

BEYOND THE RUBBLE



Socio-Economic Dispossession and the Gendered
Impacts of Israeli Home Demolitions Policy
in the West Bank

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I. Introduction

Like every society in the world, the concept of home forms the center of Palestinian family life, social identity, and economic security, serving as the primary space where generations are raised, and livelihoods are sustained. However, home carries additional layers specific to the Palestinian context, where the connection to the land is struggled for and maintained. The home, particularly in the context of prolonged Israeli occupation and recurring displacement of Palestinian communities, embodies the homeland itself, and the persistence to stay rooted in it.

For decades, since the outset of its occupation of the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt), the Israeli authorities have employed home demolition policies as a central tool to displace Palestinian communities and assert geographic control over Palestinian lands,¹ notably in Area C² in the Occupied West Bank, under “regulatory” or “security” pretexts, or as a means of collective punishment.³

This policy has significantly harmed Palestinian society. Beyond the loss of a family shelter, it causes the disruption of an entire social and economic ecosystem, stripping families of their primary asset, the home, while eroding financial resilience and fracturing community ties. The consequences reverberate across every aspect of daily life, affecting access to livelihoods, education, healthcare, and social support networks. Families often face immediate displacement, increased indebtedness, and prolonged economic insecurity as they struggle to rebuild their lives under conditions of heightened vulnerability.

Yet, as devastating as the consequences of home demolitions are to the entirety of the Palestinian collective, their impacts are not experienced equally. Home demolitions function as a gendered tool of dispossession, with women bearing a disproportionate share of their social, economic, and psychological consequences. Due to their central social and economic roles within households and communities, the impact of demolition extends beyond housing loss to include the erosion of household-based income sources, increased caregiving burdens, reduced access to education and employment, and heightened exposure to violence and social

¹ EEAS: [One Year Report on Demolitions and Seizures in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem Reporting Period: 1 January 31 December 2023](#)

² Area C comprises around 60% of the occupied Palestinian territory as per the divisions made under the Oslo frameworks, where Israel exercises full control.

³ *Ibid*, EEAS

marginalization. As such, home demolitions have distinct gendered consequences that deepen pre-existing inequalities in the context of violent displacement resulting from the demolitions.

Beyond the statistics and quantitative data, this report seeks to shed light on the economic, social, and gender-based consequences of house demolitions in the West Bank following 7 October 2023, with particular attention to the double burden borne by women. It seeks to demonstrate how Israeli demolition policies serve as part of a systematic process that dismantles family and community support networks, deepens economic and humanitarian vulnerability, and produces conditions marked by poverty, dependency, and forced displacement.

It further examines these practices in light of international humanitarian law and international human rights law to assess their impact on the fundamental rights of affected Palestinian individuals, families, and communities and the entire society.

II. Home Demolitions in the West Bank After 7 October 2023

For decades, since Israel's occupation of the West Bank, Israel has employed its demolition policies as a key driver of Palestinian displacement and insecurity. Israeli authorities employ three forms of house demolitions in the West Bank: “administrative” demolitions carried out under the pretext of ‘unauthorized’ construction in Area C, punitive demolitions⁴ as a form of collective punishment, and demolitions resulting from military operations.⁵ Although Israel conducts each form under different ‘legal’ and ‘administrative’ categories, their practical consequences converge in producing the same outcomes, namely forced displacement, structural impoverishment, and the deepening vulnerability of Palestinian society.

Even well before 7 October 2023, home demolitions had already reached a record level in the first quarter of 2023, that broke the record level of the previous year 2022, marked as the year with the highest number of demolitions since 2016.⁶

However, concurrently with the Israeli military assaults on the Gaza Strip since October 2023, which are currently subject to proceedings before the International Court of Justice

⁴ Punitive demolitions are those conducted as a form of punishment against the family of a Palestinian accused of carrying out an attack, and it is based on Israeli military regulations dating to the British Mandate.

