



Six-Month Report on Demolitions and Seizures in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem

Reporting Period: 1 January – 30 June 2019¹

Summary

The demolition and seizure of Palestinian property by Israeli authorities in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, continued during the reporting period. 296 Palestinian owned structures were demolished or seized, and 434 people (including 207 children) were displaced. These numbers mark increases of around 50 per cent and 150 per cent, respectively, compared with the equivalent period in 2018. Over 80 per cent of these structures were residential and livelihood structures. In addition, the demolitions and seizures in the reporting period adversely affected 39 738 Palestinians (including 17 353 children).

36 structures, constituting humanitarian assets, targeted in the reporting period were funded by the EU or EU Member States, which indicates an increase of around 38.5 per cent compared with the equivalent period in 2018. The total value of these structures, demolished or seized by Israeli authorities, was EUR 89 219, which represents an increase of around 46 per cent compared with the equivalent period in 2018. Other concerning developments that negatively impact the lives of Palestinians involve Israeli actions targeting educational facilities, destruction of water infrastructure, punitive demolitions, home demolitions in East Jerusalem, and displacement related to Israeli military exercises.

The restrictive planning and zoning regimes applied by Israeli authorities in parts of the West Bank (Area C and East Jerusalem), impede the development of adequate housing, infrastructure and livelihoods for Palestinians. Today, less than 1 per cent of Area C, and about 13 per cent of East Jerusalem, is zoned for Palestinian construction, which is a pre-condition for a permit to be issued by Israeli authorities, and most of these areas are already built up. Meanwhile, some 35 per cent of East Jerusalem has been zoned for Israeli settlements and 70 per cent of Area C is included within the boundaries of the regional councils of Israeli settlements and thereby off-limits for Palestinian development.²

As the Middle East Quartet found in its 2016 report, Palestinians are almost never granted building permits from Israeli authorities.³ Palestinians who build without permits face the risk of home demolition and other penalties, including costly fines. Official data released by Israeli authorities in 2015 indicated that an estimated 13 000 Palestinian structures in Area C were subject to outstanding demolition orders issued by the Israeli Civil Administration due to lack of required building permits.⁴ These pending demolition orders could be implemented at any moment. At least a third of all Palestinian homes in East Jerusalem lack an Israeli-issued building permit, potentially placing over 100 000 residents at risk of displacement.

The practice of enforcement measures such as demolitions and seizures of humanitarian assets are contrary to Israel's obligations under international law, including provisions of international humanitarian law, in particular the Fourth Geneva Convention.

¹ OCHA Demolition Database (last accessed 24 September 2019). All information disclosed in this report is susceptible to change at any time depending on new available data.

² OCHA (UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs).

³ Report of the Middle East Quartet of 1 July 2016.

