

# **Raided and Razed:**

Attacks on West Bank Education





NORWEGIAN  
REFUGEE COUNCIL

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## Executive Summary

The objective of this report was to analyse attacks and barriers that harmed Palestinian children's ability to access their education across the West Bank, with special attention to some of the most vulnerable Palestinian school children in Area C. Between January 2018 and June 2020, Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) research showed that Palestinian children in the West Bank contended with a deluge of attacks on education, at a crushing pace of 10 attacks per month, on average. Across the 30-month reporting period, NRC analysis of a multi-source dataset found that 296 attacks against education by Israeli forces or settlers and settlement private security guards took place during 235 separate incidents.

Three out of four attacks were perpetrated by Israeli forces. Of these, 37 per cent involved harassment, intimidation and threats or the actual use of force against students and educational staff, including 10 attacks during which Israeli forces physically assaulted students. Israeli forces injured students with objects such as crowd control weapons during at least 10 attacks and shot two students with live ammunition. In 25 separate incidents, Israeli forces raided schools while they were in session, terrifying students and disrupting lessons. During these raids, or while children were travelling to and from school, Israeli forces detained at least 24 primary or secondary school students. Israeli forces also prevented or delayed students and teachers or other school staff from reaching school on at least 38 occasions and closed, blocked off, or otherwise obstructed the road or entrance to schools 32 times.

Emboldened by ultranationalist rhetoric, Israeli settlers stormed schools and stoned school buses, damaging and vandalizing school property during 20 attacks. The governorates of Nablus and Hebron were especially hard hit, together accounting for nearly 80 per cent of all recorded incidents perpetrated by settlers or settlement private security guards that harmed education in the reporting period.

Further attacks affected educational property or facilities, often in the context of the issuance of demolition or 'stop work' orders, raids, and in one case, land appropriation. In 41 attacks, Israeli authorities demolished, confiscated, or placed under risk of demolition school structures, property, equipment, or materials.

Nowhere in the West Bank is the absence of adequate school facilities more apparent than among Bedouin/herding communities in Area C, where Israeli authorities routinely raze schools and seize tents or other structures being used as schools. As a result

of Israeli prohibitions on construction in Area C, a primary or pre-primary school was under threat of demolition in all six of the vulnerable Bedouin/herding communities where NRC conducted interviews. If these demolition orders were to be carried out, it would directly impact approximately 234 children. At the secondary school stage, children in all six communities had to travel outside of the community. Interviews revealed that travel, even across short distances, created an access barrier due to intersecting challenges such as transportation costs, movement obstacles, and community fears of children encountering violence from settlers and Israeli forces. This barrier has curbed educational access, with nine of 13 families whom NRC interviewed stating that one or more of their children had dropped out of school.

At a time when a number of Bedouin/herding communities in Area C are facing widespread demolitions and demolition threats extending to all or virtually all community structures, Israeli authorities moved to strip away legal protections and speed up the implementation of demolitions and confiscations, using military order 1797 and regulations allowing for the confiscation of movable structures. The Fourth Geneva Convention prohibits the destruction of property by the Occupying Power "except where such destruction is rendered absolutely necessary by military operations".

The advent of the global Covid-19 pandemic saw livelihoods recede across the West Bank. School closures and movement restrictions caused children to shift into distance learning modalities, becoming vulnerable to losing academic ground, and the risk of more children entering the labour market. Simultaneously, economic strain heightened family tensions, leading to increased domestic violence. Access to schooling came screeching to a halt in remote Bedouin/herding communities along the West Bank periphery, where children were already at a higher risk of being out of school.

Should Israel officially annex parts of the West Bank, in violation of peremptory norms of international law, it would exacerbate already fragile schooling conditions. As an immediate result, over 18,000 Palestinian students could be stranded from their current Palestinian educational system, teachers and staff, with deleterious impacts on access to education for these students.

# Recommendations

Children in the West Bank should be able to safely access their education without impediments, threats, violence, or fear. In addition to harming children's ability to safely access schools, attacks on education undermine children's psychological state, which can lead to poorer learning outcomes and hinder their ability to realise their full potential.

## Israel, the Occupying Power, should:

- Abide by its obligations under treaties and customary international law, including the rules of international humanitarian law applicable to situations of belligerent occupation and binding obligations of human rights law, and not commit attacks against education
- Establish procedures that make a clear distinction between the conduct of hostilities and law enforcement, and ensure that forces tasked with a mixed mandate are enabled to operate in full compliance with the legal framework applicable to the operation in question, be it a law enforcement operation or the conduct of hostilities
- Undertake that the decision regarding the legal framework applicable is not left to the discretion of the commanding officer, and should be subject to legal advice and judicial review, specifically addressing the status of children and that of institutions dedicated to their education
- For the protection of children and education institutions in keeping with the applicable rules of international law, Israel should ensure that: (a) Rules and procedures clearly determine the chain of command in view of the decision-making process and criteria governing recourse to force, including the type of force to be used in and around schools and in relation to children; (b) Israeli forces deployed to law enforcement operations must fully understand their mission to restore peace and security and to protect the life of the civilian Palestinian population, including children, and their personal responsibility, including criminal liability in case of excessive use of force; (c) Israeli forces must be proficient in the correct and appropriate use of any equipment used to disperse people and its potential adverse effect on children; (d) In view of the vulnerable position of children and the requirements for special protection and treatment, Israeli forces must employ the utmost restraint in the use of force against children, and are urged to weigh such consequences against the importance of the legitimate objective to be achieved, and

encouraged to search for adequate alternatives to the use of force and firearms against children

- Take immediate action to endorse the Safe Schools Declaration and, independently, to implement the Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from Military Use during Armed Conflict, including reviewing relevant legislation of the Israeli military commander, military doctrine, orders and training, and ensuring adherence to these principles

## All parties should:

- Abide by their obligations under international humanitarian law and not commit attacks against education
- Insist that all parties to conflict must not target or use schools for military purposes, and that where attacks on education have occurred, state and international bodies must investigate and hold perpetrators accountable for crimes
- Assert that children and school staff in the West Bank must be provided with unimpeded physical access to their schools, without delay or harassment
- Stress that Palestinian schools, which constitute a form of civilian infrastructure, must not be damaged or destroyed
- Reaffirm that Israeli annexation of any part of the West Bank would constitute an acquisition of territory, in violation of peremptory norms of international law, and would harm educational access and continuity in the West Bank

## States and international organisations, including intergovernmental organisations, UN bodies and agencies should:

- Adopt an inclusive definition of attacks on education, reflective of the simultaneous application of international humanitarian and human rights law, that brings to the fore the highest degree of protection and reparations to victims
- Consistently raise the issue of protection of education from attack and of educational facilities from military use, and the continuation of education during armed conflict in relevant discussions on the rule of law in occupied Palestinian territory (oPt),



such as during Security Council open debate on children and armed conflict (CAAC), and consider delivering such statements during Human Rights Council sessions, including factually based and legally accurate reference to Israeli and Palestinian authorities' actions

- Focus humanitarian diplomacy on Israel's duty to immediately halt the destruction of schools, as such acts are in breach of international humanitarian law, noting that states have systematically called upon Israel to cease its wrongful behaviour and provide reparations, and consider the appropriate countermeasures to bring Israel into compliance with international law
- In their humanitarian diplomacy, increase focus on the obligation of Israel, the Occupying Power, to provide humanitarian personnel and local authorities with safe and unhindered or unimpeded access to children in need of education and its duty to remove obstacles to accessing education
- Advocate for the expansion of international protection, including through a protective presence to monitor school buildings and accompany children travelling to and from school in areas with high rates of incidents in which Israeli forces or settlers harassed, intimidated, arrested, or delayed school children
- Undertake public advocacy and media engagement and enhance general assistance to affected communities through humanitarian relief, legal aid and engagement with Israeli authorities
- Guide CAAC working group partners in putting in place a clear and well-structured monitoring and reporting mechanism of attacks against schools, particularly strengthening the understanding of attacks in the context of law enforcement operations and in relation to attacks or threats of attack against students and teachers, and ensure such information is adequately reflected in the UN Secretary General's annual report on CAAC
- Ensure that information collected in relation to the wanton destruction of schools is shared with the CAAC working group and included in its communication to UN Headquarters for reflection in the UN Secretary General's annual report on CAAC
- Partner with the Palestinian Ministry of Education (MoE) to improve data collection on out-of-school children, disaggregated by Area A/B/C, distance travelled to school, and household socioeconomic vulnerability, in order to inform retention tactics and alternative educational programmes
- Partner with the MoE and local internet providers to deliver technology assistance, such as internet hot spots, devices that support internet connectivity and other distance learning materials, in marginalised, remote communities in order to support educational continuity
- Partner with the MoE to take proactive measures, including social cohesion interventions and transportation provision, to support school attendance in Bedouin/herding communities

### International and non-governmental organisations should:

- Duly reflect in their monitoring and reporting endeavours that violations affecting education go beyond direct attacks against schools and related persons, documenting and reporting, where applicable, any coercive or administrative impediments to the availability, accessibility, and acceptability of education
- Increase coordination to systematically gather data based on shared criteria and definitions for attacks on education in the oPt and make such information available on a public platform in order to determine prevention and mitigation strategies
- Increase focus on monitoring and reporting on violations affecting education, and the establishment of benchmarks to measure effective prevention and responses



Students sit in a classroom at school in the Jahalin Bedouin community of Khan Al-Ahmar, West Bank, 22 February 2017. (Photo: Ahmad Al-Bazz/ACTIVESTILLS)

# 1. The right to education in the occupied Palestinian territory

In the West Bank and across the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt), international humanitarian law (IHL) and international human rights law (IHRL) apply in complementarity. IHRL is applicable to all people and states are the primary duty-bearers in areas under their authority, while IHL applies in situations of armed conflict and involves multiple duty-bearers, including states and non-state armed groups. In both instances, third parties, including states and international organisations, play a role in ensuring respect for peremptory norms of international law, including rules of international humanitarian law, and the applicable human rights treaty provisions.

The universal right to education was enshrined in the Universal Declaration on Human Rights in 1948. It was reaffirmed by three subsequent treaties: the Convention against Discrimination in Education, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC).

The CRC, which Israel ratified in 1999, stresses that the right to education extends to all children, including those with disabilities and from minority religious, ethnic or linguistic groups. This equitable access directive applies to both primary school, which states must make free and compulsory, and secondary school. The CRC also mandates that states promote school attendance and actively prevent recidivism. Further, it stresses the necessity of alternative forms of education, such as vocational training, and addressing schooling in custodial situations where children have been deprived of their liberty. Like all rights enshrined in the CRC, the “best interests of the child” underpins children’s right to education as the primary guiding principle and test.

As established by the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR), in order for the right to education to be fully realised, education in all its forms and all levels must exhibit the essential elements of availability, accessibility, acceptability and adaptability.

Meanwhile, UN General Assembly Resolution 290 (A/RES/64/290) calls for humanitarian assistance in emergency situations to incorporate education. The Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE) laid out the minimum standards for education in 2004 and 2010, emphasizing the importance of educational continuity during periods of emergency through recovery. In situations of instability and conflict, education can strengthen problem-solving

and informed decision-making while concurrently mitigating the damage of psychosocial responses to disaster or violence. Schools can also serve as safe spaces and access hubs for essential supplies and services for children.

In the context of armed conflict, Security Council resolutions 1998 (2011) and 2143 (2014) urge “all parties to armed conflict to refrain from actions that impede children’s access to education”. The Safe Schools Declaration of 2015 further addressed the need to ensure that schools are safe places, as armed conflicts across the world are depriving generations of their childhoods and futures.

Under IHL, schools are assumed to be protected civilian objects. As a result, illicit direct attacks on schools is a “trigger to list parties to armed conflict in the annexes of the annual report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict”, according to the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary General for Children and Armed conflict.

