



Six-Month Report on Demolitions and Seizures in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem Reporting Period: 1 July – 31 December 2020 ¹

Summary

Despite a temporary freeze on home demolitions announced by the Israeli Authorities at the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, the number of demolitions and seizures of Palestinian property by Israeli authorities in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, skyrocketed during the reporting period in comparison to the previous one. 536 Palestinian owned structures were demolished or seized, and 627 people (including 318 children) were displaced. Of the structures targeted in the six-month reporting period, 84 structures were funded by the EU or EU Member States with a value of nearly EUR 175,508.

The total number of demolitions in 2020 (January-December) amounted to 854 structures, of which 122 were EU funded humanitarian aid structures (valued at EUR 300,233), a 25 percent increase in the demolition of EU funded structures compared to 2019. Overall, 2020 saw a 36% increase in demolitions and a 10% increase in displacements, compared to 2019, marking a four-year high in demolitions and displacements, including incidents affecting EU-funded structures.

A major trend observed during the reporting period was the increased use of military orders and other legislation, preventing or limiting people's ability to legally challenge the targeting of their homes and sources of livelihood in Israeli courts². In Area C, there was an increase in the seizure of structures with little or no prior notice through the use of military orders. In East Jerusalem, Palestinian homeowners were forced to demolish their own property to avoid financial penalties and/or imprisonment as a result of increasing pressure from the Jerusalem Municipality.

1. INTRODUCTION

The restrictive planning and zoning regimes applied by Israeli authorities in parts of the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, impede the development of adequate housing, infrastructure and livelihoods for Palestinians. Today, less than 1% of Area C, and about 13% 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% of East Jerusalem has been zoned

¹ UN OCHA (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs) Demolition Database last accessed 12 October 2021. All information disclosed in this report is susceptible to change at any time depending on new available data.

² <https://www.ochaopt.org/content/peak-demolitions-and-confiscations-amidst-increasing-denial-right-justice>

for Israeli settlements and 70% of Area C is included within the boundaries of the regional councils of Israeli settlements and thereby off-limits for Palestinian development. The Israeli civil society organisation Peace Now has reported that since 1967, 99.76% of state land allocated by Israel for any use in the West Bank, was allocated to Israeli settlements. Meanwhile, Palestinians were allocated about 0.24% (about 1625 dunams)³.

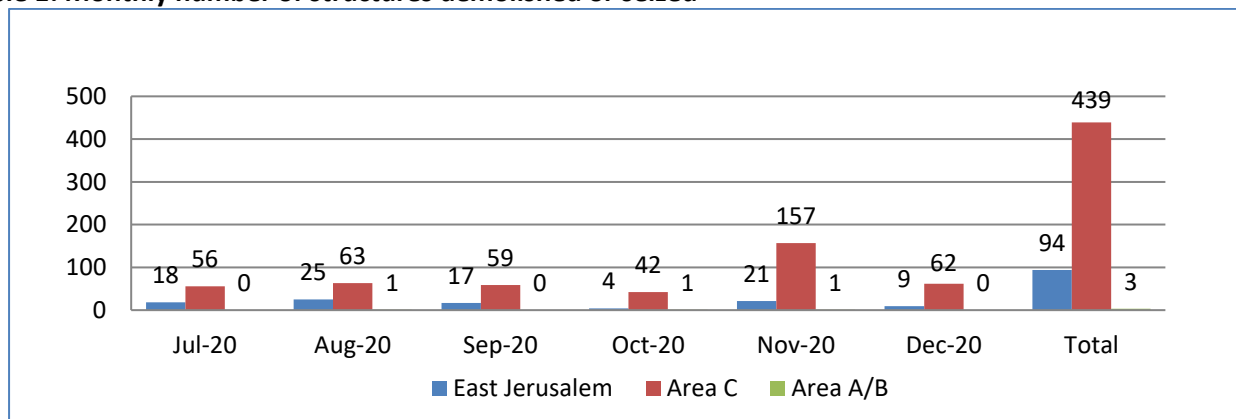
On average, between 2009 and 2018, only 2% of building permit applications in Area C were issued for Palestinians. In Jerusalem, between 1991-2018, only 16.5% of permits were issued for Palestinians, although Palestinians comprise 38% of the city’s residents⁴. Palestinians who build without such permits face the risk of home demolition and other penalties, including costly fines. More than 10,000 demolition orders – issued due to lack of required permits – against Palestinian structures in Area C are currently pending. At least a third of all Palestinian homes in East Jerusalem lack Israeli-issued building permits, which are difficult to obtain, potentially placing over 100,000 residents at risk of displacement⁵. 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.