⁵ [ACAPS: Palestine Impact of demolitions policies on Palestinians in the occupied West Bank](#)

⁶ [OCHA West Bank demolitions and displacement | January-March 2023](#)

(ICJ) concerning a plausible risk of genocide⁷, the West Bank has endured a violent, yet silent, incremental war marked by the significant intensification of demolition and displacement policies that have steadily escalated since 7 October 2023.⁸ In the aftermath of the Israeli war on Gaza, Israeli political and military discourse increasingly reframed the occupied West Bank as a latent security threat requiring pre-emptive intervention. Recurrent official Israeli assertions that “what happened in Gaza must not be allowed to recur elsewhere” effectively extended the logic applied to Gaza to the West Bank, reconstituting it as a zone of anticipatory risk and preventive control, and placing the escalation there within a broader trajectory of forced displacement, territorial expansion and the destruction of conditions necessary for Palestinian collective survival.⁹

At the broader level, in 2023 alone, a total of 1,177 Palestinian structures were demolished or seized across the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, representing the highest figure recorded since 2016.¹⁰ These policies resulted in the displacement of 2,296 Palestinians; almost half of them are women and girls¹¹, and 1057 Children¹²- while 439,875 individuals were affected either directly or indirectly.¹³ The same year also saw more than double the number of demolitions, indicating a marked increase in the use of this form of demolition.¹⁴

In the aftermath of 7 October 2023, this trajectory accelerated, with demolitions expanding in both intensity and geographic scope. Since that date, over 1,074 demolition incidents have been documented, concentrated primarily in the north of the West Bank, namely in the refugee camps of Jenin, Tulkarm, and Nur Shams.¹⁵ The numbers reflect a significant surge compared to previous years. Notably, in what marked a grave escalation, the geographic scope of these operations has extended beyond Area C and East Jerusalem into Areas A and B, where the Palestinian Authority has the civil and planning jurisdiction under the Oslo framework, signaling its deliberate erosion and the erosion of any former legal and administrative boundaries within it.¹⁶

⁷ [Application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide in the Gaza Strip \(South Africa v. Israel\)](#)

⁸ [Escalating Demolitions in the West Bank Including East Jerusalem Mid-Year Review 2024.pdf](#)

⁹ [UN: Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967 \(October 2024\)](#)

¹⁰ [One Year Report on Demolitions and Seizures in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem Reporting Period: 1 January 31 December 2023 | EEAS](#)

¹¹ *Ibid*

¹² *Ibid*

¹³ *Ibid*

¹⁴ *Ibid*

¹⁵ [Escalating Demolitions in the West Bank Including East Jerusalem Mid-Year Review 2024.pdf](#)

¹⁶ [Planning Policy in the West Bank | B'Tselem](#)

This escalation has been closely linked to intensified Israeli military operations, particularly operation “Iron Wall,” initiated in January 2025 in the north of the West Bank, which has functioned as a key operational framework for expanded demolition practices. Since its initiation, approximately 1,400 demolition orders have been issued,¹⁷ while an estimated 30,000 Palestinians remain forcibly displaced from refugee camps in the northern West Bank.¹⁸ Prior to the “Iron Wall” operation, 228 structures were destroyed in 2023 alone,¹⁹ resulting in the displacement of 921 individuals, including 394 children, underscoring the direct humanitarian impact of Israeli forces' demolitions and destruction.²⁰

Alongside these developments, punitive demolitions increased significantly following 7 October. 12 homes were demolished between October and the end of 2023,²¹ rising to 23 by September 2025, the highest level recorded in the past decade.²² Punitive demolitions in Areas A and B also increased substantially, rising from three recorded cases in 2021 to 24 cases in 2023, the majority of which occurred in the aftermath of 7 October.²³