Israel, as the Occupying Power maintaining military control over the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, holds ultimate responsibility to guarantee Palestinian children fully enjoy their right to education.

Education in the West Bank, including Area C, is largely delivered by the Palestinian Authority (PA). In practice, while the PA exerts full control over access to education in Areas A and B, it is limited to providing teachers for schools and educational materials for teachers and students in Area C. Israel maintains control over security, including movement to and from schools, as well as over the physical infrastructure, such as school construction, expansion, and their connection to the power and water grid.

The United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) also plays a significant role in delivering education in the West Bank, serving registered Palestine refugees. To qualify for this service, children must be the descendants or legally adopted children of “persons whose normal place of residence was Palestine during the period 1 June 1946 to 15 May 1948, and who lost both home and means of livelihood as a result of the 1948 conflict”. They must also live within the areas of service —namely, within refugee camps. In 2019, almost 49,000 children attended UNRWA’s 96 schools in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem.

In East Jerusalem, approximately 20 per cent of students attend schools run by UNRWA, private

entities or the PA. Due to Israel's 1967 annexation of East Jerusalem, an estimated 80 per cent of Palestinian students there attend schools directly run or overseen by the Israel's Jerusalem municipality. This includes some 40 per cent of students who attend 74 "recognised but unofficial" schools, according to figures released by the Palestine Economic Policy Research Institute (MAS) and the Palestine Liberation Organisation Negotiations Affairs Department (NAD). Tuition-based schools are more heavily attended in East Jerusalem compared with the rest of the West Bank due to a significant classroom shortage. In 2019, Israeli NGO Ir Amim estimated that this deficit exceeded 3,000 classrooms.

As reaffirmed by UN Security Council Resolution 252, the "acquisition of territory by military conquest is inadmissible". Consequently, Israel's 1967 annexation of East Jerusalem was rejected as wrongful under international law and the area remains occupied territory.



Haitham M., a 12-year-old resident of Jabal Al-Baba, said he hopes to become a journalist when he grows up. (Photo: Ahmad Al-Bazz/NRC)

## 2. Framework and methodology

This report focuses on availability and accessibility within the 4-A scheme provided by the CESC. Availability relates to a sufficient quantity of educational facilities and programmes, including sanitary conditions, trained staff, safe drinking water and adequate materials, and infrastructure for learning. Accessibility, on the other hand, refers to non-discrimination and the physical and economic accessibility of educational programmes and facilities. Physical accessibility is defined by the 4-A scheme as "within safe physical reach, either by attendance at some reasonably convenient geographic location (e.g. a neighbourhood school) or via modern technology (e.g. access to a 'distance learning programme')". Measurements of acceptability and adaptability are outside of the scope of this report.

The information and analysis in this report is derived from two primary sources: interviews with stakeholders, primarily in six vulnerable Bedouin/herding communities in Area C and a multi-source West Bank incident dataset compiled and cross-referenced by NRC.

Between June and September 2020, NRC conducted 34 in-depth interviews with community leaders, school staff, parents and children. The interviews focused on six Bedouin/herding communities along the central and southern West Bank periphery.

The communities studied in this report were: Wadi As-Seeq on the Ramallah periphery; Jabal Al-Baba and Al-Muntar on the East Jerusalem periphery; Jubbet Adh-Dhib on the Bethlehem periphery; and As-Simiya and Khirbet Ghuwein Al-Fauqa on the Hebron periphery. Due to restrictions and safety concerns associated with the spread of Covid-19, interviews were conducted in-person and by telephone. Where possible, interviews that were initially completed over telephone were followed up with in-person interviews when NRC staff returned to the communities to collect photographs and video footage.

Secondly, NRC gathered data on incidents harming Palestinian children's access to education perpetrated by Israeli forces or settlers between January 2018 and March 2020. Data included incidents reported by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), Première Urgence Internationale (PUI), B'Tselem, Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel (EAPPI), Al-Haq and NRC. The incidents were cross-checked with annual violation reports shared by the Palestinian Ministry of Education (MoE), resulting in a combined data approach.

Of note, the multi-source dataset used in this report preceded a new online database on incidents affecting education gathered and verified by the Education Cluster, a formal coordination and collaboration



forum on education in humanitarian crises. This cluster mechanism serves as an umbrella for reporting and tracking violations against education across the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip, from January 2019 onward. NRC, a member of the Education Cluster, will support the integration of the data used in this report into the Education Cluster's incident database.

***Between January 2018 and June 2020, NRC's Better Learning Programme (BLP) reached 14,315 beneficiaries, while the Information, Counselling and Legal Assistance (ICLA) programme provided legal aid to 12,627 individuals.***

Recorded cases in the multi-source West Bank dataset were measured by two axes: 'incidents' and 'attacks'. An incident was defined as bounded by time, continuity, and location. In some cases, an incident may have been short, such as a momentary confrontation between a settlement private security guard and a student. In others, an incident may have unfolded over hours or days, such as the declaration of a closed military zone in front of a school that persisted for two days, which was also counted as one incident. The second axis, attacks, was used to measure types of harmful acts within incidents, which were categorised into 12 groups. The goal of the incident axis was to demonstrate the rate and geographic distribution of events harming West Bank children, while the attack axis was a better measurement for incidents that evolved or snowballed in severity, as well as incidents that involved multiple perpetrators and forms of harm.

Many documented or reported cases were excluded from the register of NRC's incident dataset for this report. Due to the difficulty of verifying and confirming incidents that involved tear gas inhalation injuries, or missed instructional minutes from tear gas in or near school property, such incidents were excluded from the dataset. However, concerns regarding the impact on children and education of Israeli forces' repeated use of large amounts of tear gas, particularly in crowded areas and confined spaces, remain. Tear gas may only be used where strictly necessary in a law enforcement context. Where state forces employ tear gas, it must be carefully controlled to minimise

the risk to children and uninvolved persons, and be used in proportion to the seriousness of the offense and the legitimate objective to be achieved. Pre-emptive school cancellations because of anticipated disturbances and tensions, as well as confrontations involving international monitors and Israeli forces or settlers, were also outside of the inclusion criteria.

The report also heavily relied on NRC's programmatic experience in education, counselling and legal assistance programmes in the oPt as well as, information shared by NRC partners. Between January 2018 and June 2020, NRC's Better Learning Programme (BLP) reached 14,315 beneficiaries across 144 schools in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. In the same period, NRC's Information, Counselling and Legal Assistance (ICLA) programme provided legal representation, training, awareness or counselling sessions to 12,627 beneficiaries, including beneficiaries in 48 Bedouin/herding communities. Of the total work carried out between January 2018 and June 2020, ICLA followed up on two ongoing public interest cases, primarily funded by EU Humanitarian Aid, involving demolition incidents, demolition orders or 'stop work' orders impacting the schools in Wadi As-Seeq School, Al-Muntar, Jubbet Adh-Dhib, as well as Qurtuba school in Hebron.

NRC also spoke with MoE officials and interviewed school staff from three primary schools in the communities studied in this report.

In addition, this report draws from existing literature on education in the oPt, communications with NRC partners and other NGOs working in the six selected communities, and a rapid needs assessments carried out by NRC and the West Bank Protection Consortium (WBPC) during the Covid-19 pandemic.



Sundus W. helps her younger brother, Muhammad, with his homework in their home, Jubbet Adh-Dhib, West Bank. (Photo: Ahmad Al-Bazz/NRC)

### 3. Overview of attacks on education in the West Bank

The Palestinian population, including an estimated 2.27 million children below the age of 18, according to the mid-2020 figures published by Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS), is one of the most literate in the world. Across the oPt, school attendance is very high for children in the first stage of education, reaching 94 per cent of children. However, at the secondary stage, only 61 per cent of children are still in school, according to the 2018 State of Palestine Country Report on Out-of-School Children by the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF). Teenage boys are disproportionately at risk of dropping out. By the age 15, nearly 25 per cent of boys drop out of school, compared with seven per cent of girls, UNICEF found. Economic hardship, educational quality, and conflict-related barriers all adversely impact children's access to education.



Palestinians try to pass through Israeli dirt mounds that block the main entrance of Burin village near Nablus, West Bank, 6 September 2016. (Photo: Ahmad Al-Bazz/ACTIVESTILLS)

Despite high national attendance rates, it is equally true that Palestinian children in the West Bank have yet to fully realise their inalienable right to education due to Israel's protracted military occupation, which denies children safe and adequate access to schools. Attacks on Palestinian students, teachers and schools, whether in the context of individual encounters or structural mechanisms, are the aberrant norm.

This report adopts the definition of 'attacks on education' put forward by the Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack (GCPEA) as "any threatened or actual use of force against students, teachers, academics, education support and transport

staff (e.g. janitors, bus drivers), or education officials, as well as attacks on education buildings, resources, material, or facilities (including school buses)".

Similarly, Human Rights Watch (HRW) defines attacks on education as "encompassing the full range of violations that place children at risk and deny them access to education. This includes attacks on school infrastructure and on teachers and students; the occupation of schools by the police and military; harassment and threats against teachers, parents, and students; and the recruitment of children from schools to become soldiers".

Between January 2018 and March 2020, NRC found that there were 235 incidents and 296 attacks in which Israeli forces and settlers or settlement private security guards harmed Palestinian children's access to education in the West Bank (see *Framework and methodology* for elaboration of the definitions of 'incident' and 'attack' used in this report). This finding was based on analysis of the combined violations dataset, which this report will hereafter refer to as the Attacks on Education (AoE) dataset.

AoE cases were recorded or reported by OCHA and five NGOs, including NRC, and were cross-checked with MoE reports. Neither OCHA nor the MoE recorded any attacks on education from April to June 2020, as in-person learning was suspended, and a Palestinian national lockdown came into effect.

***Between January 2018 and March 2020, NRC found that there were 235 incidents and 296 attacks in which Israeli forces and settlers or settlement private security guards harmed Palestinian children's access to education in the West Bank.***

**Figure 1:** Attacks on West Bank education January 2018 - June 2020, broken down by governorate

Governorate	Israeli forces as perpetrators	Settlers / settlement private security guards as perpetrators	Israeli forces and settlers perpetrators	Total
Jenin	3	0	0	3
Tubas	4	1	0	5
Tulkarem	0	0	0	0
Nablus	31	18	3	52
Qalqilya	1	0	0	1
Salfit	0	2	0	2
Ramallah (and Al-Bireh)	14	0	0	14
Jericho	2	0	0	2
Jerusalem	40	2	0	42
Bethlehem	17	4	0	21
Hebron	75	16	2	93
<b>Total</b>	<b>187</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>235</b>

*Based on AoE dataset*

*\*Note: Israeli forces were often present during settler attacks on education shown in this table, however, this analysis strictly limits the term 'perpetrator' to the immediate actor committing the documented behaviour.*

Hebron suffered the highest number of incidents, accounting for 40 per cent of all instances where Israeli forces and settlers or settlement private security guards carried out attacks on West Bank education in the reporting period. Both Nablus and Jerusalem were adversely affected, exceeding an average rate of two incidents per month.

The incidents included wide ranging behaviours, which NRC categorised into 12 main attack categories, shown in Figure 2. Incidents that met the AoE inclusion criteria, but did not match any of the descriptive categories, were marked as 'other'. Examples of attacks in this category include incidents where Israeli forces prevented teachers from helping students cross the road in the central West Bank village of Al-Maniya near Bethlehem; a group of Israeli forces attempted to enter Ibziq school in northern Jordan Valley governorate of Tubas in order to carry out a military training; a settler in a car attempted to kidnap

an 11-year-old child from a school yard in Al-Lubban Ash-Sharqiya, a northern Nablus-area village; Israeli soldiers photographed and attempted to enter the previously demolished As-Simiya school premises in the southern part of the Hebron governorate; Israeli forces delayed the Palestinian Red Crescent Society from responding to an emergency medical call from Qurtoba school in the city of Hebron, in the southern West Bank.

