



PROTECTING PALESTINE REFUGEE HERDING COMMUNITIES IN AREA C AMIDST HEIGHTENED LEVELS OF SETTLER VIOLENCE

05 April 2024



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Mostafa Mleihat from Wadi Siq shares the difficult events they witnessed fleeing Wadi Siq and how it impacted his children. © UNRWA Photo 2023

Background on Settler Violence in the West Bank

Settler violence has been on the rise in the West Bank in recent years. On average, three settler-related incidents occurred per day in the first eight months of 2023, compared to an average of two per day in 2022 and one per day the previous year. However, since 7 October 2023, these incidents have surged to an average of seven per day. This marks the highest daily average of settler-related incidents affecting Palestinians since the UN began recording this data in 2006. The violence is widespread across Area C - the area of the West Bank under full Israeli control - encompassing the South Hebron Hills, the region east of Ramallah towards Jericho, the Jordan Valley, and Nablus.



According to OCHA, since 7 October 2023 and as of 29 January 2024, at least 78 Palestinian households comprising 1,298 people, including 586 children, have been displaced from their homes in the near east due to settler violence and access restrictions.

The displaced households are from at least 15 herding or Bedouin communities. More than half of the displacement occurred on 12, 15, and 28 October, affecting seven communities, these include the displacement of the Wadi Siq community who are mostly refugees (12 October 2024). The displacement toll since 7 October 2023 represents 78 percent of all displacement reported due to settler violence and access restrictions since 1 January 2023 (1,539 people, including 756 children).

Wadi Siq Community



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An illegal outpost near herding communities in East Ramallah. © 2023 UNRWA Photo

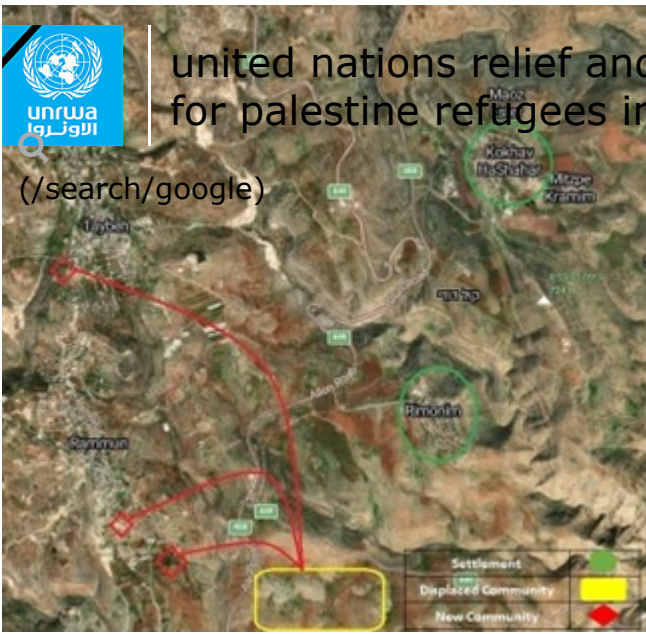
The herding community of Wadi Siq, east of Ramallah, have lived in their location on the mountain slopes for decades since the 1980s. The community consists of 25 households with a total of 144 individuals, including 66 children. The vast majority of the community members are Palestine Refugees. For years, the community has been facing settler harassment from nearby Israeli settlements which escalated in 2022 and again in 2023, following the establishment of an illegal outpost by Israeli settlers. The presence of the illegal outpost, which is about 300 metres away from the community, led to various forms of attack, from harassment and intimidation to raids, livestock theft, and physical assaults, including against children. The donor-funded school within the community was also subject to vandalism by these settlers. Since the outbreak of the war in Gaza in October 2023, the situation sharply deteriorated, with daily attacks reported by community members. Since 7 October, daily attacks against the community took place until one night, settlers gave the community an ultimatum to evacuate within 24 hours under the threat of harm. The community who had refused to leave had no choice but to uproot their homes and move because of mounting settler violence and intimidation.

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On 12 October, the situation took a

more alarming turn when heavily armed settlers, reportedly accompanied by military reservists and settlers in military uniform, stormed the Bedouin community.

Live ammunition was shot in the air threatening the Bedouin residents and causing panic among women and children. As the shooting began, community members fled to the nearby mountains without collecting any belongings, and some sustained injuries due to falling.