III. Economic Dispossession Through Home Demolitions

A. Systemic Impoverishment

Within the broader planning and zoning regime imposed by Israel in the occupied West Bank, particularly in Area C, demolitions function as a mechanism of structural impoverishment. They operate in a context of Israeli policies in Area C, marked mainly by restricting Palestinian access to land, natural resources, construction permits, and development opportunities, largely limiting the ability of Palestinian communities to pursue sustainable economic growth. Area C, which comprises roughly 60% of the West Bank, contains significant agricultural, tourism, and natural resource potential.²⁴ However, restrictions on Palestinian development, combined with recurrent demolitions, undermine the capacity of communities to utilize these resources as a basis for economic advancement and poverty reduction.

¹⁷ [Israel must stop killings and home demolitions in occupied West Bank | OHCHR](#)

¹⁸ *Ibid*

¹⁹ *Ibid*, EEAS

²⁰ EEAS: [One Year Report on Demolitions and Seizures in the West Bank including East Jerusalem - 1 January 31 December 2023.pdf](#)

²¹ [Surge in rate of terrorist homes demolition by IDF | The Jerusalem Post](#)

²² *Ibid*

²³ *Ibid*, EEAS

²⁴ [Planning Policy in the West Bank | B'Tselem](#)

The effects of demolitions also extend across generations. Housing often represents the primary accumulated asset of Palestinian families and serves as a source of inheritance, financial security, and social protection. The destruction of homes, therefore, erodes not only present living conditions but also future economic prospects, disrupting intergenerational wealth transfer and weakening long-term household resilience.

Moreover, repeated demolitions contribute to the production of dependency. Families affected by demolition frequently lose both their shelter and the productive assets associated with it, forcing them to rely on humanitarian assistance, emergency aid, or informal support networks. The cumulative effect of demolition orders, restrictions on reconstruction, and recurring displacement creates a coercive environment that undermines self-sufficiency and entrenches long-term economic vulnerability.

B. Loss of Assets and Income

Home demolitions frequently target structures that are essential for income generation and household survival. While residential buildings accounted for nearly 46% of all demolished structures during the first half of 2024,²⁵ a substantial proportion of demolished properties were directly linked to economic production and livelihoods.

Agricultural structures represented approximately 28% of demolished structures during the same period,²⁶ while livelihood-related facilities accounted for an additional 17%.²⁷ Field documentation indicates the destruction of agricultural sheds, blacksmith workshops, livestock facilities, and equipment repair shops,²⁸ all of which constitute critical components of local economies and household income generation.

For Bedouin and herding communities in particular, demolitions frequently target livestock enclosures, animal pens, feeding troughs, and fodder storage facilities.²⁹ The destruction of these structures effectively removes the primary productive assets upon which entire households depend for income, food production, and economic survival.

The economic losses generated by demolitions, therefore, extend beyond the market value of the demolished structures themselves. They include the destruction of productive capacity,

²⁵ [JLAC: Escalating Demolitions in the West Bank Including East Jerusalem Mid-Year Review 2024](#)

²⁶ *Ibid*

²⁷ *Ibid*

²⁸ B'Tselem: [Demolitions and confiscations in communities facing expulsion](#)

²⁹ *Ibid*, EEAS

the interruption of economic activity, and the loss of future income streams. In many cases, the demolition of a home simultaneously eliminates the physical space where families conduct home-based economic activities, including food production, livestock management, handicrafts, and small-scale enterprises.

The impact is also reflected in growing levels of food insecurity. The destruction of agricultural assets, livestock facilities, water infrastructure, and storage capacities directly undermines household food production systems. In Area C, approximately 24% of households experience food insecurity linked to demolition-related policies and displacement.³⁰ These effects are particularly severe among Bedouin and pastoral communities whose livelihoods depend heavily on land, livestock, and agricultural infrastructure.

C. Debt, Dependency, and Economic Insecurity

The economic consequences of demolition persist long after the physical destruction has occurred. Many affected families face substantial financial burdens before demolition takes place, through fines, legal expenses, permit-related costs, and administrative penalties imposed by Israeli authorities.