2. GENERAL DEMOLITION FIGURES

2.1. Material Damage: Monthly and Annual Number of Structures demolished or seized

From 1 July to 31 December 2020, a total of 536 structures were demolished or seized throughout the West Bank, of which 94 were located in East Jerusalem, 439 in Area C and 3 in Areas A and B⁶.

Table 1: Monthly number of structures demolished or seized



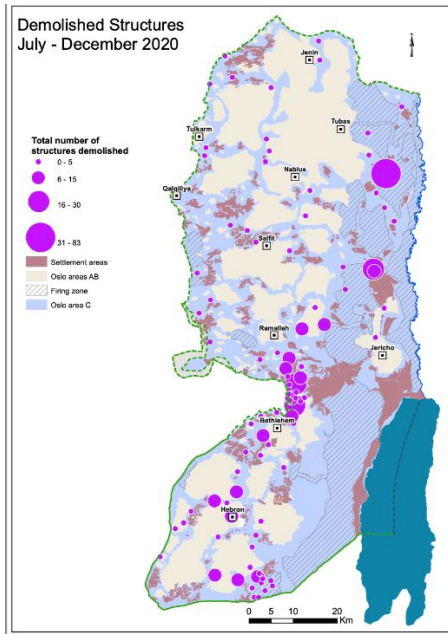
Source: UN OCHA

³ <https://peacenow.org.il/en/state-land-allocation-west-bank-israelis>

⁴ <https://peacenow.org.il/en/jerusalem-municipal-data-reveals-stark-israeli-palestinian-discrepancy-in-construction-permits-in-jerusalem>

⁵ <https://www.ochaopt.org/content/west-bank-east-jerusalem-key-humanitarian-concerns>

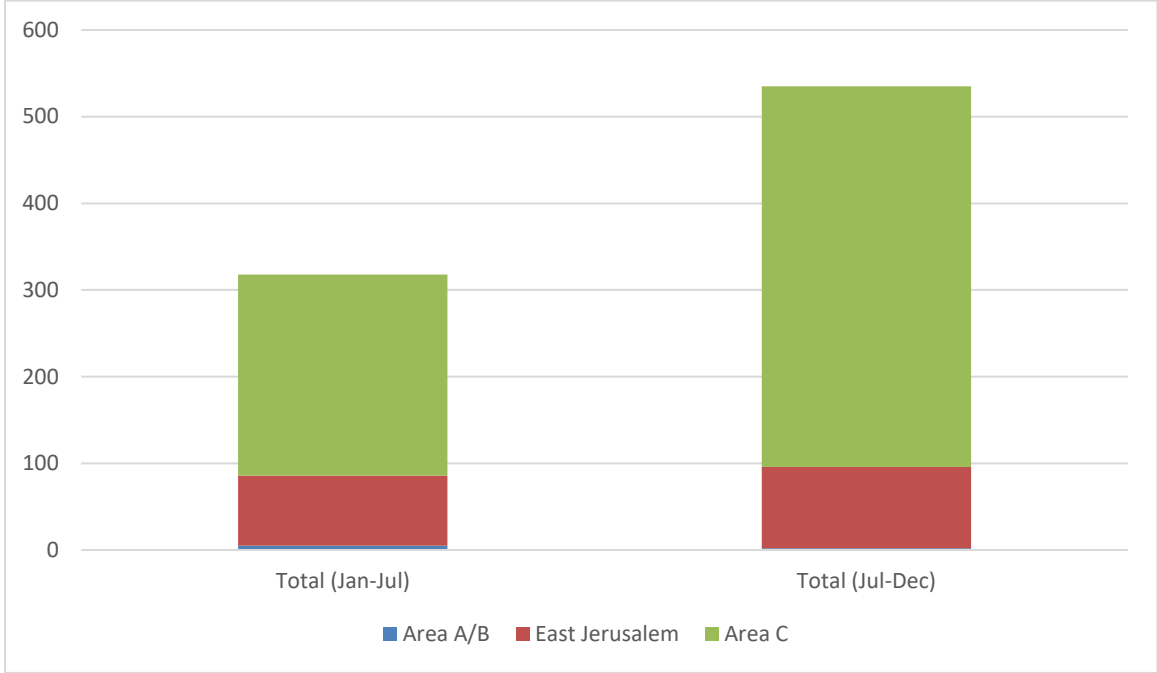
⁶ Source: UN OCHA



As reflected in Table 1, November 2020 saw the highest individual monthly number of demolished homes and other structures in this six-month period. The structures, of which almost all were located in Area C, were subject to demolition due to the lack of building permits by Palestinians. This represents the third highest number monthly figure since the beginning of OCHA's documentation practices in 2009.