While incidents capture the number of separate occasions — in terms of date and location — on which such events occurred, attacks measure the types of violations against education. For example, an instance where a group of settlers damaged school property while Israeli forces injured a student, was counted as one incident and two attacks. On average, 1.3 attacks occurred per recorded incident, amounting to 296 total attacks.

**Figure 2:** Attacks on West Bank education January 2018 - June 2020, broken down by type

Type of attack on education	Israeli forces as perpetrators	Settlers / settlement private security guards as perpetrators	Total
<b>Harassment and intimidation of student/s</b> (includes verbal assaulting, threatening, following in a threatening manner and chasing)	19	25	44
<b>Physical violence against a student/s</b> (includes pushing, striking, punching, kicking, choking)	10	2	12
<b>Physical violence against a teacher/s</b> (includes pushing, striking, punching, kicking, choking)	3	0	3
<b>Student/s injured by live ammunition</b>	2	0	2
<b>Student/s injured by object</b> (includes injuries from being directly struck by rubber bullets, tear gas canisters, stones or other objects)	10	5	15
<b>Student/s or school staff stopped or delayed</b> (includes being stopped or held at checkpoints, and being stopped or held at any location including for brief questioning or 'security' body and possession searches)	38	2	40
<b>Arrest or detention of student</b> (during school day or while travelling to or from school)	24	0	24
<b>Arrest or detention of school staff</b> (during school day or while travelling to or from school)	2	0	2
<b>Raid or incursion onto school property while students present</b>	25	1	26
<b>Route or entrance to school closed or obstructed</b> (includes instances where checkpoints are closed; roads are demolished, blocked, or declared as military zones, and school entrances are sealed or obstructed)	33	1	34
<b>School facilities or property impacted</b> (stoned, vandalised, or otherwise damaged)	10	20	30
<b>School structure or property seized, demolished or placed under threat of demolition</b> (includes full or partial demolitions; delivery of 'stop work' or demolition orders; seizure or confiscation of school property, structures, construction materials or educational supplies and materials; and appropriation of school land)	41	0	41
<b>Other incident that impacted educational access or availability</b> (excludes tear gas inhalation injuries or disruption and lost schooling from general clashes where school, teachers or students were not directly impacted)	10	13	23
<b>Total</b>	<b>226</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>296</b>

Based on AoE dataset



### 3a. Attacks on education perpetrated by Israeli forces

The AoE dataset revealed that the vast majority of attacks, 226, were perpetrated by Israeli forces. This number includes 22 instances where Israel forces physically assaulted, shot, or injured students with an object.



Nine-year-old Malek Issa recovers in the hospital on 22 February 2020 after Israeli police shot him in the head with a crowd control weapon on 15 February and doctors had to surgically remove his left eye. (Photo: Heather Sharona Weiss/ACTIVESTILLS)

On 2 February 2020, 12-year-old Mahmoud M. was struck on the head by a tear gas canister while attending Burin Co-Ed Secondary School in the Nablus governorate. A group of armed settlers had gathered near the school gate at recess, the boy told NRC. Clashes broke out and Israeli soldiers arrived on the scene, deploying tear gas canisters into the school yard. “I did not see the canister because there was so much smoke that I could not open my eyes. I was not breathing much, either,” said Mahmoud. “It hit my head and my head started bleeding. Inside the school, they tried to stop the bleeding using a first aid kit. When I got home, I was dizzy and drowsy because of the head injury so my family took me to the hospital in Nablus.”

Mahmoud’s mother expressed concern that frequent attacks on her children’s school have become the status quo. “I attended the same school when I was a student, and now the same things are happening to my kids. It has not improved. It has only gotten worse — more incidents and closures,” she said.

Gwyn Lewis, Director of UNRWA Affairs in the West Bank told NRC in October 2020 that Israeli forces’ actions had impacted over 3,200 children in eight different UNRWA schools during the last two school years. “These incidents took various forms; schools fired upon with sound bombs and tear gas canisters, but also incidents of threats and intimidation to both UNRWA staff and pupils,” Lewis stated.

***“I did not see the canister because there was so much smoke that I could not open my eyes. I was not breathing much, either,” said 12-year-old student Mahmoud from a Nablus-area school. “It hit my head and my head started bleeding.”***

While the AoE dataset found that 24 children were arrested or detained by Israeli forces from school or while travelling to and from school, it is critical to note that access to education is also directly impacted when students cannot attend school due to being deprived of their liberty, regardless of the location of the arrest. Israeli forces arrested 1,247 Palestinian children between January 2018 and June 2020, OCHA reported.

A further 53 attacks by Israeli forces impacted educational property. Many of these occurred in the context of demolitions or demolition threats to school property. Due to Israel’s planning policies, which effectively bar Palestinian construction in Area C, over a third of Palestinian communities in Area C of the West Bank lack a primary school according to HRW, and those that do exist are often under demolition threat. Israeli authorities fully or partially demolished, or confiscated education infrastructure in the West Bank at least 23 times between January 2010 and June 2020, often repeatedly targeting the same schools. As of 31 October 2020, 52 Palestinian schools are at risk of full or partial demolition due to pending ‘stop work’ or demolition orders, 44 of which are located in Area C, according to the Education Cluster.



Palestinian school children walking to their homes pass Israeli soldiers in the streets of Al-Eizariya, West Bank, 13 February 2014. (Photo: Ryan Rodrick Beiler/ACTIVESTILLS)

***Due to Israel's planning policies, which effectively bar Palestinian construction in Area C, over a third of Palestinian communities in Area C of the West Bank lack a primary school and those that do exist are often under demolition threat.***

For this reason, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) described the status of education in the oPt as being “in disrepair and failing, due largely to effects of the Israeli occupation: insufficient school infrastructure, lack of adequately trained teachers, and a lack of access to schooling in marginalised areas”.

### **3b. Attacks on education perpetrated by Israeli settlers or settlement private security guards**

Among 70 attacks perpetrated by Israeli settlers, harassment and intimidation of students was the most prevalent type, accounting for just over a third of settler attacks on education. In two separate December 2019 incidents in the Nablus and Bethlehem governorates, a settlement private security guard and an armed settler chased a group of secondary school students.

On 9 September 2018, a settler harassed students walking from their homes in Tuba to their school in At-Tuwani, in the South Hebron Hills. The settler verbally accosted the children, who were accompanied by Operation Dove volunteers, a Catholic NGO, and tried to use his car to block the road.

In nearly 30 per cent of attacks, settlers attacked school infrastructure. Such incidents included stoning classroom windows and school buses, arson, damaging security cameras, and painting Hebrew slogans or graffiti — including elements of hate speech — on school walls. Students sustained injuries after being struck by stones or broken glass during four settler stoning attacks that occurred in Jerusalem, Hebron, Nablus and Salfit.

A dozen of the AoE incidents took place in Urif, south of Nablus city. On three occasions between 10 October and 7 November 2018, settlers from Yitzhar settlement attacked Urif Boys school. Yitzhar settlement sits on top of a mountain, overlooking six Palestinian villages in the Nablus governorate.

The most severe of these attacks took place on 18 October 2018, when a group of settlers armed with axes and stones descended on the school, accompanied by Israeli forces. The settlers stoned the school while students were in classrooms. As students fled the school, Israeli forces fired tear gas canisters and rubber bullets. OCHA reported that at least seven children and one teacher sustained injuries from rubber bullets, which contain a steel core. While less lethal than live ammunition, rubber bullets can still inflict serious injury or even death.



School children in Hebron's Tel Rumeida neighbourhood walk past “Qafisheh” checkpoint, on the western side of H2. (Photo: Ivan Karakashian/NRC)



## The psychological impact of attacks on schools

An environment of stability and safety is essential for children to develop and reach their full potential. Yet, AoE data demonstrates how frequently Palestinian students are exposed to armed forces, as well as stressful and violent experiences. “Apart from the physical injury and related absence from school, these incidents impact children socially and psychologically by creating anxiety, trauma and harm to their sense of safety, which ultimately makes learning more difficult,” OCHA writes.

“They were crying and begging for help, and I was unable to protect them,” said Radi Mayaleh, a school counsellor at Ziyad Jaber Primary School in Hebron, describing an incident in March 2019. Based on data collected by NRC, Israeli forces pursued two boys, aged seven and nine, as they were leaving school. The boys ran back into the school, seeking refuge in the principal’s office. Israeli forces followed the two students into the school and verbal confrontations broke out between the soldiers and school staff, escalating to the point of soldiers pointing guns at the school staffs’ heads, according to the MoE.

Although Mayaleh and other school staff tried to prevent it, Israeli forces detained the 9-year-old boy. “I felt helpless and afraid because soldiers broke the laws, by storming into the school, and drawing weapons on us while we were inside a school, a place that should have been safe from any military attacks,” said Mayaleh.

The boy was released the same day into his father’s care, after being held and questioned by Israeli forces for a little over an hour. However, the stressful encounter continued to impact both of the children.

After the incident, teachers noticed that the 9-year-old boy changed. “He seemed detached,” Mayaleh said. “He grew more aggressive with his classmates. He made up excuses for not attending school.” The 7-year-old boy also showed some sign of regression. “He went backwards, academically,” Mayaleh said, “losing some basic skills that he had before.”

In addition, other students showed signs of being negatively impacted by the incident, Mayaleh said. “Students who heard or witnessed the event became more fearful,” Mayaleh told NRC. “At the psychological and academic levels, the incident affected the students. They no longer wanted to attend school. Their grades started to decline and teachers noticed a drop in their levels of participation and engagement during classes and even in terms of their social relations.”

Mayaleh has participated in NRC’s Better Learning Programme (BLP). BLP is a school-based intervention that aims to restore a child’s academic functioning and well-being following a traumatic experience. The programme’s core principles to recovery include providing social support, instilling hope, and empowering children to achieve better self-efficacy. It is also designed to strengthen the two core social domains in children’s lives: schools and families.

“It was very interesting and useful, both to me and the students. At school, there were a large number of students who had nightmares and had no tool and method to support them before the programme. When we were hired as counsellors, our capabilities in dealing with such cases were not developed, but the programme has filled in some of the training I needed in order to support my students,” Mayaleh said.

“While the global pandemic has impacted the mental health of people everywhere, children and especially those who have previously experienced traumatic events, are more vulnerable,” said Camilla Lodi, Psycho-Social Support and Social Emotional Learning Regional Adviser at NRC’s Middle East Regional Office (MERO). “The stress of the current Covid-19 pandemic can compromise children’s physical and mental health by triggering symptoms from past traumatic experiences, leading to the onset of more severe health issues or even death. Further, sustained exposure to large stressors can lead to temporary cognitive impairment in the short term and stress-related illnesses in the long term.”



A student walks down the hall of Madama Mixed Secondary School in Nablus governorate with her counsellor, who participated in BLP trainings. (Photo: Ivan Karakashian/NRC)

## 4. Education in Bedouin/herding communities in Area C



Palestinian children herding their family sheep in the Jordan Valley, West Bank, 6 February 2020. (Photo: Keren Manor/ACTIVESTILLS)

Over 30,000 Palestinians live in 183 Bedouin/herding communities that are fully or partially located in Area C. These communities subsist on the fringe of the West Bank, both geographically and economically. According to a 2017 Oxfam report, Bedouin/herding communities represent some of the poorest households in the oPt.

Many are “landless refugees” who have been internally displaced once or more. According to UNRWA, approximately 70 per cent of all Bedouins in the West Bank are refugees. While some Area C Bedouin communities receive direct education assistance from UNRWA, due to these communities’ location outside of refugee camps, UNRWA education facilities are not readily available to many of them.

Whether Bedouin or non-Bedouin herders, these communities have lost access to a substantial amount, if not all, of their original grazing lands, from which they traditionally drew their primary livelihood.