In some cases, households have accumulated debts amounting to approximately 100,000 NIS in fines associated with alleged unauthorized construction prior to being compelled to demolish their own homes.³¹ The widespread practice of self-demolition reflects the severe financial pressures imposed on affected families, many of whom choose to destroy their homes themselves to avoid additional demolition fees charged by Israeli authorities.³²

The situation worsens with increasing household expenditures while simultaneously reducing access to income-generating opportunities. Palestinian families are often required to secure alternative accommodation, replace lost property, and rebuild essential infrastructure under conditions of extreme uncertainty and resource scarcity.

The destruction of water, sanitation, and electricity infrastructure compounds these economic burdens. Demolitions frequently target water tanks, sanitation facilities, solar panels, roads,

³⁰ [MIFTAH: Fact Sheet On Violations against women by Israeli occupation in Areas designated as \(C\) Women under occupation](#)

³¹ *Ibid*, EEAS

³² *Ibid*, EEAS

and other essential infrastructure required for daily life and economic activity.³³ In Area C, where approximately 70% of communities are not connected to water networks,³⁴ the demolition of water storage facilities significantly increases household expenditures and undermines agricultural production.

IV. Social Consequences of Home Demolitions

Home constitutes the center of family life, social relations, and community belonging. It is embedded within a wider network of social relations. Consequently, its destruction disrupts not only living arrangements but also the social structures that sustain individuals and families. Beyond the physical shelter, a home protects the family's privacy, security, autonomy, and sense of belonging. Its destruction can therefore constitute a profound loss of dignity and personal agency. Families may lose the ability to determine where and how they live, while creating a situation of forced dependence on humanitarian aid and relatives, or temporary accommodation with relatives.

Families who are forced to seek temporary accommodation with relatives, or within overcrowded communal settings, face situations of overcrowding, loss of privacy, and increased pressure on already limited household resources. Families that once maintained independent living arrangements are compelled to share living spaces with extended family members, generating tensions and altering established family dynamics.³⁵

When families are displaced, they can lose daily contact with their usual social surroundings: relatives, neighbours, friends, schools, and community institutions. When families relocate as a result of demolition, they often lose these social ties, which gain specific importance in the Palestinian context due to the dominant political instability and economic hardships. This situation is aggravated in cases of repeated displacement, which can contribute to the fragmentation and alteration of the demographic and social character of an entire community.

The destruction of the home also affects traditional family roles and responsibilities. Displacement often undermines the ability of family members to perform their customary social and economic functions, particularly where livelihoods are simultaneously disrupted. Men may experience a loss of their perceived role as providers and protectors, while women

³³ *Ibid*, B'Tselem

³⁴ *Ibid*, MIFTAH

³⁵ *Ibid*

frequently assume additional caregiving and household responsibilities under increasingly difficult conditions.³⁶ These shifts can create tensions within the household and contribute to the erosion of family stability.

At the community level, demolitions target key social and economic infrastructure, including communal centers, mosques, halls, parking facilities, and public sports installations. These facilities cannot be categorized as secondary or “luxury” amenities; they perform essential functions directly tied to the rights to work, social life, and the healthy development of children and youth. Such facilities serve as communal spaces, sources of direct and indirect livelihood, and rare safe areas in already crowded and spatially deprived environments. For example, the Aida Refugee Camp pitch in Bethlehem, serving over 250 children and around 500 youth, faced an Israeli demolition order despite the completion of all legal procedures, including formal lease arrangements.

As such, the threat of demolition itself contributes to a coercive environment in which families live under constant fear of displacement, disrupting social life and discouraging long-term investment in community development.³⁷ As a result, demolitions contribute not only to the displacement of individuals but also to the gradual destabilization of entire communities.