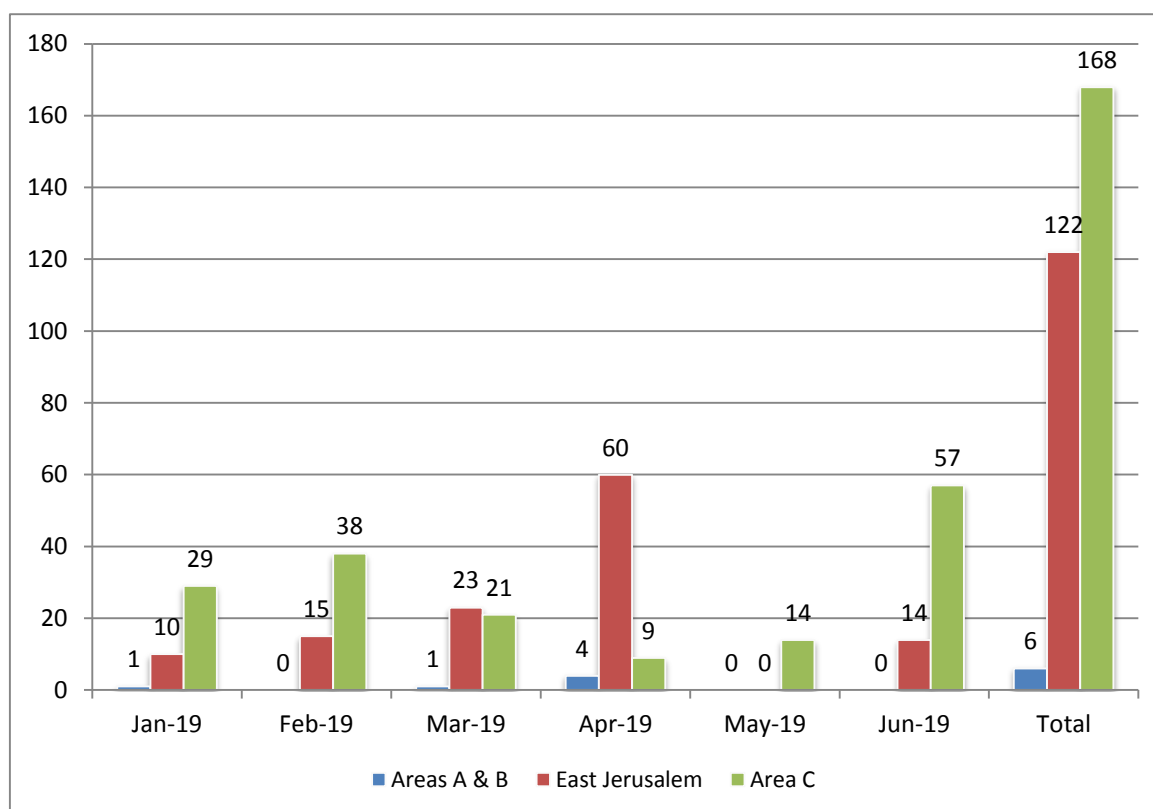
⁴ According to Israeli Civil Administration figures, from January 2000 to mid-2016, Palestinians filed 5 475 applications for building permits. Only 226 (about 4 per cent) were granted. ICA data also indicates that there was a 3 per cent approval rate in 2018.

1. GENERAL DEMOLITION FIGURES

296⁵ structures were demolished or seized throughout the West Bank from January to June 2019. Of these structures, 122 were located in East Jerusalem and 168 in Area C. Table 1 displays the data by individual months.

The month of April saw the highest individual monthly number (73) of demolished homes and other structures recorded by OCHA in more than two years. This increase was driven by demolitions in East Jerusalem. The April number includes 15 self-demolitions in which the owners were forced to demolish their properties to avoid fines, following the issuance of demolition orders by Israeli authorities. 22 of the 73 structures were demolished in Jabal al Mukabbir (East Jerusalem), affecting 57 people from eleven households, and displacing ten people from two households. Since the beginning of the year, 122 structures were demolished in East Jerusalem, accounting for 41 per cent of all demolished structures in 2019. Area C accounted for 57 per cent of all demolished structures.

Table 1: Monthly number of structures demolished or seized

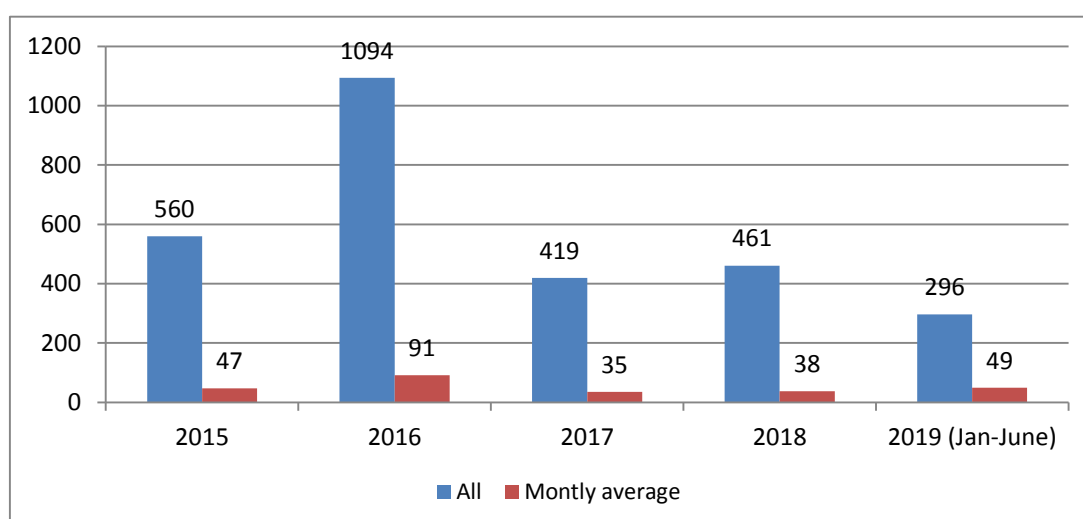


Source: OCHA

On a monthly average nearly 50 structures were demolished or seized in the reporting period. This number is higher than in 2018 (38 structures per month), and in 2017 (35 structures per month), but well below that of 2016 (91 structures per month), see table 2.

