

30 November 2009

Israel:

Short-term and protracted displacements following various conflicts

This profile is organised according to the four situations of internal displacement in Israel:

1. Arabs displaced in the context of the establishment of the state of Israel;
2. The situation of the Bedouin population in the south;
3. Temporary displacement due to rockets launched from Gaza
4. Temporary displacement in northern Israel during the 2006 Israel-Hezbollah conflict

The profile uses the short terms “Arab Israeli” and “Bedouin”. During interviews, IDMC encountered people preferring these terms, while others preferred the labels Palestinian citizens of Israel, or Israeli Arabs. Some Bedouin also prefer the label Palestinian rather than Bedouin.

See www.internal-displacement.org/countries/opt for more information on internal displacement in the Occupied Palestinian Territory (East Jerusalem, West Bank & Gaza).

Map of Israel



Map No. 3584 Rev. 2 UNITED NATIONS
January 2004

Department of Peacekeeping Operations
Cartographic Section

Source: UN Cartographic Section
More maps are available on <http://www.internal-displacement.org>

1. Arabs displaced in the context of the establishment of the state of Israel

During or shortly after the conflict which accompanied the creation of the state of Israel in 1948, some 46,000 to 48,000 people lost their homes and subsequently remained in Israel. Many of them found refuge in nearby villages in which they had relatives, family and friends. They subsequently moved from one village to another, mainly to reunite with people from their village of origin. The Association for the Defence of the Rights of the Internally Displaced in Israel (ADRID), an umbrella organisation uniting thirty local committees of IDPs, quotes the figure of 46,000 internally displaced people (IDPs) in the 1950 registry record of the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). In 1952 the Israeli government reportedly used the figure of 48,000 IDPs, based on a census of its Arab citizens.

Like other Arabs in Israel, IDPs became Israeli citizens. However, their freedom of movement was severely restricted, since the areas in which 90 per cent of Arabs lived were placed under military administration until 1966. Having lost their property and economic resources, these IDPs faced particular difficulties in the first years after their displacement. Most of them had cultivated their land prior to the war, and they now had to compete with people in host communities for employment in a very difficult post-war economic situation.

The government strived to integrate the displaced people into existing Arab communities and villages, rather than rebuilding destroyed villages or establish-

ing new ones. As a result, it started in 1949 to rent land to IDPs in inhabited villages. While in some cases IDPs rented land without problems, in many cases they faced opposition from Jewish neighbours or from host communities. Also, many feared that renting other land would compromise their claim on their own land, and the proposed plots were often of bad quality and very small.

From 1950 to 1952, UNRWA assisted IDPs in Israel until the government agreed under American and UNRWA pressure to take responsibility for them. The government decided that IDPs (called refugees at the time) would be cared for by existing government departments, and that it would temporarily provide them welfare and jobs. It also enacted a series of laws affecting IDPs and their descendants. In particular, the Absentee Property Law of 1950 allowed the State to acquire control of all land and property left behind by people who had fled during the 1948 war. Under the law people who had come back or were still in the country, such as IDPs, were defined as “present absentees” and lost their land.

During the late 1950s, IDPs began to prepare for long-term settlement, and many migrated from villages to urban centres in search of better economic opportunities. Since the 1960s, few IDPs have moved between communities. Economic disparities between them and the Arab communities who had not been uprooted tended to disappear in the following decades, particularly among members of the second generation, who had not experienced the difficulties of flight and settlement and were in general more educated.

In the 1980s, they reportedly stopped seeing their displacement as temporary. However, some continued to demand to return to the homes they lost in 1948. The villagers of Ikrit and Bir'em, when originally ordered from their homes by the Israeli army, had complied with the order and received an explicit promise from the army that they would be allowed to return. In 2003, following six years of hearings, the Israeli Supreme Court ruled that the Ikrit inhabitants could not return to their former homes, and instead had the choice of receiving land elsewhere in the country or monetary compensation. The Court accepted the government's claim that Israeli interests, based on the current security situation and the Palestinians' persistent demands for the right of return of refugees, could not justify the return of the Ikrit inhabitants, despite explicit promises made by previous governments.

The UN does not consider that there are any IDPs in Israel, nor does the Israeli government. Some academics, Palestinian and Arab Israeli NGOs claim that some 150,000 to 300,000 people should be called IDPs today in Israel. These estimates are based on multiplying the original number of IDPs by the natural growth rate of the Arab population in Israel. As displacement occurred over 60 years ago, most of those included in these estimates are in fact the children and grandchildren of people who were displaced.

