



UNITED NATIONS

Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
occupied Palestinian territory

BETHLEHEM GOVERNORATE: FRAGMENTATION AND HUMANITARIAN CONCERNS

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KEY FACTS

- Around 210,000 Palestinians currently live in Bethlehem governorate, including some 6,000 in 17 residential areas located in Area C, which is directly controlled by Israel.
- There are over 100,000 Israeli settlers residing in 19 settlements and settlement outposts across the governorate, including in those parts de facto annexed by Israel to the Jerusalem municipality.
- More than 85% of Bethlehem governorate is designated as Area C, the vast majority of which is off limits for Palestinian development, including almost 38% declared as “firing zones”, 34% designated as “nature reserves”, and nearly 12% allocated for settlement development.¹
- Less than 1% of Area C in Bethlehem has an outline plan approved by the Israeli authorities allowing Palestinians to build legally.
- Since 2009 the Israeli authorities demolished 118 Palestinian structures in Area C of Bethlehem governorate, citing lack of building permits, displacing 174 people; around half of the structures demolished were funded by donors.
- 56 km of the Barrier’s route are located within Bethlehem governorate, of which 42% are complete and 20% under construction. If completed as planned, 12 communities, will be physically separated from the rest of the governorate.
- Farmers in at least 22 communities across the governorate require visitor permits or prior coordination to access their privately-owned land located behind the Barrier or in the vicinity of settlements.
- From 2009 through 2014, OCHA recorded 162 settler attacks resulting in Palestinian casualties or property damage, as well as 73 Palestinian attacks resulting in Israeli casualties or damage to property throughout the governorate.
- In 2014, four Palestinians, including two children, were killed by Israeli forces in clashes that erupted during protests and military operations across Bethlehem, and another 1,292, including 614 children, were injured.

Israeli policies and practices applied since the beginning of the occupation, which have accelerated in recent years, have resulted in the increasing fragmentation of the Bethlehem governorate and its population. These include the annexation of areas to Israel; the seizure of land and its allocation for settlement development and for military training; the imposition of physical and administrative access restrictions; the inadequate planning and zoning regime; and ineffective enforcement of the law on Israeli settlers, among others.

The establishment and continuous expansion of Israeli settlements throughout the governorate is one of the key drivers of vulnerability among Palestinians. The declaration of large areas as public land (also known as “state land”) and their allocation for settlement development has contributed to the shrinking of space available for Palestinians to sustain their livelihoods and develop adequate housing and services. The Barrier planned around the Gush Etzion settlement block, if completed, will separate Bethlehem’s rural hinterland from the urban centre and impair people’s access to services.

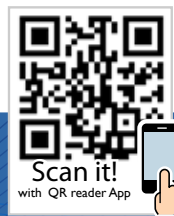
Palestinian building is prohibited in the absolute majority of Area C across the governorate, resulting in the demolition of structures built without permits and the displacement of people. It has also resulted in the movement of young couples to Areas A and B in order to meet their housing needs. This prohibition is implemented as part of planning processes and institutions, which exclude Palestinian participation while fully integrating Israeli settlers.

A range of restrictions on the access of Palestinian farmers to land that was not seized for settlement development or military training have undermined the agricultural livelihoods of many families. Access to private land located within the outer limits of settlements, in areas where settler violence is recurrent, or behind the Barrier, is subject to a permit system or to prior coordination with the Israeli authorities. The limited number of days allocated via these mechanisms and the related restrictions on the entry of vehicles and machinery to these areas have been negatively impacting productivity.

The Israeli authorities fail to effectively enforce the rule of law in regard to acts of violence and takeover of land by Israeli settlers, further undermining the safety, mental health, and livelihoods of Palestinians. Israeli forces often fail to stop attacks and follow-up afterwards is inadequate or poorly conducted. The policy to retroactively ‘legalizing’ settlement outposts built on public land taken over without any official authorization contributes to an atmosphere of impunity.

As the occupying power, Israel is obligated to ensure that the humanitarian needs of Palestinians in Bethlehem are met and that they are able to exercise their human rights, including their right to enjoy their natural resources and to be free from discrimination. Israel also has an obligation to ensure that those responsible for violence and takeover of land are held accountable. The transfer of Israeli population into the occupied territory is prohibited.

1. These figures include areas designated as “nature reserves” in the context of the 1998 Wye River Agreement between Israel and the PLO, which are de facto administered as Area C. The three categories within Area C partially overlap (see map).



BETHLEHEM GOVERNORATE FRAGMENTATION: MAIN DEVELOPMENTS IN 2014

25 August: Israeli Civil Administration declares **3,799** dunums as "state land".

12 June: Palestinians kidnap and subsequently kill **three** Israeli youths.

24 September: Israeli authorities promote plan to build **2,610** housing units in Giv'at HaMatos settlement.

1 Oct: Israeli Civil Administration publishes an outline plan for the establishment of a Jewish religious school in an area previously declared as 'state land'.