⁵ This number does not include partially demolished structures.

Table 2: Annual number of structures demolished or seized, and monthly averages



Source: OCHA

The demolitions and seizures in the reporting period resulted in the displacement of 434 Palestinians (including 207 children), and adversely affected an additional 39 738 Palestinians (including 17 353 children), see table 3.

The respective numbers of affected Palestinians were especially high in February – when Israeli authorities damaged 750 m-long pipes intended to supply water to the communities of Beit Dajan and Beit Furik villages (both in Nablus), which affected all residents of the two communities (more than 18 000 people); in March – when Israeli authorities levelled a one-kilometre section of a road that leads to around 5 000 dunums of agricultural land and a dump site in Kobar village (Ramallah) due to the lack of a permit, which affected all residents of the village (an estimated 4 470 people); and in June – when Israeli authorities demolished two water cisterns in Tammun village (Tubas), due to their location in a nature reserve, affecting access to water for all residents of the village (an estimated 13 600 people).

Table 3: Monthly number of people being displaced⁶ and affected⁷ by demolitions or seizures

2019	All Displaced	Displaced Children	All Affected	Affected Children
January	44	18	197	118
February	105	46	20 179	8 098
March	77	34	5 075	2 678
April	78	38	322	157
May	24	12	121	62
June	106	59	13 844	6 240
Total (Jan-June)	434	207	39 738	17 353

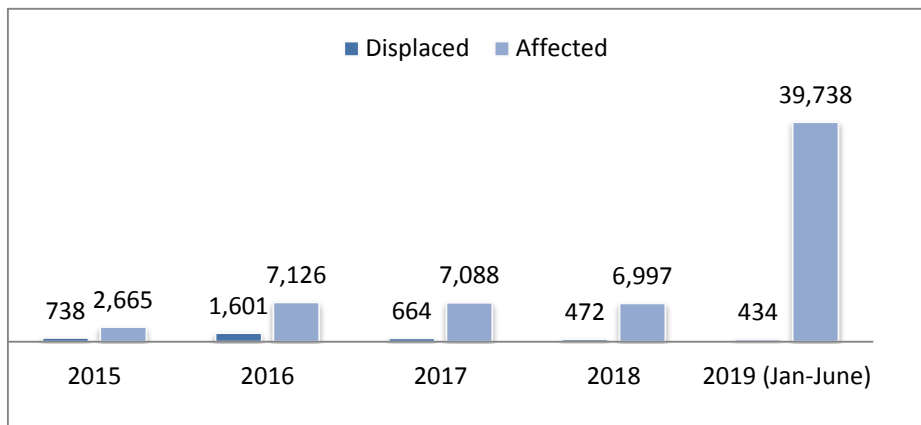
Source: OCHA

⁶ Includes all people who had a structure used as their habitual place of residence demolished.

⁷ Includes all people who had any of their property, other than their residence, demolished. Displaced and affected are here mutually exclusive categories, i.e. people counted under the former are not included in the latter.

In comparison with previous years, the number of affected people is exceptionally high in the first half of 2019, see table 4. This is principally due to the three separate incidents concerning demolitions of infrastructure related to water distribution mentioned above.

Table 4: Annual number of people being displaced or affected by demolitions or seizures