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Remnants of the original site of Wadi Siq, which was evacuated. © 2023 UNRWA Photo



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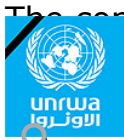
Abu Bashar Al Kaabneh, the community spokesperson of Wadi Siq, told UNRWA about the horrors the community witnessed while fleeing on 12 October 2023. © 2023 UNRWA Photo

Following this, Bashar Al-Kaabneh, the community leader of Wadi Siq, reported to the UNRWA Protection Team that, for days, settlers invaded their homes, obstructed residents from retrieving their belongings, and looted their structures, along with vandalizing the donor-funded community school.



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7. The donor-funded Al Tahaddi School in Wadi Siq was vandalized following the community fleeing. © B'Tselem 2024 UNRWA Photo



The community members fled to lands in Taybeh and Rammun villages east of Ramallah, awaiting some form of resolution. The community lacks basic infrastructure and services, which include solar panels to generate electricity and to access sustainable water sources.

Women in particular shared with us the difficult situation and the trauma experienced by their children. The forced displacement has impacted on the children's access to education as well: many had to move from schools they were used to, and some had to temporarily stop attending school. Wadi Siq was the second community, after the community of Ein Samiya, to be fully displaced (<https://www.aljazeera.com/amp/news/2023/6/4/better-to-die-there-palestinians-mourn-ein-samiya-eviction>) by settler violence this year along with recently displaced villages al-Baqa and Ras al-Tin.



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An elderly displaced man from the community discusses the challenges of living in their displacement location and the community's needs. © 2023 UNRWA Photo

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An elderly displaced man from the community discusses the challenges of living in their displacement location and the community's needs. © UNRWA Photo 2023



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The lives of the displaced children have been greatly affected. Parents told UNRWA teams how changing schools has impacted their children. © UNRWA Photo 2023

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Mostafa Mleihat from Wadi Siq shares the difficult events they witnessed fleeing Wadi Siq and how it impacted his children. © UNRWA Photo 2023



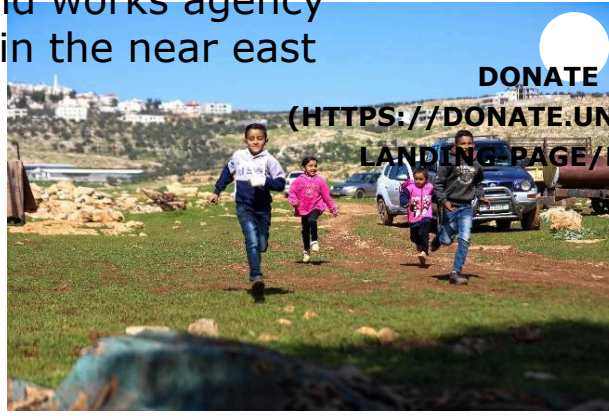
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Children eagerly await the educational games and support brought by the CIU Protection Social Workers. A moment of pure happiness, capturing the spirit of resilience and hope. © UNRWA Photo 2023



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Excited children sprint towards the arriving UN convoy, full of hope for the educational games and assistance delivered by the CIU's dedicated Protection Social Workers. It's a scene of sheer delight, embodying resilience, and optimism. © UNRWA Photo 2023

This unsettling trend suggests that more communities may face forced displacement if this level of settler violence persists.



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The prevention of access to grazing land by settlers was cited as another major reason for fleeing. In addition, after 7 October, more movement restrictions were imposed by the ISF further limiting the grazing lands. A Bedouin shepherd herding. © UNRWA Ph

The community of Mghayer El Deir, consisting of 23 households (140 persons) in East Ramallah, has been consistently reporting settler violence incidents since 7 October. While the community is currently holding its ground, it remains under an imminent threat of displacement.



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Mghayer El Deir Community, East of Ramallah, continues to endure settler harassment and faces the threat of forced displacement. © UNRWA Photo 2023

UNRWA Protection Team



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The protection teams actively listening to women and elderly community members in Rammun, explaining the dire situation following forced displacement. © UNRWA Photo 2023

During the first part of 2023, the Protection team started monitoring and reporting Israeli settlers' attacks against Wadi Siq to the Israeli Authorities, requesting immediate interventions by the Israeli Security Forces (ISF) to stop the attacks when they take place and to ensure the safety and protection of the Bedouin community. Additionally, the UNRWA Protection team consistently advocated that perpetrators should be held accountable and brought to justice. The UNRWA Protection team, upon appeals by the community, requested that the ISF safeguard

the community, their livestock, and trucks given the direct threats inflicted on them
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The inter-agency humanitarian actors visit to Wadi Siq community new location in Taybeh village in 30 October 2023. © UNRWA Photo 2023