The impacts of demolitions are intergenerational; They can extend well beyond the trauma of the immediate event. The family, and especially children who grow up experiencing displacement or housing insecurity, may develop a persistent sense of uncertainty about their future and relationship to their home and community. At the family level, the loss of property and assets can also affect the ability of parents to provide stable opportunities for their children. In this way, demolition can contribute to the transmission of economic and social vulnerability across generations.

The social impact of home demolitions extends to accumulated psychological dimensions, as the psychological condition of individuals cannot be separated from the transformations imposed by displacement and loss of shelter. The destruction of a home entails the destruction of a space of memory, identity, belonging, and security, which directly affects individual psychological stability and leads to elevated levels of stress, anxiety, depression,

³⁶ [MIETAH: Fact Sheet On Violations against women by Israeli occupation in Areas designated as \(C\) Women under occupation](#)

³⁷ *Ibid*, [ACAPS](#)

and fear. These conditions are further exacerbated by living under the constant threat of demolition orders and the ongoing anticipation of displacement.³⁸

Children are among the most affected groups in psychological terms. Studies indicate high levels of psychological distress and symptoms associated with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, particularly among children under the age of fifteen.³⁹ Reported symptoms include sleep disturbances, difficulty concentrating, bedwetting, social withdrawal, and regressive developmental behaviors. Many children also develop persistent fears related to buildings, darkness, and sudden collapse. In severe cases, prolonged exposure to trauma may affect both physical health and overall development.⁴⁰

Children's right to education is also particularly impacted. Families affected by demolitions often face significant barriers to maintaining children's access to education.⁴¹ The destruction of schools, increased travel distances, and concerns over settler violence and harassment contribute to school dropout, particularly among girls.⁴² In some communities, these pressures have been linked to increased rates of early marriage and child labor as families struggle to cope with deteriorating economic and social conditions.⁴³

Despite the severity of these impacts, their burden is intensified by limited access to gender-sensitive psychosocial support. Mental health interventions often fail to address the specific experiences of women, children, and displaced families, leaving many affected individuals without adequate assistance.⁴⁴ As a result, the psychological consequences of demolition persist long after the event, becoming embedded within broader patterns of social vulnerability and protracted displacement.

V. Gender-Specific Impact: Reproducing Women's Structural Marginalization

The impact of home demolitions is not gender neutral. While demolitions affect entire families and communities, women and girls experience distinct and disproportionate harms resulting from pre-existing social and economic inequalities. In the Palestinian context, where

³⁸ Springer Nature Link: [Mental health consequences of home demolition policy towered Palestinians: Literature review | International Journal of Mental Health Systems |](#)

³⁹ *Ibid*

⁴⁰ *Ibid*

⁴¹ *Ibid*, ACAPS

⁴² *Ibid*

⁴³ *Ibid*, MIFTAH

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, ACAPS

women continue to bear primary responsibility for caregiving, household management, and family well-being, the destruction of the home extends beyond the loss of shelter to undermine the very space through which many women exercise agency, security, and social identity. In addition, with women being the primary caretakers, displacement often increases their responsibility for caring for children, elderly relatives, and other family members under much more difficult conditions. The difficulty is aggravated in cases of disabled family members, notably with children and elderly people with disabilities. Consequently, home demolitions not only exacerbate existing vulnerabilities but also reproduce and deepen women's structural marginalization and double their burdens.

Displacement carries a specific toll on women; it fundamentally alters women's relationship to privacy, safety, and bodily security. Relocation to often unfamiliar and overcrowded temporary accommodation, with shared living arrangements, largely undermines their privacy and safety, at times exposing them directly to threats of exploitation, violence, and insecurity. These conditions expose them to heightened risks of gender-based violence, sexual harassment, exploitation, and abuse. The absence of secure and private sanitation facilities further compounds these risks and undermines women's dignity and well-being. In many cases, concerns regarding personal safety lead women and girls to restrict their movement, limiting access to education, healthcare, water sources, and other essential services.

