectively. However, the emergency response following the displacement – including prompt assessment and provision of short-term emergency shelter; water; food, hygiene and kitchen kits; prompt clean-up and rebuilding efforts; 24-hour medical assistance; comprehensive psychosocial assessments; and effective coordination and communication – was seen as effective in meeting the needs of the residents and one that can be replicated and strengthened.

These examples provide a basis for developing best practice around preventing displacement and working towards durable solutions. However, more work needs to be done to map communities at risk of displacement, to better understand the medium- to long-term needs of people following displacement, to understand what IDPs need in order to return, and to understand the impact of displacement on host families and communities.

***‘Because my home is on higher ground in the village, we do not receive any water at all in our house. Save the Children UK provided me with a 1,000-litre water tank, so now, instead of filling gallons and bottles of water every hour from my brother’s house located 300 metres away, I can use my tractor to refill the tank with water from my brother’s home.’  
– 31-year-old Daoud, father of five young children, in al-Jiftlik village.***

## Recommendations

The Displacement Working Group and Save the Children UK recommends the implementation of a coordinated inter-agency response to situations of internal displacement in the OPT. Specifically, funding is needed for the following initiatives:

- Working to prevent further displacement by funding programs for communities at risk (infrastructure and services), and ensuring that information related to displacement is included in reporting on and responses to displacement in donor governments' regular reporting and funding strategies.
- Empowering communities to self-protect through formation of Community Protection Committees.
- Providing legal assistance to all those at risk and who have been displaced.
- Supporting the rapid and consistent delivery of emergency aid across different sectors (shelter; livelihoods, education, and health) based on the needs of the affected families and communities.
- Searching for durable solutions including return, relocation or resettlement and rehabilitation programs that reflect the wishes of the displaced residents.



Children engage in a recreational activity in the al Salam tent camp for internally displaced persons as part of Save the Children's emergency response in Gaza. PHOTO/Osama Damo

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