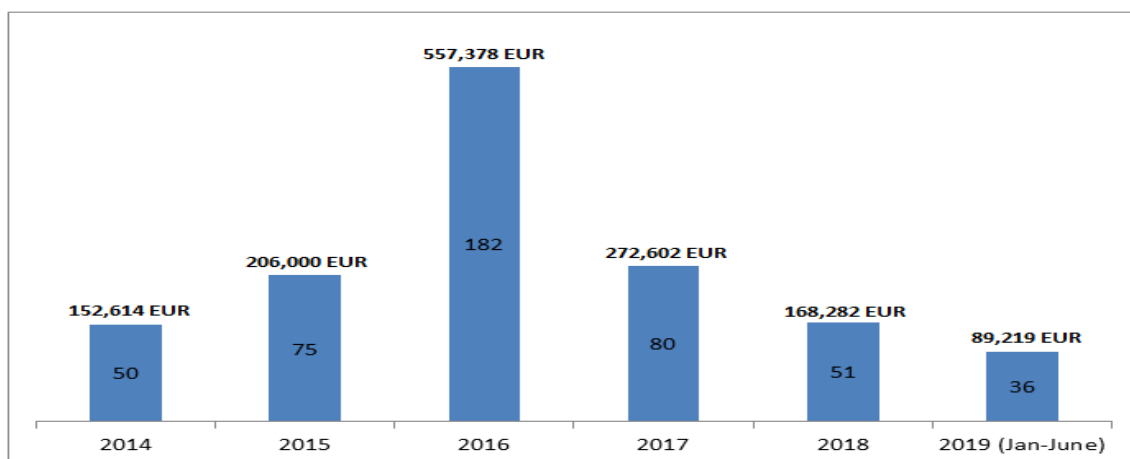


Source: OCHA

2. TARGETED STRUCTURES FUNDED BY EU OR EU MEMBER STATES

36 structures constituting humanitarian assets, including residential and livelihood structures, funded by EU or its Member States were demolished or seized in the first half of 2019.⁸ This number indicates similar levels as previous years, with the exception of 2016, see table 5. The 36 structures targeted represent an estimated material loss of EUR 89 219. For reference, from 2014 until the end of the current reporting period, approximately 474 structures funded by EU and EU Member States were demolished or seized, representing an accumulated value of EUR 1 446 095.⁹

Table 5: Annual number of targeted structures funded by EU or EUMS, including information about incurred financial losses



Source: OCHA

⁸ In addition approximately 40 EU-funded structures were placed at the risk of demolition though the issuance of stop working orders or demolition orders. The value of the structures in question is estimated at EUR 270 000.

⁹ For the European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO), the financial losses incurred due to demolitions/seizures accounts for an average of 1 per cent of its West Bank budget since it started recording such incidents in 2009.

3. DEVELOPMENTS OF CONCERN IN THE REPORTING PERIOD

The following developments are of concern as they negatively impact the lives of Palestinians, and contribute to the consolidation of Israel's presence and control of the West Bank, including East Jerusalem.

Education

Currently some 50 schools in the West Bank, including in East Jerusalem, are under threat of demolition due to pending demolition orders. At least half of these schools were provided with some form of support from the EU or EUMS.

In January, three tents, provided by the Palestinian Ministry of Education, were seized in As Simiya village (Hebron), affecting 45 children. In March, an elementary school building under construction in the Shu'fat refugee camp in East Jerusalem was demolished. The building was an extension to an existing school and designed to accommodate 450 students during the next school year.

Israeli authorities' interference in schools at the beginning of the school year prompted the UN Humanitarian Coordinator and the UNICEF Special Representative to issue a joint statement on 30 January, in which they expressed their deep concern "by the high number of reported incidents of interference in or near schools in the West Bank since the beginning of the school year. These incidents are impacting children's safe access to education. Incidents of interference in schools by Israeli Forces, demolitions, threats of demolition, clashes on the way to school between students and security forces, teachers stopped at checkpoints, and the violent actions of Israeli forces and settlers on some occasions, are impacting access to a safe learning environment and the right to quality education for thousands of Palestinian children."

Water

Around 300 000 Palestinians in Area C are directly affected by Israeli restrictions and control of WASH-related infrastructure, such as water and sanitation networks, with around 95 000 people receiving less than 50 litres of water per capita per day, compared to the WHO recommendation of 100 litres per day, while over 83 000 people receive bad quality drinking water, or have to resort to purchasing expensive and unregulated water.¹⁰

In the reporting period, Israeli authorities demolished and seized infrastructure related to vital water distribution systems in Area C affecting Palestinian communities already suffering from water shortages. In addition to the three separate incidents mentioned above (in Beit Dajan, Beit Furik, Kobar and Tammun, affecting the water supply of more than 36 000 residents), Israeli authorities damaged a 1.4 km-long water pipe in the Masafer Yatta area (south of Hebron), affecting 1 200 people residing in 13 communities. The area is designated by Israel as a "firing zone" for military training. In other incidents, Israeli authorities damaged and/or confiscated a two km-long EU-funded water pipeline in the Bedouin community of Wadi abu Hindi (East of Jerusalem), affecting about 320 people; demolished and seized a 2.3 km-long section of a newly constructed and EU-funded pipeline intended to supply water to the Khallet al Foron area (south of Hebron), affecting 100 people; demolished two water wells in Al Khalayleh and Mikhmas affecting the livelihoods of 30 people; and demolished a water cistern in Susiya.