Due to Israel’s historic and current occupation policies and practices in Area C, Bedouin/herding communities have been subjected to two simultaneous contradictory forces: rapid urbanisation and the inability to develop in a way that is in line with their traditional lifestyle. Diminished access to seasonal grazing land and the

growth of settlements have made it difficult for them to secure adequate income from herding, forcing them to purchase water and fodder for their animals and seek employment in the Israeli labour market. At the same time, Israeli policies preventing them from installing electricity and water infrastructure, or erecting community structures, deny these communities the tools they need to adapt economically to the loss of their grazing land.

***Due to Israel’s historic and current occupation policies and practices in Area C, Bedouin/herding communities have been subjected to two simultaneous contradictory forces: rapid urbanisation and the inability to develop in a way that is in line with their traditional lifestyle.***



Since the Oslo Accords were concluded in the mid-90s, Area C, representing approximately 62 per cent of all West Bank land, remained under full Israeli control. There, Israel applies a planning framework, which violates the prohibition on unnecessary changes to local legislation and institutions. OCHA reports that less than 1 per cent of Area C has been planned for Palestinian development, a precondition for issuing building permits. Accordingly, the Israeli Civil Administration (ICA), in response to a freedom of information request filed by Israeli NGO Bimkom, said it had approved just 245 out of 6,532 Palestinian applications for building permits in Area C since 2000. Between 2016 and 2018, only 21 out of 1,485 applications, or 1.41 per cent, received approval.



An official Israeli sign, stating that the area has been designated as a nature reserve, is seen on the eastern part of Wadi As-Seeq community on 10 September 2020. (Photo: Ahmad Al-Bazz/NRC)

In contrast, Israel has designated over 19 per cent of Area C for settlement use. According to OCHA, 8.5 per cent of Area C has approved settlement outline plans and a further 11 per cent falls “within the municipal boundaries of settlements for future planning”. An EU report revealed that in the first half of 2019, 5,800 settlement housing units were advanced in the planning and implementation process, including 603 units in the large settlement Ma’ale Adumim, which is situated near the Bedouin community of Jabal Al-Baba. The report also noted with concern that the planned expansion of Alon settlement could threaten the Bedouin community of Khan Al-Ahmar, which is under threat of demolition. In 2020, the number of units in West Bank settlements advanced or approved hit a nine-year high of 12,159, according to the Israeli NGO Peace Now.

Further, Israel considers more than a quarter of the West Bank, approximately 1.6 million dunums (1,600 square kilometres), as ‘state land’, Israeli rights group Yesh Din reported in a legal opinion paper. Based on the ICA’s response to a freedom of information request filed by Israeli NGO, Peace Now, Israel allocates over 99 per cent of ‘state land’ in the occupied West Bank

for Israeli use only, rather than public land that the Occupying Power should preserve and develop for the benefit of the occupied population, in accordance with international law.

***Cut off from grazing lands and unable to install infrastructure, the margin of survival for Bedouin/herding communities in Area C is paper thin.***

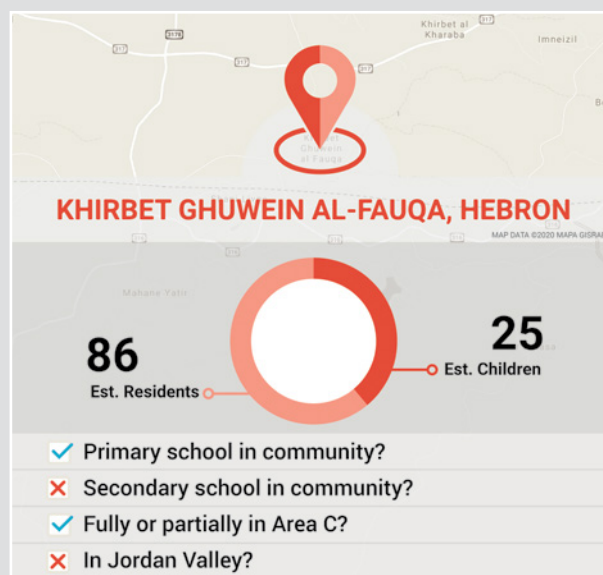
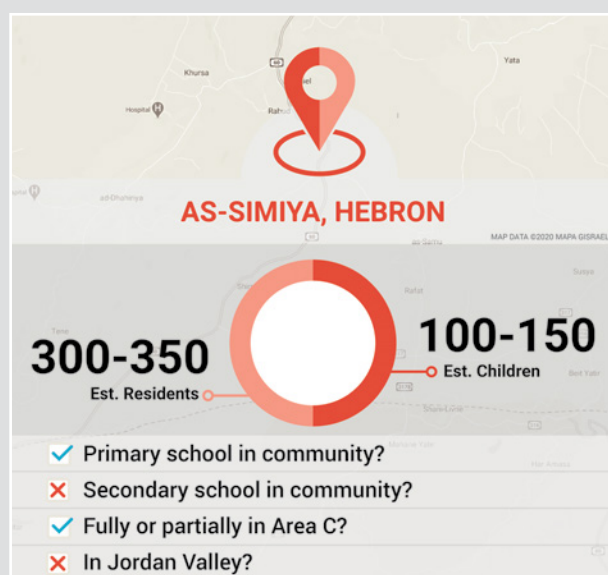
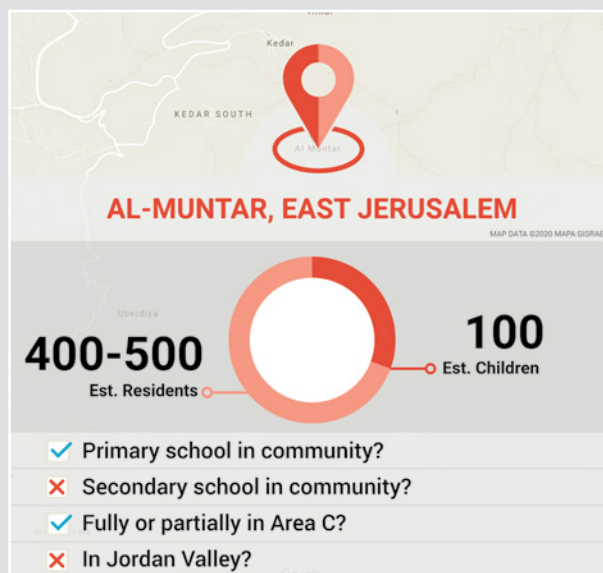
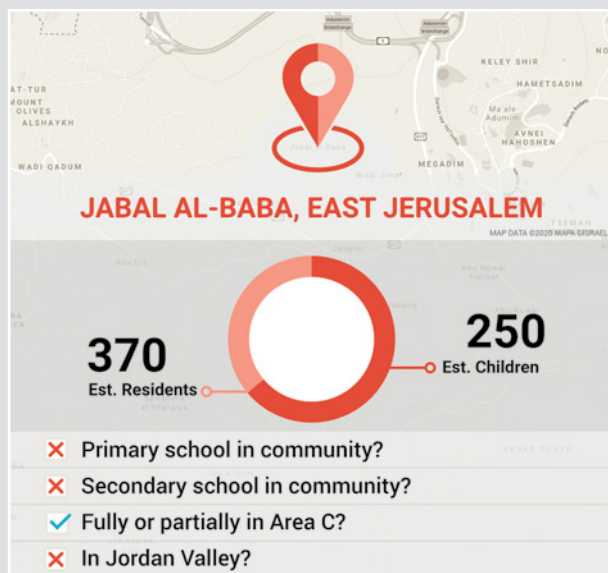
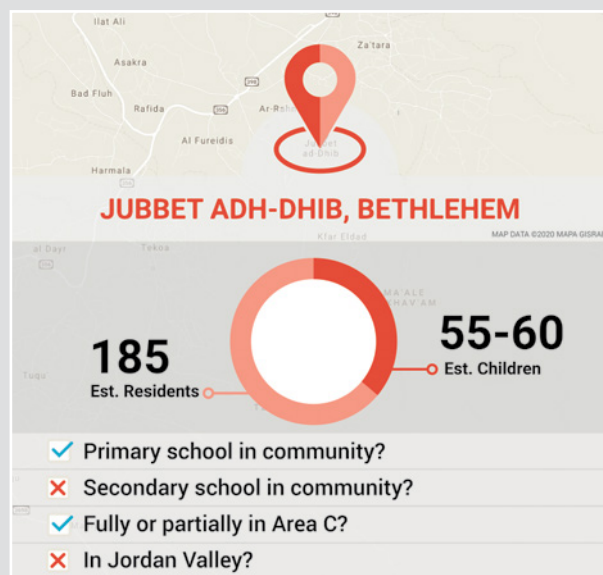
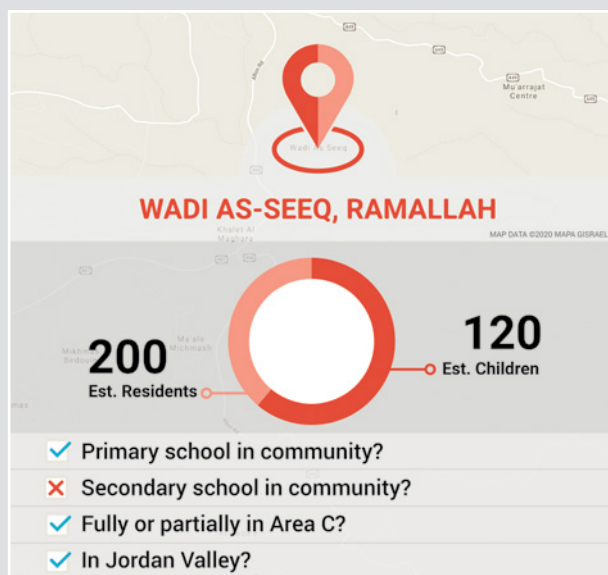
Cut off from grazing lands and unable to install infrastructure, the margin of survival for Bedouin/herding communities in Area C is paper thin. Consequently, obstacles inhibiting access to education, even if seemingly minor, can have long reverberations. If the electricity goes out due to a solar panel demolition or an irregular supply, children may need to help families make up for lost machine labour in domestic chores. If there is no school in the community at a child’s grade level, the family may not be able to pay for the necessary transportation for their child to access the nearest school, leading to early dropout. Primary schools located within communities are well attended, but these are often under demolition threat, making education continuity tenuous.

In addition to affecting their right to education, demolitions can traumatise children. “The impact on children can be particularly devastating, including depression, anxiety, and symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder,” said OCHA.



A view of livelihood and residential structures in Wadi As-Seeq, West Bank. (Photo: Ahmad Al-Bazz/NRC)

## Overview of six Bedouin/herding communities studied in this report



Data from the Education Cluster and NRC interviews

#### 4a. Pre-primary and primary schools inside the community under demolition threat

A common theme among the stakeholders whom NRC interviewed was the importance of having schools within their community. Yet, in all six studied communities, a primary or pre-primary structure is currently under threat of demolition, pending legal proceedings.

Both adults and children felt students were safest inside the community, without the risks that travel could bring, whether conflict-related or more general. When schools are based in the community, there is also no financial cost associated with transportation, which can be a significant obstacle to access in a family barely making ends meet.



Palestinian children walk back home after finishing their school day, Jubbet Adh-Dhib, West Bank. (Photo: Ahmad Al-Bazz/NRC)

**Figure 3:** Demolition orders impacting pre-primary and primary school structures

Community	Demolition order (DO) or 'stop work' order (SWO)	Date order issued	Type of educational structure	Grades served
Wadi As-Seeq	DO*	03/24/2020	Primary school	1 - 6
Jabal Al-Baba	DO*	10/06/2019	Pre-primary	Kindergarten
Al-Muntar	DO*	03/14/2017	Pre-primary and primary school	K - 7
Jubbet Adh-Dhib	SWO*	19/04//2017	Primary	1 - 4
As-Simiya	DO*	30/10/2019	Pre-primary and primary school	K - 6
Khirbet Ghuwein Al-Fauqa	DO*	06/10/2016	Primary	1 - 6

*\*order frozen pending resolution of legal proceedings*

*Based on data from the WBPC, NRC and legal partners.*

This was especially true for pre-primary school, since it takes place before formal, compulsory education. Based on the interviews NRC conducted, children were likely to attend a pre-primary school if it was located within the community. However, only three of the six selected communities had a pre-primary school in their community: Jabal Al-Baba, Al-Muntar and As-Simiya.