The map to the left shows the location of the demolitions and seizures during the reporting period. Demolitions and seizures took place in all Palestinian Authority governorates, with concentrations in the areas in and around East Jerusalem and Bethlehem. Communities in the northern Jordan Valley, such as Humsa and Fasayil al Wusta, were also heavily affected.

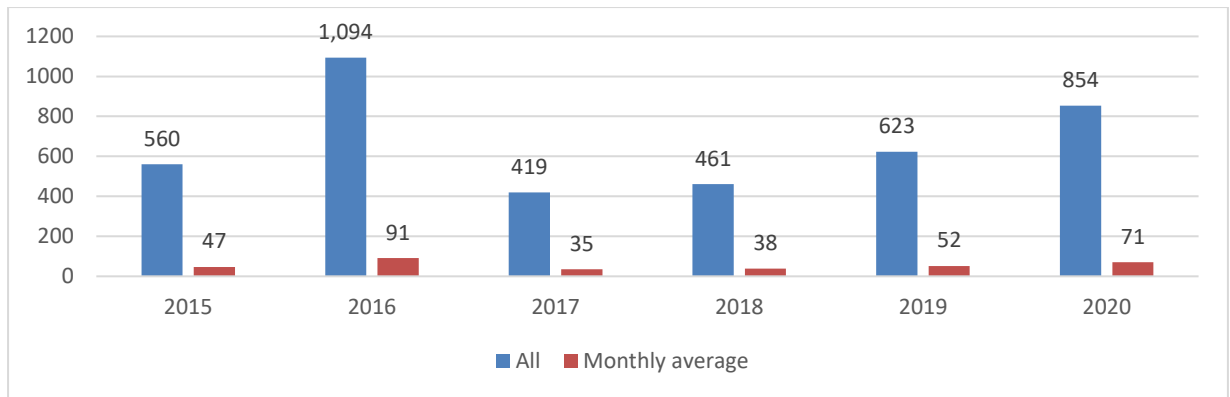
Table 2: Jan-July demolition/seizure in comparison with July-Dec demolition/seizure



Source: UN OCHA

Putting into contrast with the figure of the first half of 2020, demolitions and seizures in the second half of 2020 increased significantly. While the number of demolitions and seizures in East Jerusalem remained relatively steady, the number of such cases in Area A/B decreased from five to two cases (see Table 2).

Table 3: Annual number of structures demolished or seized, and monthly averages



Source: UN OCHA

An end of year review reveals that the cumulative number of demolished or seized structures in 2020 were the largest since 2016, reaching a total of 854 (see Table 3). 671 were targeted in Area C, of which 30% were seized without warning by Israeli forces and 13% were subject to Military order 1797. Of the ones in East Jerusalem, almost half (47%) were demolished by their owners, compared to an average of 23% in recent years⁷. Of concern in 2020 was also the limited ability of Palestinians to legally challenge demolition orders due to an increased denial of justice rights⁸.

2.2. Human Damage: Monthly and Annual Number of People Displaced and Affected by demolitions or Seizures

Table 3: Monthly number of people displaced⁹ and affected¹⁰ by demolitions or seizures

2020	All Displaced	All Affected
July	35	365
August	202	454
September	136	287
October	41	1223
November	163	1059
December	50	435
Total (July-Dec)	627	3823

Source: UN OCHA

In the second half of 2020, October and November saw by far the highest numbers of affected people, accounting for more than 40% of the year's total (5,395). During that period, the Israeli government announced the freeze of demolitions of inhabited homes in East Jerusalem in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. The freeze was lifted on 11 November and resulted in the demolition of 21 structures in East Jerusalem in November, alone¹¹ affecting a total of 97 people¹².