¹⁰ OCHA Humanitarian Needs Overview 2019.

Punitive demolitions

Israeli authorities continued to demolish homes belonging to families of Palestinians who Israeli authorities considered responsible of various attacks against Israelis. Six Palestinian residencies were demolished on this ground in the reporting period.

In January, the Israeli military destroyed an apartment in Yatta (Area A). The apartment was home to a Palestinian who stabbed and killed an Israeli settler in September 2018, and who was shot and injured before he was arrested. In March, a house located in Kobar village in Area B was demolished by the Israeli authorities. The house belonged to the family of a Palestinian who was arrested and charged with carrying out an attack in December 2018, in which two Israeli soldiers were killed. In April, four structures were demolished, including two apartments in Area A in Hebron city and two other residences in Area B in the villages of Kobar (Ramallah) and Az Zawiya (Salfit). The residences belonged to families of Palestinians who were accused of, or charged with, killing Israelis in the West Bank.

East Jerusalem

On 30 April, Israeli authorities demolished Palestinian homes in the Wadi Yasul area, in the Silwan neighborhood of East Jerusalem, resulting in the displacement of eleven people, including seven children and two women. Some 50 legal cases concerning other homes and structures in this area are pending in Israeli courts, while these homes continue to be under threat of demolition. The area has been zoned by the Israeli authorities as a "green area", specifically forest, since the late 1970s. Efforts by residents over the past 15 years to rezone the neighbourhood as "residential" have been rejected.

On 11 June, Israel's High Court dismissed a petition by the Palestinian residents of the Wadi Hummus/Sur Bahir neighbourhood of East Jerusalem, giving them until 18 July 2019 to demolish nine buildings (compromising some 70 apartment units) located in PA-controlled Area A as well as area B, due to their proximity to the separation barrier.

Developments related to Israeli military exercises

The Israeli army continued to conduct military training exercises in areas designated by it as firing zones in the Jordan Valley of the West Bank. From March to June, around 184 Palestinians, 80 per cent of who were women and children from the Tell al-Khashaba, Lifjim and Humsa al-Baqai'a communities in the Norther Jordan Valley, were forced to temporarily evacuate their homes on eleven occasions, including during Ramadan. On 22 May, Israel's High Court rejected a petition against the recurrent displacement of these communities.

Military Order 1797 allows the demolition/seizure of unlicensed structures deemed as "new", within 96 hours after the issuance of a removal notice. This military order has been on hold since June 2018, pending a decision by Israel's High Court on a petition filed by humanitarian partners. The petition was rejected in late April 2019 paving the way for its enforcement in the upcoming months. The use of this order could severely limit the possibility of challenging demolitions and seizures in Israeli courts.

4. EU ACTION DURING THE REPORTING PERIOD

During the reporting period the issue of demolitions and seizures continued to be raised by the EU with relevant interlocutors. In addition, the following actions took place.

- On 21 January 2019, EU Heads of Mission in Jerusalem and Ramallah visited the Sabbagh family who were under threat of eviction from their home in the Sheikh Jarrah neighbourhood in East Jerusalem. In a press release, the EU Heads of Mission recalled the successive Foreign Affairs Council Conclusions and statements in which the EU has repeated its strong opposition to Israel's settlement policy and actions taken in this context, including evictions and demolitions.
- In a local statement on 25 February 2019, the EU Heads of Mission in Jerusalem and Ramallah condemned the eviction of the Abu Asab family from their home in the Old City of Jerusalem on 17 February. The statement addressed further settlement plans including evictions that are being forwarded in East Jerusalem, mainly in Sheikh Jarrah, Silwan, the Old City and Beit Safafa.
- In a local statement on 26 April 2019, the EU Heads of Mission in Jerusalem and Ramallah noted with grave concern the demolition by Israeli authorities of Palestinian property in the Wadi Yasul area of the Silwan neighbourhood in East Jerusalem on 17 April 2019.
- On 22 May 2019, EU Heads of Mission in Jerusalem and Ramallah visited the Silwan neighbourhood in East Jerusalem where they met representatives of Palestinian families living under the threat of eviction and home demolition. They were also briefed on the educational situation and the challenges facing Palestinian students and schools.