***"They started school late. They did not even enter 1st grade," said Suliman Kaabneh, a father of 12 children in Wadi As-Seeq.***



“They started school late. They did not even enter 1st grade,” said Suliman Kaabneh, a father of 12 children in Wadi As-Seeq. He said that the nearest primary school at the time was in Deir Jarir, which is approximately 10-11 kilometres away. “The transportation expenses were too high and the travel was so hard,” Kaabneh said.

Early childhood education can have a substantial impact on long term earnings, health and even reduce the likelihood of an individual committing a crime. A 2017 paper by the Bureau of Economic Research measured midlife outcomes of US adults who had been identified as disadvantaged at an early age. The study calculated gains in the individual’s labour income, parental labour income, crime, and health, finding that a high-quality early education yielded a 13.7 per cent rate of return.

With the exception of Jabal Al-Baba, all of the studied communities had primary schools inside the community. “Of course, if we had every grade in the community, it would be better,” said Kaabneh. “It would make things much easier on the students. Instead, they sometimes have to walk to school on rainy days. Sometimes, there are problems with Jewish settlers on the nearby bypass road. On some days, the situation became so dangerous that we just did not send our kids to school.”



Students wear masks to prevent the spread of Covid-19 during a lesson in Al-Muntar primary school in early October 2020. (Photo: Ahmad Al-Bazz/NRC)

“The first question on people’s minds is always where students will study. Now, there is a school that supports their existence on the land,” said the principal of Khirbet Ghuwein Al-Fauqa primary school, Hani al-Kabash. Before the school was officially established, he told NRC that children dropping out of school was more common, and that families felt pressured to move to nearby areas with schools.



A teacher writes on a whiteboard during a primary school lesson in Khirbet Ghuwein Al-Fauqa. (Photo: Ahmad Al-Bazz/NRC)

Dua Abu Zeinah, principal of As-Simiya primary school, shared a similar observation: “People used to live in As-Samu, or to send their children to schools in As-Samu on a daily basis, and sometimes accompany them. There was no transportation organised by the PA. The school was built and it is now supporting people’s ability to exist here. The school is one minute away from the students. Students do not approach the bypass road any more.”

Given clear community preference for schools inside their community, the impact of a demolition can be significant. Some of the six school structures under risk of demolition were established as humanitarian relief projects, including with funds from the EU and European governments. Some are also part of an MoE Al-Tahadi or ‘challenge’ schools initiative to establish micro schools in marginalised Area C communities in order to improve education access and support community resilience, according to media reports.

For many of the stakeholders, the current school demolition orders are not the first of their kind that they have seen. “We had a primary school that went up to the 3rd grade, but it was demolished three times in 2017 and once more in 2018,” said Atallah Mazarah, Jabal Al-Baba’s community representative.

The Jabal Al-Baba kindergarten, which serves 25 children, is not the only structure in the community that has come under demolition threat. “For the past six years we have witnessed almost 70 demolition cases in the community. Almost every structure in the community has been demolished: the clinic, the kindergarten, the women’s centre, and the primary school,” Mazarah said. “It has definitely affected us in many ways. For the children, especially, it has taken a psychological toll. On winter days, looking for alternative shelter after a demolition has taken place is very difficult and taxing.”



***“For the past six years we have witnessed almost 70 demolition cases in the community. Almost every structure in the community has been demolished: the clinic, the kindergarten, the women’s centre, and the primary school,” said Jabal Al-Baba’s community representative.***

Approximately 45 children in As-Simiya attend a primary school, serving from kindergarten up to the 6th grade. One month after it was established in November 2018, Israeli forces demolished the primary school.

Israeli authorities seized educational structures, including three tents used by the school, in three separate incidents between December 2018 and January 2019. In March 2019, Israeli forces demolished the school’s remaining concrete foundation.

Hoping to protect the school from future demolitions, Farhan Salamin, a member of the As-Simiya Agricultural Committee, told NRC that the community re-established the school last year on private land “in between the houses”. By October 2019, the ICA issued a ‘stop work’ order against the new school. The landowner submitted a building permit application in November 2019, which is still pending.



Following a demolition in November 2018, As-Simiya primary school was rebuilt in 2019. (Photo: Ahmad Al-Bazz/NRC)

At the end of December, the ICA issued a demolition order against the school, but the order is currently frozen until the end of legal proceedings.

Jubbet Adh-Dhib’s primary school was under construction in April 2017, when the ICA issued a ‘stop work’ order. Israeli forces demolished and confiscated a set of six caravans that were being used for educational purposes in August 2017. The caravans had been installed by an international NGO to serve approximately 60 students.



Children finish their school day in the newly rebuilt Jubbet Adh-Dhib primary school in 2017, following a demolition. (Photo: Roald Høvring/NRC)

In September 2017, NRC partner Society of St Yves, a Catholic human rights organization, petitioned Israel’s High Court of Justice in order to prevent a demolition. The structure is on privately owned land between Jubbet Adh-Dhib and Beit Tamar, Jubbet Adh-Dhib’s northern neighbour. The court issued an interim injunction, preventing the demolition from being carried out until the end of legal proceedings. In November 2017, the court gave the school the right to submit a new building permit application. A detailed plan for the school was submitted to the ICA in 2018 and is still pending.

“A war on this school was inevitable,” said Advocate Emile Mashreqi, an attorney at Society of St Yves, “because it is in an empty area, which is surrounded by settlements”.

## Shuruq, K., 13-year-old girl in Wadi As-Seeq

I will be entering the 7th grade this next school year. We are expecting them [the MoE] to open a 7th grade here. I asked the minister if he could do that and he promised he would. I hope it will happen, so I can continue my education here. If there is no 7th grade here, I will go to Deir Jarir school. Deir Jarir is 11 kilometres away from our community. It is better for there to be a school in the community. It is easier to get to school on time here. At Deir Jarir school, we are usually late because it is far. When I was in 1st, 2nd and 3rd grade, I attended a school in Deir Jarir. This school [in Wadi As-Seeq] did not exist yet.

In our community school, there are nine rooms: some classrooms, staff rooms, and a principal's office.

There is a yard for the school, but no library. We need more classrooms and a library. I love maths. I like to understand things, not just to memorise them.

They [ICA] gave the school a demolition order after it was built. There is a court case about it now. I hope it will not be demolished. This school is our only hope. If they demolish it, then all will be lost.

This year, we did not complete the second semester because of the coronavirus. We did not have the possibility of distance learning. There is no internet here. In other schools, there was distance learning. We do not even have electricity.

### 4b. Schools outside the community

Although some of the communities have added on some higher grades to their primary school, none of the selected communities has been able to install a full secondary school in their community due to Israel's planning and construction policies in Area C. As a result, children in all six studied communities have to travel outside of their community to access secondary schools. Notably, due to the Israeli authorities' demolition of Jabal Al-Baba's primary school, accessing all primary and secondary grades requires travel for Jabal Al-Baba children. Across the oPt, education is compulsory from the 1st to 10th grades.

In sharp contrast to Bedouin/herding communities in Area C, surrounding settlements have full education access, including secondary schools.

Parents generally stated that the location of secondary schools outside of the community was a barrier to their children continuing or completing their education. When children have to travel outside of their community to access schooling, a host of access risks and challenges are introduced. These risks included: settler violence, the presence of military forces, and physical movement barriers.

"Three of my children dropped out of school," said Yusra al-Salameen, a mother of six in As-Simiya. She said that her older children must cross a military gate and Route 60 to reach their secondary school. "They dropped out because of the long distance and the gate is sometimes closed."

Given that all six of the studied communities are in range of settlements and settlement-related infrastructure, such as bypass roads, families expressed fears of settler encounters as one of the most significant dangers children face while travelling to school. Incidents involving settler violence against Palestinians or their property have steadily increased in the West Bank in the last several years, from 169 incidents in 2017 to 341 incidents in 2019, according to OCHA data. Given that these figures only reflect incidents which resulted in casualties or property damage, the actual number of settler attacks on Palestinians or their property was likely higher.

***Given that all six of the studied communities are in range of settlements and settlement-related infrastructure, such as bypass roads, families expressed fears of settler encounters as one of the most significant dangers children face while travelling to school.***

The pandemic period has shown no abatement, with 227 settler attacks resulting in 96 Palestinian injuries taking place between 1 January and 20 September 2020.

One parent from Khirbet Ghuwein Al-Fauqa, whom NRC interviewed, said that four of his ten children have already dropped out of school. In the village,

located at the edge of the South Hebron Hills, near a bypass road and the separation barrier, travel to school is fraught. “It would be safer if we could have all grade levels inside the community. Our children would not have to encounter any settlers or military forces on their way to school and back home. They would be near us,” said Ismael al-Daghameen.

**Figure 4:** Secondary school distance and transportation from the six studied communities

Community	Closest secondary school location	Estimated distance to closest secondary school	Transportation provided by the MoE?
Wadi As-Seeq	Deir Jarir	10-11 km	Yes (inconsistent)
Jabal Al-Baba	Al-Eizariya	2-3 km	No
Al-Muntar	Wadi Abu Hindi, As-Sawahra	4-12 km	No
Jubbet Adh-Dhib	Za'tara	2-3 km	Yes (inconsistent)
As-Simiya	As-Samu	4 km	No
Khirbet Ghuwein Al-Fauqa	As-Samu	6 km	Yes (inconsistent)

*Based on information by the Education Cluster and NRC field interviews.*

Transportation, costs and weather-related challenges also featured prominently in parent and children interviews.

The MoE provides transportation to school for three of the studied communities: Wadi As-Seeq, Jubbet Adh-Dhib, and Khirbet Ghuwein Al-Fauqa. Nonetheless, challenges still arise, as some families reported that the transportation service provided by the MoE can be unreliable. “Today, there is a bus from the Ministry of Education but it does not function on a regular basis. When it does not come, students miss school days,” said Wadi As-Seeq’s Community Representative Abdul-Rahman Kaabneh.

The transportation is also subject to the MoE’s budgetary decisions and constraints. As UNICEF noted, during the 2016-2017 school year, the MoE provided transportation services to about 2,200 children in 39 communities in the West Bank, selecting communities on “a case-by-case basis”. UNICEF further stated that due to financial limitations, the MoE was “unable to provide other communities it has already identified with much-needed transportation services”.



Children in Al-Muntar ride donkeys along a dirt path.  
(Photo: Ahmad Al-Bazz/NRC)

In October 2020, UNRWA told NRC that approximately 100 students in Area C Bedouin communities have not been able to attend UNRWA schools recently due to a lack of funds for transportation, previously provided by the PA through a donor-funded programme that terminated. UNRWA expressed concern that the “continuation of this situation may lead to the long-term drop out of these children from school. School girls are particularly vulnerable. Some families



indicated that they are not willing to allow girls to travel independently on public transportation or other means.”

Atallah Mazarah, Jabal Al-Baba’s community representative, told NRC that he has repeatedly sought out transportation assistance from the PA and international NGOs in the last four years, without result. “Every year, they promise to bring vehicles to transport our students, but it does not happen,” said Mazarah.



A Palestinian boy walks to school on the rocky hills of Al-Muntar, near Jerusalem. (Photo: Ahmad Al-Bazz/NRC)

For those walking to school, the combination of poor weather and unreliable public transportation means they sometimes arrive at school wet and dirty, and feel a sense of stigma as a result. “During the winter days I arrive at school with mud all over my boots and my smell is not nice, and children in the class laugh at me,” said 12-year-old Haitham M., who lives in Jabal Al-Baba and attends school in Al-Eizariya. “This makes me feel bad,” the boy added. Children and parents also expressed fears of wild animals, such as dogs, which roam open areas in packs and could carry disease.