Women relocate while still having to carry out daily caretaking activities and maintaining household stability, in the absence of adequate structures, including kitchens, bathrooms, electricity, or water, rendering these responsibilities significantly more demanding. Demolitions significantly increase women's practical and caregiving responsibilities. Once displaced, families are often forced to reside in temporary shelters, overcrowded accommodations, tents, or the homes of relatives. Under such circumstances, women become the primary managers of family survival despite having fewer resources and less control over their environment. Approximately 63% of women report a substantial increase in their physical, practical, and psychological responsibilities following demolition.⁴⁵ The destruction of homes and essential infrastructure transforms routine domestic tasks into labor-intensive activities, requiring women to secure water, prepare food, maintain hygiene, and care for children under increasingly difficult conditions.

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, [MIFTAH](#)

The burden experienced by women is further intensified by the expectation that they continue to provide stability for other family members despite their own trauma. Following demolitions, women frequently assume responsibility for containing the fear and distress of children, supporting spouses, and maintaining family cohesion while suppressing their own emotional suffering. Studies indicate that women exhibit significantly higher levels of psychological distress than men following demolition-related displacement,⁴⁶ with Bedouin women showing particularly elevated levels of depression due to the simultaneous loss of home, livelihood, and community stability.⁴⁷

Especially for housewives, which represent the majority of Palestinian women⁴⁸, the home is frequently described as their "kingdom," the space where they raise children, manage family life, preserve social relations, and exercise a degree of autonomy and control over their daily environment. The destruction of this space, therefore, carries profound consequences for primary caretakers in this very space. Women often describe the demolition of their homes as the loss of a part of themselves, a form of identity destruction that extends beyond material loss. As the repository of memories, family history, and emotional security, the home functions as a protective environment against external threats. Its destruction removes this protective shield and leaves women exposed to profound feelings of grief, insecurity, anxiety, and depression.⁴⁹

Women are also disproportionately impacted economically. Demolitions immediately undermine their resources, assets, and any prospects to support their economic independence. The loss of a home often entails the destruction of possessions, equipment, savings, documents, and home-based sources of income. The destruction of homes often eliminates the domestic spaces where women engage in income-generating activities, food production, handicrafts, and other forms of informal labor.⁵⁰ At the same time, the loss of family land and productive assets may compel women to seek employment in precarious labor markets, including work in Israeli settlements under exploitative conditions characterized by low wages, insecurity, and heightened risks of abuse.⁵¹ These conditions deepen women's economic dependency while limiting opportunities for sustainable recovery.

⁴⁶ [Post-traumatic stress disorder and co-morbid psychological disorders after Palestinians' home demolition: a comparative study](#)

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, Spring Nature Link

⁴⁸ [United Nations in Palestine: Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment](#)

⁴⁹ Wafa: [Occupation's demolition of Palestinian homes, a double burden on Women](#)

⁵⁰ *Ibid*, Wafa

⁵¹ *Ibid*, MIFTAH

Relocation after demolitions can increase both housing costs and transportation costs women need to access employment and education, or to run errands. These pressures can reinforce existing gender inequalities in access to income, property, and economic decision-making. Such economic consequences are often long-term; with demolitions, unpaid domestic work often increases, limiting further employment or income-generating opportunities. Where women already have limited control over household assets or financial resources, demolitions often reduce their economic autonomy. Reliance on relatives or humanitarian assistance may provide essential short-term support but does not replace the long-term security that stable housing and productive assets provide. In this way, demolitions can deepen existing structural gender inequalities by reducing women's economic opportunities while simultaneously increasing their unpaid responsibilities.