Table 4: Proportionate displacement by demolitions in 2020

⁷ https://www.ochaopt.org/sites/default/files/demolition_monthly_report_december_2020.pdf

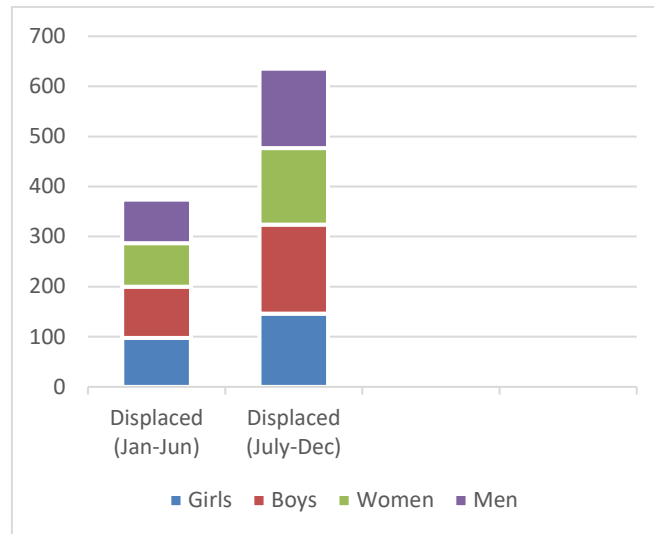
⁸ <https://www.ochaopt.org/content/peak-demolitions-and-confiscations-amidst-increasing-denial-right-justice>

⁹ Includes all people who had a structure used as their habitual place of residence demolished.

¹⁰ Includes all people who had any of their property, other than their residence, demolished. Displaced and affected are here

¹¹ https://www.ochaopt.org/sites/default/files/demolition_monthly_report-november_2020.pdf

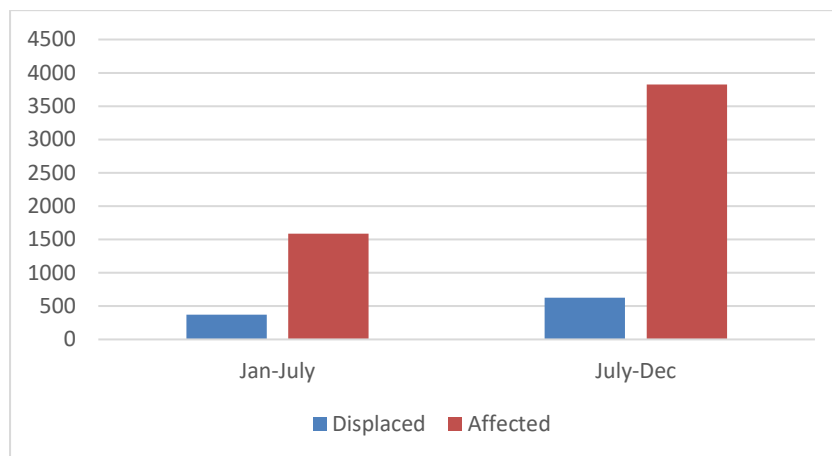
¹²Source: UN OCHA



Source: UN OCHA

Out of the 627 displaced people in the period of July-December, more than half were children (318), with girls accounting for 23 % and boys for 28%. This represents a slight decrease in the number of children affected in the second half of 2020 when put into comparison with the first half (see table 4).

Table 5: Number of people displaced or affected between Jan-July and number of people displaced or affected between July-Dec



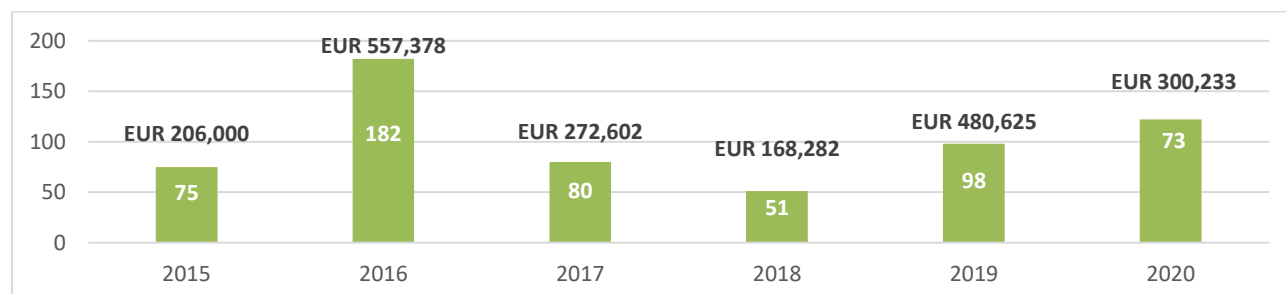
Source: UN OCHA

A bird's-eye view on 2020 reveals that demolitions/seizures of buildings and structures resulted in the displacement of nearly 1000 individuals. Particularly the period from July to December, saw a high number of affected people by demolitions, and contributed to this yearly total (Table 4).