2. The situation of the Bedouin population in the south

In 1949 the Israeli authorities forced Bedouin communities in the Negev to move into a smaller area known as the "Siyag", between the town of Beer Sheva and the Israel-Gaza border, where it declared

military rule. Other communities were relocated to this zone until 1953. 11 of the 19 Bedouin tribes who remained in Israel became internally displaced; the other eight tribes already inhabited the Siyag.

In the 1960s, state planners mapped all villages and towns to be included in Israel's first "master plan", but did not include Bedouin villages in the plan. As a result, according to Israel's National Planning and Building Law of 1965, the Bedouin settlements were not recognised, and all buildings in these communities became illegal.

From the 1970s to the 1990s, the Israeli government planned and built seven townships for the Bedouin, which included schools, clinics, and public spaces. About half of those who resettled in them had been displaced in the Siyag. To date, only about half of the Bedouin population in the Negev have agreed to move to the townships, while the other half remain in unrecognised settlements, which look like small shanty towns and generally do not receive municipal services. In the late 1990s, as many Bedouin did not want to move into the new towns, the government set up the "Abu Basma Regional Council" to represent some ten villages, which had until then been unrecognised. Today, some 30,000 people live in the Abu Basma villages, while 60,000 are in the remaining unrecognised villages.

Whether living in recognised or unrecognised villages, the Bedouin are among the poorest and most marginalised citizens, in the worst situation for all socio-economic indicators. The recognised Bedouin localities receive some government support, but not enough to raise its residents out of poverty. While residents of the unrecog-

nised villages pay taxes, they are not eligible for the services, including water and sewers, which are provided to recognised communities. Following appeals by advocates for the Bedouin, the courts have ordered the provision of limited health and education services. Meanwhile, those living in unrecognised villages continue to risk displacement. Their crops are routinely destroyed, and every year the government demolishes some 300 Bedouin homes, most of which are then rebuilt in the same place.

3. Temporary displacement due to rockets launched from Gaza

For years, inhabitants of the town of Sderot in southern Israel, and to a lesser extent other communities, have been the targets of rockets launched from Gaza by Palestinian armed groups, in particular by the armed wing of Hamas. Thousands of rockets have been launched since 2001, killing 15 civilians inside Israel. During the 22-day Gaza conflict in December 2008 and January 2009, rocket attacks from Gaza killed four Israeli civilians and injured hundreds of people. In May 2007, over 250 rockets were fired into southern Israel, killing two civilians and reportedly causing the temporary displacement of some 10,000 people from Sderot to other parts of Israel. Houses and other property were destroyed or damaged in these and similar attacks. Sporadic attacks continued as of the end of 2009.

4. Temporary displacement in northern Israel during the 2006 Israel-Hezbollah conflict

In July and August 2006, Hezbollah fired thousands of rockets into northern Israel, which is home to 1.5 million Jews and Arabs. Some 300,000 people from both communities fled their homes, most of them to the centre and south of Israel. In the absence of a government evacuation system, people who fled the north did so independently, finding refuge with relatives or moving into hotel rooms, or with the help of NGOs. Private individuals in Israel and Jewish communities around the world sent thousands of food packages and millions of dollars to help the displaced. All the displaced were reported to have returned home by the end of 2006. Following the conflict the UN recommended that the Israeli government ensure equal treatment of Jewish and Arab citizens in regard to compensation for damaged or destroyed property, access to free medical services and the construction of new and the upgrading of existing shelters and alarm systems.

Note: IDMC is no longer actively following the situation in [Israel](#). For information on the remaining challenging for those displaced in the context of the establishment of the state of Israel and its aftermath, and for their descendants, please see the November 2009 profile.

About the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre

The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, established in 1998 by the Norwegian Refugee Council, is the leading international body monitoring conflict-induced internal displacement worldwide.

Through its work, the Centre contributes to improving national and international capacities to protect and assist the millions of people around the globe who have been displaced within their own country as a result of conflicts or human rights violations.

At the request of the United Nations, the Geneva-based Centre runs an online database providing comprehensive information and analysis on internal displacement in some 50 countries.

Based on its monitoring and data collection activities, the Centre advocates for durable solutions to the plight of the internally displaced in line with international standards.

The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre also carries out training activities to enhance the capacity of local actors to respond to the needs of internally displaced people. In its work, the Centre cooperates with and provides support to local and national civil society initiatives.

For more information, visit the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre website and the database at www.internal-displacement.org.

Contact:

Nina Birkeland

Head of Monitoring and Advocacy

Tel.: +41 (0)22 795 07 34

Email: nina.birkeland@nrc.ch

Greta Zeender

Country Analyst

Email: greta.zeender@nrc.ch

IDMC

Norwegian Refugee Council

Chemin de Balexert 7-9

1219 Geneva, Switzerland

www.internal-displacement.org

Tel: +41 22 799 0700

Fax: +41 22 799 0701