The social consequences of demolition additionally intersect with harmful gender norms and coping mechanisms within households. When male family members lose their homes, livelihoods, and perceived roles as providers and protectors, some adopt negative coping strategies that may include violent behavior within the household.⁵² As a result, women often face increased exposure to intimate partner violence and other forms of domestic abuse during periods of displacement and economic hardship. In this way, the consequences of demolition extend beyond the physical destruction of property to reshape power relations and vulnerabilities within the family itself.⁵³

Girls face additional long-term and life-changing consequences of demolitions. Demolitions and the broader coercive environment created by settlement expansion, infrastructure destruction, and settler violence frequently disrupt access to education. Families concerned about safety risks associated with long travel distances, military activity, or settler harassment may withdraw girls from school as a protective measure. Such disruptions contribute to declining educational attainment and have been linked to increased rates of early marriage in affected communities, thereby reinforcing cycles of gender inequality and socio-economic exclusion.⁵⁴

Women's health is also adversely affected by demolition-related displacement and infrastructure destruction. Damage to roads, healthcare facilities, and transportation networks restricts access to essential health services, including maternal healthcare. Humanitarian

⁵² *Ibid*, ACAPS

⁵³ *Ibid*

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, MIFTAH

assessments indicate that tens of thousands of pregnant women face significant obstacles in accessing medical care, while water scarcity and inadequate sanitation create additional risks to reproductive and menstrual health.⁵⁵ These conditions demonstrate that the consequences of demolition extend well beyond housing loss to affect women's physical health, dignity, and overall well-being.

Taken together, these impacts demonstrate that home demolitions operate not only as a policy of displacement but also as a mechanism that reproduces and deepens existing gender inequalities. By destroying the spaces through which women secure livelihoods, provide care, maintain social relations, and exercise agency, demolitions reinforce structural patterns of marginalization while imposing a disproportionate burden on women and girls.

VI. Applicable Legal Framework and Legal Analysis

A. Applicability of International Law and the Legal Status of the Occupied Palestinian Territory (oPt)

The West Bank, including East Jerusalem, remains occupied territory under international law and is therefore governed by the rules of belligerent occupation contained in the 1907 Hague Regulations,⁵⁶ the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949,⁵⁷ customary international humanitarian law, and applicable international human rights law. The applicability of these legal frameworks has been consistently affirmed by the United Nations, international tribunals, and the International Court of Justice (ICJ).

In its 2024 Advisory Opinion on the *Legal Consequences Arising from the Policies and Practices of Israel in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem*, the ICJ reaffirmed that Israel's presence in the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt) is governed by the law of occupation and concluded that Israel's continued occupation has become unlawful as a result of its prolonged character and its associated policies of settlement expansion, territorial fragmentation, demographic engineering, and permanent control over Palestinian land and resources.⁵⁸

The Court further determined that Israeli policies and practices systematically undermine the Palestinian people's right to self-determination and amount to an unlawful exercise of

⁵⁵ *Ibid*

⁵⁶ ICRC: [IHL Databases](#)

⁵⁷ [IHL Treaties - Geneva Convention \(IV\) on Civilians, 1949](#)

⁵⁸ ICJ: [Legal Consequences arising from the Policies and Practices of Israel in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, in](#)

sovereign powers in occupied territory.⁵⁹ Consequently, individual measures undertaken by Israeli authorities, including home demolitions, cannot be assessed in isolation from the broader legal context in which they occur. Rather, they must be understood as part of a wider system of territorial control, dispossession, and demographic restructuring that the Court found incompatible with international law.

Against this backdrop, home demolitions must be legally examined as part of a broader pattern of practices that employ the crime of forced displacement to facilitate territorial acquisition, and the consolidation of Israeli control over occupied territory, rather than “administrative” or “security” measures.