**Families without current or past access to MoE transportation assistance and long distances to school may not be able to afford the cost of a daily bus commute for all their children.**

Families without current or past access to MoE transportation assistance and long distances to school may not be able to afford the cost of a daily bus commute for all their children. “Before the last four years, we needed to pay for the transportation costs or students would have to walk long distances. It was so challenging,” said Abdul-Rahman Kaabneh of Wadi As-Seeq. In addition to his local leadership role, he is also a father of seven.

This is one of the ways in which family socioeconomic status can have an undue impact on a child’s access to education, especially for boys. This holds true even if the school, itself, is free. “Looking at survival rates to the last grade of basic education, just 80.3 per cent of boys from households in the poorest quintile reach 10th grade if they were enrolled in 5th grade, compared to an estimated 94.3 per cent of their male peers from households in the richest quintile,” UNICEF found.

## Haitham M., a 12-year-old boy in Jabal Al-Baba

There is no school in Jabal Al-Baba, only a kindergarten. The occupation army does not allow us to have one. We built one, but it was demolished. We will build it again. Even if the army demolishes it, we will rebuild it.

Since the 1st grade, I have been studying at a school in Al-Eizariya. It takes half an hour to walk to school, and half an hour to come back home. That is an hour every day. In general, all Jabal Al-Baba students go to schools on foot. There is no transportation. There is a dirt road to the school that we created, but it was bulldozed by the occupation.

In the morning, the weather may be windy, which scatters dust in our eyes. On the way home, it might be so hot that it makes some children faint. Sometimes, it is very cold in the winter, which pushes students to

miss school. In class, all the students wear regular shoes except for the students of Jabal Al-Baba, they wear boots for mud. When we go to school, we sometimes arrive late to the morning queue or even classes. The principal kicks us out and asks us to bring our parents because we were late.

I love school. I like activities like sports, arts and crafts, and painting too. I like maths, Arabic, science and English. I love all of them.

When I grow up, I will become a journalist because I want to convey our story to the world. I remember solidarity groups visiting us and taking interviews when I was a young child. I was watching them interview my father. I learnt from that and fell in love with that profession.



#### 4c. The impact of low access to water and electricity on livelihoods and education

A stark feature of Bedouin/herding communities on the West Bank periphery is their limited and unstable access to water and electricity. Water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) are important to children's education in terms of creating healthy living conditions, safe and functional educational spaces, and lighting up residential structures in the evening so that students can study. Electricity further plays a crucial economic role in cheese production and refrigeration, which is part of the Bedouin/herding livelihood that is drawn from their animals. Access to both inexpensive water and electricity contribute to positive community-wide economic conditions, thus reducing the likelihood that families pull their children out of school for financial reasons.

At the time of NRC's interviews, none of the six studied communities said they had reliable, consistent piped water. Even communities connected to municipal water networks and also relying on secondary water supplies from wells and collected rainwater were still forced to purchase additional water, at a much higher price.

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**Figure 5:** Electricity and water connection in the six studied communities

Community	Electricity grid connection?	Water network connection?
Wadi As-Seeq	No	No
Jabal Al-Baba	Yes, irregular supply	Yes, irregular supply
Al-Muntar	No	Yes, irregular supply
Jubbet Adh-Dhib	No	Yes, irregular supply
As-Simiya	Yes, irregular supply	Yes, irregular supply
Khirbet Ghuwein Al-Fauqa	No	Yes, irregular supply
<i>Based on the Education Cluster and NRC field research.</i>		

"The water is a big problem," said Mazarah, describing conditions in Jabal Al-Baba. "We are connected to water from Al-Eizariya, but we only get it for four hours a week. So, we need to buy water tanks, which costs us NIS 600 [EUR 150] a month for three tanks. The tank water is used for both the people and for the animals."

"Around 20,000 people in Bedouin/herding communities in Area C of the West Bank are not connected to a water network. They have access to only about 30 litres per day, at a cost ten times higher than through the network," UNICEF reported in 2018.

Historically, semi-nomadic Bedouin/herding communities subsisted by shifting grazing areas seasonally to find water and pasture for livestock. With less land access, communities have sought municipal sources for electricity and water. Low-cost piped water is essential for the survival of Bedouin/herding communities and their way of life. As herds are depleted, more and more residents become reliant on nearby settlements for income as daily labourers.

***With less land access, communities have sought municipal sources for water and electricity.***

“The number of livestock has decreased in Wadi As-Seeq. Instead of 3,500 animals, there are only 1,300 today,” said Wadi As-Seeq’s Community Representative Abdul-Rahman Kaabneh. “Most of the shepherds say they would leave grazing if they could make 50 shekels [EUR 12.5] a day at any other job,” he told NRC.



A Palestinian child runs toward his residential structure in Wadi As-Seeq after finishing his school day. (Photo: Ahmad Al-Bazz/NRC)

In 2017, OCHA and its humanitarian partners assessed the vulnerability of 46 Bedouin/herding communities in the central West Bank which were at severe risk of forcible transfer due to the coercive environment resulting from Israeli policies in Area C and Israeli ‘relocation’ plans, which have since been withdrawn. The assessment included three of the communities studied in this report: Wadi As-Seeq, Jabal Al-Baba and Al-Muntar. The vulnerability exercise found that the majority of these communities relied on herding as their primary income, and labour inside settlements as their secondary source. Equally significant, 43 per cent of the surveyed communities had no access

to electricity whatsoever, while another 41 per cent relied on solar panels. Only four of the communities were connected to municipal water supply.

While specific community conditions may change — solar panels may be demolished in one community and newly installed in another — this snapshot data represents the general, longstanding reality of inadequate access to essential services and livelihoods.

Electricity has likewise become essential with reduced access to grazing lands, as it can offset the time and labour needed for domestic chores and cheese production, an important source of community income.



Amnna al-Wahsh monitors the solar power control room in Jubbet Adh-Dhib. (Photo: Ahmad Al-Bazz/NRC)

Of the six studied communities, four are not connected to any electricity grid. Solar panels installed by NGOs as a form of humanitarian relief, often lack permits. One such organisation providing off-the-grid power in Area C is Community Energy and Technology in the Middle East (COMET-ME), an Israeli-Palestinian organisation that has helped provide basic energy supplies to 90 communities to date.

Even though these solar panels only generate a small amount of electricity, about 2.5-3 kilowatts daily per household, it can meaningfully improve economic and living conditions in marginalised Palestinian communities in Area C. “This daily amount suffices for quite a lot: refrigeration 24 hours a day, lighting, cell-phone charging, and heavier/productive uses such as laundry and butter churning. It cannot support appliances with heating or cooling elements, such as electric kettles or air conditioners,” COMET-ME told NRC.

Electricity can shape children’s access to education in various ways. Television can expose children to ideas and information beyond the small communities in which they live. In times of distance learning, television can be children’s primary means of

accessing education. Power outages in the evening can be detrimental to students' ability to study and complete homework.

"The electricity cuts off a lot. At night, I cannot study," said 13-year-old Sajed H. from Khirbet Ghuwein Al-Fauqa. "During hot days and cold days, it is difficult to study at home because we cannot run heating or cooling devices without electricity."

His mother, Noura H., told NRC that energy generated by the solar panel amounted to about three kilowatts of electricity per family each day. "Sometimes it runs out during the day. Without light, my children cannot study and they close their books."

"I would like them to become doctors, to be organised, and to have better job opportunities," said Sajed's mother. Noura told NRC that, as a girl, her father had forced her to drop out of school after 7th grade. Now, her biggest fear regarding her children's education is that "they would waste their time with the sheep".

Inadequate access to electricity can especially harm slow learners and children with disabilities, who may need extra time to complete their schoolwork. "I have difficulties studying. I am so slow," 8-year-old Muhammad W. from Jubbet Adh-Dhib said. "Sometimes, the electricity cuts off and it is so hot, like today, and I am just not able to study." Across the oPt, a third of children between the ages of six and nine who have disabilities are out of school, according to UNICEF. Girls between the ages of ten and fifteen who have a disability are especially vulnerable to being out of school, at a rate of 36.6 per cent, UNICEF reported.

COMET-ME told NRC: "Electricity plays a larger and larger role in access to education, not only in the basic illumination which allows children and older students to study after dark, but also in access to content on the internet. In the Covid-19 era, with the growing need to incorporate remote learning, a lack of electricity will only increase the educational gaps between children living in these marginalised communities and children living in the cities."

The relationship between water and education is similarly multi-dimensional. A heavy reliance on high-priced water tanks can cause economic hardship and result in children, especially older boys, leaving school to become wage earners. Like malnutrition, dehydration damages children's health and ability to concentrate. Inadequate access to water inside residential structures and schools can harm hygiene, increasing the spread of illness or disease.

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The 4-A scheme indicates that for educational structures to be functional, they must have appropriate infrastructure, "for example, all institutions and programmes are likely to require buildings or other protection from the elements, sanitation facilities for both sexes, safe drinking water", among other needs.

When asked what the most pressing needs were for As-Simiya, Agricultural Committee member Farhan Salameen responded: "To have better lighting and stronger lighting, especially during the night. To have a stronger water supply especially in the school because what is currently available is not enough and I buy water tanks for the school, which costs NIS 200 [EUR 50] every month."

Between January 2018 and August 2020, OCHA recorded 44 incidents in its demolition database in which Israeli authorities demolished or confiscated WASH structures in Area C Bedouin/herding communities, including in As-Simiya and Al-Muntar. At present, among donor funded West Bank Protection Consortium (WBPC) projects, 16 WASH structures and two solar panel systems across the West Bank are under threat due to demolition or 'stop work' orders. The WBPC is a strategic partnership of five international NGOs, 10 European donors, and EU Humanitarian Aid, formed to prevent the forcible transfer of Palestinians in the West Bank.



A view of a mobile latrine structure in Al-Muntar, located on the periphery of East Jerusalem. In November 2019, Israeli forces demolished a latrine in Al-Muntar. The demolition resulted in the loss of EUR 983 of EU-donor humanitarian aid, which had been funded through the WBPC. (Photo: Ahmad Al-Bazz/NRC)

COMET-ME stated that since the start of the year, the ICA has seized nine solar panels and four batteries that they installed in Palestinian communities in Area C. Additionally, there are currently ‘stop work’ orders on 19 COMET-ME micro-grids.

Israel’s failure to ensure adequate access to water and electricity in Bedouin/herding communities in Area C is salient in view of expanding Israeli settlements nearby, all of which enjoy water and electricity network connections.

According to the UNDP, water consumption in Bedouin/herding communities of Area C amounts to 20 litres per day or less. The World Health Organisation (WHO) recommends a minimum of 50 to 100 litres per day. Israeli citizens use approximately 1,651 litres per capita per day, UNDP reported, with settlers carrying out agricultural activities in arid areas even doubling this figure.

“The Palestinian communities in this area are denied any connection to the electricity or water grids by the Israeli authorities, even as electricity and water lines literally run over their heads and under their feet to serve the nearby illegal Israeli settlements,” stated COMET-ME, referring to the South Hebron

Hills. The same logic can be applied to the other four studied communities in the Ramallah, Jerusalem and Bethlehem peripheries, as they are all situated in close proximity to Israeli settlements and their associated infrastructure.

***Israel’s failure to ensure adequate access to water and electricity in Bedouin/herding communities of Area C is salient in view of expanding Israeli settlements nearby, all of which enjoy water and electricity network connections.***



## Interview with Imad Salah, principal of Al-Muntar primary school

► **NRC:** What is the official name of the school and how many students does it serve?