Recognizing the significance of collaborative action, the UNRWA Protection team supported the humanitarian response by facilitating the reach of humanitarian actors to the displaced community. On 30 October, an UNRWA team along with OCHA led a convoy comprising of 9 humanitarian actors to assess and respond to the needs of the displaced community of Wadi Siq. This took place during a difficult time of access and closures following 7 October. Moreover, the UNRWA Protection team has been proactively sharing information on communities and settler attacks with other humanitarian actors for protection advocacy and response. The UNRWA Protection team has proactively engaged with herding communities in Area C, maintaining regular visits and contact with them. Their interventions focus on protection monitoring, reporting, and documentation. The Protection team advocates for protection regularly, sometimes daily, with Israeli authorities and the international community. They also provide protection by presence where deemed safe and feasible. The regular contact with the community has enabled timely protection reporting to halt attacks when they occur and allowed for a prompt humanitarian response to the increasing humanitarian needs in Bedouin communities.

UNRWA Crisis Intervention Unit (CIU)



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An UNRWA Protection Officer documenting one of the settler attacks on the community. © UNRWA Photo 2023

The Crisis Intervention Unit (CIU) at UNRWA has been at the forefront of providing comprehensive support to families affected by the increased settler violence in the West Bank, including the Palestinian communities in Wadi Siq. CIU's tailored intervention addressed urgent needs that arose from the crisis.

A total of 24 families, including 138 individuals, received CIU's support. Among these, 18 refugee families comprising 94 individuals were eligible for cash-based assistance, which was critical for recovering from the loss of personal belongings and essential kitchen items. Through cash-based support, one family was able to address the basic needs of their newborn baby in a timely manner.



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A CIU social worker chatting with the children of the displaced community. © UNRWA Photo 2023

Six non-refugee families, consisting of 44 individuals, received psychological first aid (PFA). This support was vital in addressing the immediate psychological and



emotional distress caused by the violence and displacement they faced. The United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) has been providing support for Palestine refugees in the near east since 1949. The support provided was both responsive to the immediate needs and adaptable for long-term recovery.

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The close communication channel with the West Bank Protection Consortium (WBPC) ensured that CIU's interventions were well-coordinated within the broader framework of community protection efforts.

During CIU's comprehensive engagement with the Wadi Siq community, two cases required more complex, ongoing case management and were appropriately referred.

EU Humanitarian Aid Support enabled UNRWA to provide protection services to Palestinian refugees, including the Bedouin communities at risk of displacement in Area C. The aid supported UNRWA in advocating for duty bearers to respect, protect, and fulfill the rights of Palestinian refugees



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A CIU protection social worker is delivering Educational Games and interactive tools that teach children about humanitarian aid and protection in a way that's accessible and engaging. © UNRWA Photo 2023

under international law. Additionally, it allowed UNRWA to assist refugee households facing protection threats, such as displacement, demolition, conflict-related violence, military operations, and settler violence, helping them cope more effectively. This support involved the distribution of cash to affected households, along with psychosocial first aid, emergency case management, and referrals. ECHO's support also ensured that refugees affected by conflict had access to essential services through close coordination with other humanitarian actors.



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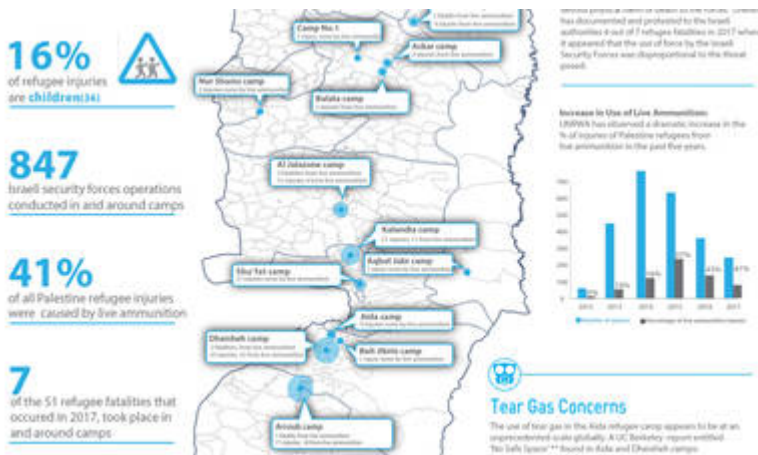
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