3. TARGETED STRUCTURES FUNDED BY THE EU OR EU MEMBER STATES

84 structures constituting humanitarian assets, including residential and livelihood structures, funded by the EU or its Member States were demolished or seized in the second half of 2020. The material loss of these targeted structures are EUR 175,508, which is around 40 per cent higher than in the first half (EUR 124,725).

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



Source: UN OCHA

Put in perspective, the number of targeted structures funded by the EU or EUMS and their material loss was lower than in the previous year, as one can observe in Table 5. For reference, from 2015 until the end of the current reporting period, approximately 608 structures funded by EU and/or EU Member States were demolished or seized by Israeli authorities, representing an accumulated value of EUR 1,985,120. Over 1,000 structures funded by the EU and/or EU Member States (with a cumulative value of around EUR 5.1 million) are currently at risk of demolition¹³.

4. DEVELOPMENTS OF CONCERN IN THE REPORTING PERIOD

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

The targeting of Palestinian structures in midst of the pandemic was of serious concern in 2020¹⁴. Commitments made by the Israeli authorities to halt the demolition of inhabited homes during the COVID-19 crisis were largely disregarded. Along with the repeated targeting of water and sanitation facilities, these practices undermined the ability of already vulnerable families to adequately cope with the pandemic.

4.1. East Jerusalem

A trend continuing in the second half of 2020 was the increase of structures being demolished by their owners in East Jerusalem, following the receipt of demolition orders, to avoid financial penalties and/or imprisonment and reduce damage to adjacent structures and personal belongings. This was particularly visible when comparing the number of the homes that were demolished by their owners in East Jerusalem in 2020 (47%) with the average of the previous four years (23%). The rise of demolitions by their owners in 2020 can be traced back to Amendment 116 of the Planning and Building Law, transferring authority to intervene from Israeli courts to the Jerusalem Municipality and enabling them to pressure homeowners to demolish their own properties.

¹³ Source: ECHO

¹⁴ https://www.ochaopt.org/sites/default/files/sitrep_25-17-30_dec

4.2 Area C

The numbers and figures on Area C demolitions in the second half of 2020 reinforce the already existing trend of rising demolitions and seizures since 2016. In Area C, 30 per cent of the structures targeted in 2020 (202 out of 666) were seized without prior warning, up from 11 per cent in 2017 and 8 per cent in 2016. Another 13 per cent of the structures in Area C (88) were demolished on the basis of Military Order 1797, which provides a 96-hour notice and very limited grounds for legally challenging a demolition¹⁵.

4.3 Military Regulations Concerning the Transfer of Goods

In the second half of 2020, the Israeli government increasingly targeted unlicensed structures in the West Bank and East Jerusalem through instrumentalising the ‘Military Regulations Concerning the Transfer of Goods’¹⁶. Structures owned by Palestinians, deemed ‘movable’ by an ICA inspector and lacking required permits, are subject to confiscation and don’t require authorities to provide prior notice. Until August 2020, such structures could only be confiscated within 30 days of their installation, but this period was extended to 90 days. In 2020, the percentage of seizures without prior notice, out of all structures targeted, increased to 30%, to which the regulations were a large contributor¹⁷.

5. EU PUBLIC STATEMENTS DURING THE REPORTING PERIOD

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

- On 8 September 2020, the EU issued a local statement on the demolitions of Palestinian structures in the occupied West Bank. In the statement, EU missions in Jerusalem and Ramallah stressed their concern about the targeting of Palestinian structures since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, including EU and EU MS-funded ones, that are illegal under international humanitarian law¹⁸.

¹⁵ https://www.ochaopt.org/sites/default/files/demolition_monthly_report_december_2020.pdf

¹⁶ https://www.ochaopt.org/sites/default/files/demolition_monthly_report_december_2020.pdf

¹⁷ <https://www.ochaopt.org/content/peak-demolitions-and-confiscations-amidst-increasing-denial-right-justice>

¹⁸ https://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/palestine-occupied-palestinian-territory-west-bank-and-gaza-strip/84842/eu-local-statement-demolitions-palestinian-structures-occupied-west-bank_en