► **Salah:** Al-Muntar Elementary Mixed School/ Al-Tahadi 2. There are 36 students from 1st to 7th grades. Since the 1st / 2nd grades and the 3rd /4th grades are combined, we only have five classrooms.

► **NRC:** Is the school connected to any water network?

► **Salah:** There is a water pipe connected from As-Sawahra municipality, but the water does not always reach the school. Right now, the water has been cut off for two months. Water does not reach because the water pressure is weak and we are at a high altitude. Each teacher brings his own personal water. There are two water tanks in the school. The water truck cannot reach here.

► **NRC:** Can you describe the school's access to electricity?

► **Salah:** The situation is very good now. There are 25 solar panels.

► **NRC:** How would you describe attendance?

► **Salah:** When we start a year with 30 students, we end with 30. Attendance is excellent. This school helped the children of the area to enroll in education.

► **NRC:** What happens to students after the 7th grade?

► **Salah:** Some parents send their children to the neighbouring Abu Hindi school. Families here love for their daughters to have an education, but boys drop out of school after the 7th grade. Some girls take a donkey from their home to school. One girl goes to the university in Abu Dis on a donkey. But you know, some feel shy about this, which is why the girl leaves her donkey some distance away from the university, then takes public transportation.

► **NRC:** Are there any students with physical, cognitive or behavioural disabilities?

► **Salah:** No. There is a student with weak vision and he sits in the front. The school is not ready for such cases. In the event that there is such a case, we may set up a custom classroom. The MoE asks us every year if there are any of these cases.

► **NRC:** Does the MoE provide transportation for students?

► **Salah:** The problem of transportation and the PA is the biggest problem. Four years ago, they told us to start running this school and they would provide cars and buses. This did not happen.

► **NRC:** Do you think it is important for primary schools to exist inside these communities?

► **Salah:** Before this school was created, there were fewer students. When a student is a child in first or 2nd grade, it is better to have the school close to them. Now, at the age of five or six, students are entering school. Previously, they were enrolling at the age of seven.

► **NRC:** Did your school provide any distance learning during the Covid-19 period?

► **Salah:** We did nothing. There is no internet, laptops or phones here. Teaching was completely interrupted. The teachers got the necessary training [for e-learning], but they could apply nothing. We only counted students' grades until last March.

► **NRC:** If the school shuts down again due to Covid-19, what are your plans?

► **Salah:** We told the Education Directorate in the Jerusalem outskirts area that we will continue in-person education if there is another lockdown. We are an exception. Here, we are an isolated cluster and there have been no Covid-19 cases here since last March.

*\*Interview edited for brevity and clarity.*

#### 4d. Out-of-school children

While the MoE has released detailed statistics, disaggregated by age, stage of education, gender, governorate and other indicators, no comprehensive data has been published on Area C Bedouin/herding communities' school inclusion rates. Nine of the 13 families NRC spoke with said at least one child had dropped out of school, suggesting that children in these communities may have lower school completion rates.

Pastoralist children are more likely to be excluded from education as a general trend worldwide. According to UNICEF, in the oPt, "their exclusion is aggravated by the fact that many pastoralist communities live in Area C where house and school demolitions are an ongoing threat due to the restrictive permit regime."

Poorer Palestinian children are more likely to repeat grades, which can also contribute to a higher likelihood of dropping out of school. UNICEF found that between 5th and 10th grade, 2.33 per cent of the poorest Palestinian children repeated a grade compared with 0.30 per cent of children in the wealthiest quintile.

***Pastoralist children are more likely to be excluded from education as a general trend worldwide.***

A high number of siblings and low maternal education levels were also associated with children being out of school between the ages of ten and fifteen. Low maternal education was especially correlated with older boys being out of school. According to UNICEF, boys whose mothers left school after completing 10th grade or earlier fared worse than those whose mothers achieved higher education rates, with 16 per cent less still attending school by the 10th grade.

Among the 13 families NRC spoke with, interviews revealed that six fathers and 10 mothers dropped out of school before completing compulsory education. Of these, three mothers and at least one father had never attended school.

While anecdotal evidence suggests low school inclusion in the six studied communities, NRC's interviews showed parents wanted their children to complete their basic education and beyond. As herding becomes a less viable financial path forward, parents clearly want their children to have other livelihood options.

***While anecdotal evidence suggests low school inclusion in the six studied communities, NRC's interviews showed parents wanted their children to complete their basic education and beyond. As herding becomes a less viable financial path forward, parents clearly want their children to have other livelihood options.***

"I am illiterate and that is why I insist all my children get an education. I have tasted the bitter life because I did not get an education," said Hani Abu Aweida, a parent to 11 children in Jabal Al-Baba.

Amna al-Wahsh, a mother of five in Jubbet Adh-Dhib, told NRC: "Their future is not clear. I want my children to continue their studies and to live in better circumstances — better than ours. I want them to achieve the things that we could not achieve."

UNDP noted that "poor conditions have discouraged many Bedouins from completing their basic education, leading to a relatively high percentage of illiteracy in addition to a high drop-out rate, especially among females". This concern was also reaffirmed by the 2016 UN Country Team for the oPt, especially as it relates to adolescent girls: "[I]n Area C, the lack of or distance of adequate school facilities causes girls' irregular attendance and school drop-out, especially in secondary education." The same report also found that while adolescent girls are less likely to be out of school than boys across the oPt, early marriage is a leading cause for girls to drop out of school at the secondary stage of education.

Past studies have indicated that longer travel distances to school may negatively impact Palestinian girls' school inclusion. "The number of children dropping out of school is increasing, especially among female students. Their families prefer that they avoid the long journey to school," said Jabal Al-Baba's Community Representative Atallah Mazarah. While more research is needed, the absence of secondary schools in the six studied communities as well as the demolition threat hanging over existing primary schools may create an additional barrier for girls.



Sundus W. was a student in Jubbet Adh-Dhib's primary school when it was previously demolished. (Photo: Ahmad Al-Bazz/NRC)

Meanwhile, UNICEF's recommended interventions include combatting school staff's social beliefs that once a boy or girl from a pastoralist community has left school, the situation is irreversible. "As it stands, interviews suggest that some counsellors, as well as principals and teachers, view girls leaving basic education for early marriage and children from nomadic households leaving education as acceptable and unchangeable," stated UNICEF.

Past World Bank research has shown that communities with concentrated numbers of heads of households who have achieved a primary education or less are more likely to be very poor. As children who drop out of school grow up and become parents with lower education completion rates, the cycle of depressed educational attainment and higher poverty will repeat.

Education is a right in and of itself and also functions as a layer of defence against other forms of child rights risks. Child labour — including recruitment by armed forces or groups — early marriage, and the possibility of coming into conflict with the law are all risks more strongly associated with out-of-school children. Schools are often sites for delivering basic health services, such as vaccinations, and early detection

screenings for scoliosis and vision. School staff also play a central role in identifying or referring children for early intervention for issues such as disability, malnutrition, or issues of abuse or neglect.

Moreover, education can "strengthen critical survival skills and coping mechanisms", as INEE has reported. A study based on a 2014 cross-sectional household survey of 455 Bedouin refugee children in 18 communities in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, found that 44 per cent of participants had a probable psychiatric disorder.

***Education is a right in and of itself and also functions as a layer of defence against other forms of child rights risks.***



#### 4e. Distance learning period during the pandemic

Access disparities between children residing in urban/camp versus pastoralist contexts became markedly pronounced during the distance learning period introduced as part of Covid-19 prevention measures. The PA announced a state of emergency on 5 March 2020, shutting down the normal operations of schools and universities to mitigate against the spread of Covid-19. The MoE launched a Facebook page, e-learning portal and other channels in spring 2020, as part of its National Response Plan for Covid-19. Despite these efforts, some of the most marginalised children were not reached.

“I am six years old and supposed to go to the 2nd grade, but I am doing the 1st grade all over again because of the coronavirus,” said Ahmad D., a young resident of Khirbet Ghuwein Al-Fauqa. He was unable to attend kindergarten because there is no pre-primary school in his community, the boy said. Now, after just one partial year of schooling, he has already fallen behind and will be at increased risk of dropping out. “We stopped going to school because of the coronavirus,” Ahmad told NRC. He said that his goal is to become a doctor, and the biggest challenge he faces as a student is “to stay focused and study after school”.

Ahmad’s experience was mirrored by students in all the six Bedouin/herding communities whom NRC interviewed. All said they had no, or extremely limited, access to distance learning. The top two

reasons children cited were a lack of internet access and no or very limited access to a smartphone. “The school would update their schedule on their Facebook page, but we do not have access to the internet in the community and this makes it so hard to follow the distance learning programme,” explained then 6th-grade-student Shuruq K. from Wadi As-Seeq.

***“I am six years old and supposed to go to the 2nd grade but I am doing the 1st grade all over again because of the coronavirus,” said Ahmad D., a young resident of Khirbet Ghuwein Al-Fauqa.***

Students also said they had no laptops, and some mentioned limited access to electricity due to their solar panel batteries’ storage limitations or because of prohibitive costs. “We tried distance learning on smartphones, but it was limited because it costs money to charge the smartphone every time,” said Jawaheer A., a 15-year-old in Jabal Al-Baba. Of the 14 child interview subjects, only one child reported access to some offline educational materials during the spring distance learning period.



Long distances to school can be a barrier to educational access for students like Shuruq K., 13, as her family cannot afford to pay for transportation. (Photo: Ahmad Al-Bazz/NRC)

According to the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), inadequate internet infrastructure and access and power outages formed the main structural barriers to children benefiting from the distance learning programme. UNESCO further highlighted the disproportionate impact of distance learning on vulnerable Palestinian communities, including children in Area C, due to “low accessibility to online material and availability of computers or smartphones to some students”.

The Education Cluster reported on 5 May that 360,000 children in remote and impoverished areas, with little or no internet access, were in need of offline materials and other forms of educational support. By early April, an NRC Rapid Assessment of 735 beneficiaries in the West Bank and Gaza found that 55 per cent of respondents who had at least one child were not following any form of education. Among those following some education from home, 13 per cent of West Bank respondents had no access to internet or appropriate devices.

“We need to acknowledge that the longer children are unable to attend school, the more likely it is they will never return, particularly adolescent girls and boys and those from low-income households,” a June 2020 advocacy brief by the Education Cluster stated.

While the 2020-2021 school year in the West Bank began on 6 September with both MoE and UNRWA schools using a blended distance and in-person learning model, the likelihood of a return to full distance learning for individual schools or across the West Bank as a whole due to the continuing pandemic remains high. The MoE, in cooperation with international and local organisations, has sought to mitigate some of the earlier gaps children experienced during the period of March to June 2020. “All remote communities with no internet access face different challenges in distance learning especially that previous MoE programs focused on e-learning,” said UNICEF’s Chief of Education for Development. “Moving forward, these children should be able to access self-learning materials developed by the MoE with support of Education Cluster partners (hard copies of the self-learning materials or offline applications on tablets) as well as the educational TV channel.”

Even with these improvements, distance learning poses broad risks to children’s access. If distance learning continues for an extended period in the 2020-2021 academic year, UNICEF stated that anticipated challenges included health, safety and protection concerns, remote and blended learning challenges, and “a high risk of school dropout leading to an increase in child labour”.



A poster displayed in the hallway of As-Simiya primary school encourages proper handwashing and mask-wearing in October 2020. (Photo: Ahmad Al-Bazz/NRC)

In addition to academic losses, distance learning also exposed children to a higher risk of domestic violence. A WBPC Multi-Sector Needs Assessment carried out in April 2020 found that 12 per cent of the 296 respondents said they had noticed a rise in psychological violence at home, and five per cent said there had been a rise in physical domestic violence. Given the high sensitivity of the issue, domestic violence is typically underreported.

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## Amna al-Wahsh, a parent in Jubbet Adh-Dhib

I am a housewife. I have five children: three girls and two boys. Three of them are school students, one girl is in university. One of them, my son, dropped out of school last year, despite my support for him to continue.

About three or four years ago, Al-Tahadi 5 school was built. With the start of the school year, the Israelis [soldiers] came and demolished it. Tents were set up again the same night and students went to school the following day. Now, the school is closer and the path to get there is easier. I can watch my children returning from school. In the past, the street was dangerous, and there were stray dogs. Now, it is closer and that gives us some reassurance. We used to avoid sending them to school in the winter. They would stay home and miss classes and their right to education.

They did not go to kindergarten. There are no kindergartens close by. As a result, my children lack

a strong educational foundation. This made it difficult to learn. My son is now in 3rd grade, and he barely reads and writes.

These days, I also suffer with my college daughter. She does not have a laptop to study, but rather uses a mobile phone. There is a difference between attending an e-lecture on a laptop or a mobile phone. Sometimes, I can buy internet data, but sometimes I cannot.

The students and their families are suffering terribly. Two of my daughters, grade 8 and grade 10, have not been studying. During the coronavirus period, I was not able to get enough internet data on my mobile phone. I was not able to keep up with my children's education. My neighbour was providing me with school updates and so forth. It was not easy, there was a lockdown and the situation was scary.

### 4f. A coercive environment and the threat of annexation

Inadequate educational access and availability in Bedouin/herding communities in Area C mirror conditions within the wider coercive environment in which rights are systematically denied. Through restrictions on construction and development, the destruction of Palestinian residential, educational, agricultural structures and basic infrastructure, harassment and excessive use of force by Israeli forces, settler intimidation and violence, restrictions on movement, and limitations on access to resources, livelihoods, essential services and humanitarian assistance, Israel has created a coercive environment for Palestinians. Such an environment subjects Bedouin/herding communities to a grave risk of forcible transfer.



A Palestinian child rides his donkey in Jabal Al-Baba, a Bedouin community in Area C. (Photo: Ahmad Al-Bazz/NRC)

Between 1995 and 2020, NRC found that the Israeli military delivered 207 'stop work' or demolition orders to the six studied communities. While not all of these orders were ultimately upheld by Israeli courts or enforced by the military, their high volume nonetheless constitutes a form of coercive pressure undermining community growth, living conditions and resilience.

**Between 1995 and 2020, NRC found that the Israeli military delivered 207 'stop work' or demolition orders to the six studied communities. While not all of these orders were ultimately upheld by Israeli courts or enforced by the military, their high volume nonetheless constitutes a form of coercive pressure undermining community growth, living conditions and resilience.**



**Figure 6:** Israeli military demolition and ‘stop work’ orders 1995-2020

Community	Number of issued DO/SWO
Wadi As-Seeq	32
Jabal Al-Baba	19
Al-Muntar	70
Jubbet Adh-Dhib	38
As-Simiya	18
Khirbet Ghuwein Al-Fauqa	30

“Our home is currently under two residential demolition orders, one for a tent and one for a house,” said 59-year-old Khirbet Ghuwein Al-Fauqa father, Ismael al-Daghameen. “I have two sick children who have gone through spinal cord surgery. When they see military forces, they start running to hide because they get so scared. They ask me where we will go, if there is a demolition? Where will we live? If we, as adults worry, how must our children feel?”

***“In the last ten years, 25 families have left – about 100 people. It is because of the prohibition against construction, and the lack of health and education,” said Itidal al-Wahsh, who serves as treasurer to Jubbet Adh-Dhib’s Women’s Council and the Red Crescent coordinator for the area.***

“In the last ten years, 25 families have left — about 100 people. It is because of the prohibition against construction, and the lack of health and education,” said Itidal al-Wahsh, who serves as treasurer to Jubbet Adh-Dhib’s Women’s Council and the Palestine Red Crescent Society (PRCS) coordinator for the area. “The younger residents in the community want to get married and establish their own residences. Some of the families have sold their sheep and bought land in other areas so that they can build something for the young couples, or to find another livelihood option.”

Today, virtually all structures in Wadi As-Seeq, Jabal Al-Baba and Al-Muntar are under demolition threat. “We received 26 demolitions orders lately in two days during the Covid-19 period,” said Wadi As-Seeq’s Community Representative Abdul-Rahman Kaabneh. Between 25 August and 2 September, Israeli authorities demolished 12 structures in Wadi As-Seeq, displacing 45 people, including 21 children, according to OCHA. Also during the pandemic period, Al-Muntar saw 17 of its structures demolished or confiscated between 1 March and 7 September, as Israeli authorities implemented demolition or ‘stop work’ orders, based on OCHA’s data.

In June 2018, military order 1797 began allowing Israeli authorities in certain circumstances to demolish unpermitted Palestinian structures summarily without any legal process through an expedited administrative process. For affected structures, the order cancelled the court procedures that previously would follow demolition orders, under military law.



Israeli authorities demolished residential structures in Fasayil Al-Wusta, a Bedouin community, in the Jordan Valley, 16 January 2020. (Photo: Ahmad Al-Bazz/ACTIVESTILLS)

“The only advantage these proceedings offer for those facing demolition is the possibility of an interim injunction that offers a stay until the petition is decided. The length of the proceedings offers the petitioners a reprieve, knowing their homes will not be demolished in the meantime,” said Israeli NGO B’Tselem.

A September 2020 statement issued by the UN Humanitarian Coordinator Jamie McGoldrick, expressed concern about “Israeli authorities’ increased use of an expedited procedure (Order 1797) for the removal of structures as soon as 96 hours after delivering a notice, largely preventing owners from being heard before a judicial body”. Israeli forces demolished or confiscated a monthly average of 65 Palestinian-owned structures in the West Bank between March and August 2020, “the highest average destruction rate in four years”, McGoldrick said.

Military order 1797 came soon after a 2015 amendment to military order 1252, that provided for the confiscation of mobile structures within 60 days. A further amendment in August 2020, updated this time frame to 90 days. Taken together, these developments have facilitated the more rapid seizure, or demolition of Palestinian property in Area C and EU and European government funded structures have not been spared.



Children's handprints are seen on the side of Khirbet Ghuwein Al-Fauqa's primary school. (Photo: Ahmad Al-Bazz/NRC)

During a July 2020 Foreign Affairs and Defence Committee Meetings on Area C, Foreign Minister Gabi Ashkenazi made this statement: “Whenever the Ministry of Foreign Affairs learns about European activity, existing or planned, in Area C, representatives in Israel and abroad convey a determined message: Israel as a sovereign will not allow operations without the usual procedure with the competent authorities for obtaining a permit. In cases of non-issuance of permits, consequences arising from the violations must be expected.” He further commented: “[W]e outright reject any claim for compensation for the

destruction or confiscation of equipment, and we see this activity as a European intervention in an attempt to delineate borders.”

Foreign Minister Ashkenazi's comments further suggest that Israel has not excluded the possibility of annexing parts of the West Bank, especially Area C. Should Israel carry out de jure annexation of all or parts of Area C, it would only magnify the coercive environment and risk of forcible transfer while also damaging children's right to education.

***Should Israel carry out de jure annexation of all or parts of Area C, it would only magnify the coercive environment and risk of forcible transfer while also damaging children's right to education.***

Earlier this year, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu indicated that Israel would annex large parts of the occupied West Bank as early as 1 July 2020. While annexation has not yet taken place, it remains in the realm of possibility for the near future.

In a de jure annexation scenario, Israel would almost certainly reject any efforts by the PA to continue delivering aid and essential services to Palestinian communities in annexed territory, including education and health care. Accordingly, PA officials and civil servants would see their access to Palestinian communities in annexed areas severed.

Under the Oslo Accords, the PA can provide very limited assistance in Area C, including health and education services. Notably, physical infrastructure is excluded from these agreed upon services and provisions. Article 9 of the Protocol Concerning Civil Affairs of the Israeli-Palestinian Interim Agreement affords the PA power and responsibilities in the educational and cultural spheres in the West Bank. This responsibility extends to educational and cultural institutions—including associated staff and property—and all private, public and non-governmental bodies operating and delivering such services in the West Bank. These powers, even if applied only in part at present, would be entirely removed following annexation. In extending its own sovereignty, Israel



would end any recognition of the PA's legal authority or mandate in the annexed territory.

While Israel has not clearly laid out its intentions regarding which parts of the West Bank would be annexed, areas under threat of annexation include the six studied communities and more broadly, the Jordan Valley, Jerusalem periphery, Bethlehem periphery, and southern Hebron. As a result, the MoE and its employees could lose access to 93 of its schools, threatening the educational continuity of 18,256 students.

It is feasible that the PA may be permitted to provide a limited response, as it currently does in Area C, within enclaved areas not annexed by Israel.

In terms of humanitarian access, the impact of annexation could also be significant for many aid-dependent Palestinians. Annexation would facilitate

Israeli courts supplanting international humanitarian law with domestic Israeli law. Israeli courts could plausibly sanction the expropriation of land owned by Palestinian individuals for alleged public needs, even if not serving the needs of the Palestinian residents. Necessarily, Palestinian landowners would have lesser remedies available. In cases where schools have been installed on Palestinian privately-owned land, as in Jubbet Adh-Dhib's primary school, such a shift could damage the school's legal footing.

Further, Israeli courts would dismiss Article 53 of the Fourth Geneva Convention — which prohibits the destruction of property, except where such destruction is absolutely necessary for military operations — in annexed territory, applying instead the lesser protection found in the Israeli Planning and Building Law (2017). This would allow for administrative demolitions and criminal liability for any unauthorised construction.



Residents of Jabal Al-Baba are under severe risk of forcible transfer due to the community's location in 'E1', a planned area of expansion of Ma'ale Adumim. (Photo: Ahmad Al-Bazz/NRC)



## 4g. Conclusion

The acute vulnerability of Palestinian Bedouin/herding communities on the West Bank periphery is a visceral manifestation of ‘occu-annexation’, as coined by UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian Territory occupied since 1967 Michael Lynk, pushed to its extreme limits. In fact, in 2019, the mere characteristic of ‘Bedouin’ in a West Bank school was assigned the highest risk category in the Education Cluster’s vulnerable schools list.

Bedouin/herding communities are barred both from maintaining their traditional lifestyle and from accessing essential services. Schools go up and come crashing down. Even a string of tents where students gather to learn the alphabet cannot be considered safe. Secondary schools outside the community slip quickly out of reach when shocks strike. Water pumps and systems are demolished despite the fact that access to clean water is an inalienable human right. Renewable energy structures are installed under the cover of night as humanitarian organisations attempt to live up to their mandates to deliver relief and aid. Children sleep and rise in flimsy structures that could be dismantled by court decision or without due process. Sheep are sold to purchase water and teenage boys pulled out of school to work.

Without the possibility of adequate infrastructure and livelihoods, communities have become permanently

aid-dependent. Meanwhile, Israeli forces routinely demolish and confiscate humanitarian aid materials, equipment and projects. Between 2016 and 4 August 2020, the total cost of destroyed or seized donor funded WBPC humanitarian aid in the six studied communities alone amounts to EUR 38,276, while at least EUR 201,201 is under threat due to pending military orders.

These are the general conditions in which Al-Muntar’s Community Representative Muhammad al-Hadleen told NRC: “No families are leaving and that is something that we are proud of, as a community.”

Resilience should be the outcome of liveable, rights-affirming conditions, as it cannot be built solely on determination and human spirit. Israel must immediately act to improve the untenable living conditions of Palestinian Bedouin/herding children in Area C, while simultaneously allowing them to maintain their current residences and traditional way of life, regardless of any political consideration. This burden is in no way lifted in a context of conflict. Rather, such a context enforces the urgency of the unimpeded delivery of humanitarian aid and relief. As the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) writes: “Education is a humanitarian issue because it enables people to rebuild their lives with dignity.”



Haitham M. plays with his brother after school in Jabal Al-Baba. (Photo: Ahmad Al-Bazz/NRC)

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