B. Destruction of Property and Forced Displacement

Article 46 of the Hague Regulations requires respect for private property and prohibits its confiscation outside of absolute military necessity.⁶⁰ Similarly, Article 53 of the Fourth Geneva Convention prohibits the destruction of private or public property by an occupying power except where such destruction is rendered absolutely necessary by military operations.⁶¹

The threshold of “absolute military necessity” constitutes an exceptional and narrowly interpreted standard. Demolitions carried out for administrative purposes, planning restrictions, punitive objectives, demographic considerations, or settlement-related expansion do not satisfy this requirement.⁶²

Furthermore, Article 49 of the Fourth Geneva Convention prohibits the forcible transfer or deportation of protected persons in occupied territory regardless of motive.⁶³ International humanitarian law recognizes that coercive environments resulting from repeated demolitions, denial of essential services, restrictions on construction, and destruction of livelihoods may amount to indirect forcible displacement even where physical force is not directly employed, which is as unlawful as direct forcible displacement.

The Rome Statute, in its Article 8(2)(a)(iv), criminalizes “Extensive destruction and appropriation of property, not justified by military necessity and carried out unlawfully and

⁵⁹ *Ibid*

⁶⁰ ICRC: [IHL Databases, Article 46](#)

⁶¹ [IHL Treaties - Geneva Convention \(IV\) on Civilians, 1949 - Article 53](#)

⁶² [IHL Treaties - Geneva Convention \(IV\) on Civilians, 1949 - Article 53](#)

⁶³ [IHL Treaties - Geneva Convention \(IV\) on Civilians, 1949 - Article 49](#)

wantonly”, involving extensive, unlawful and wanton destruction as potentially constituting this grave breach and corresponding war crime under the Rome Statute. Additionally, Article 8(2)(b)(xiii) prohibits and criminalizes “Destroying or seizing the enemy's property unless such destruction or seizure be imperatively demanded by the necessities of war.”

This report demonstrates that demolitions conducted at the reported scale frequently result in displacement, repeated loss of shelter, destruction of livelihoods, and the creation of conditions incompatible with a dignified life. Such outcomes constitute violations of Articles 49 and 53 of the Fourth Geneva Convention and corresponding customary international humanitarian law norms, as well as the Rome Statute.

C. Collective Punishment and Punitive Home Demolitions

Punitive demolitions constitute serious violations under international humanitarian law. Article 33 of the Fourth Geneva Convention expressly prohibits collective penalties and all measures of intimidation against protected persons. The prohibition reflects the fundamental principle of individual criminal responsibility and bars punishment imposed on persons for acts they did not personally commit.⁶⁴ In its 2024 Advisory Opinion, the ICJ specifically examined Israeli punitive demolitions in the West Bank. It found that the demolitions punish family members and other people who did not commit the alleged offence and concluded that the practice is contrary to Article 33 of the Fourth Geneva Convention.

Punitive home demolitions target family members and relatives who bear no individual criminal responsibility for the alleged conduct attributed to another person. The destruction of family homes, therefore, imposes severe consequences on individuals solely by virtue of their familial relationship to a suspect or accused person.

The significant increase in punitive demolitions following October 2023 raises renewed concerns regarding the systematic use of measures that are fundamentally incompatible with international humanitarian law.⁶⁵

D. Discrimination in Planning Regimes

In its 19 July 2024 Advisory Opinion, the ICJ examined Israel’s planning and zoning regime in the West Bank, including Area C and East Jerusalem, which is a major pretext causing

⁶⁴ [IHL Treaties - Geneva Convention \(IV\) on Civilians, 1949 - Article 33](#)

⁶⁵ [IHL Treaties - Geneva Convention \(IV\) on Civilians, 1949 - Article 33](#)

house demolitions, and found that Palestinians face a highly restrictive system in which obtaining building permits is exceptionally difficult, while Israeli settlement construction is treated substantially differently. The Court concluded that the policy and practice of demolishing Palestinian property for lack of building permits amounts to differential treatment that lacks reasonable or objective justification.⁶⁶

The Court further found that this differential treatment violates Israel's obligations under international human rights law, including Article 17(1) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which protects against arbitrary or unlawful interference with privacy, family and home, as well as Articles 2(1) and 26 of the ICCPR, which establish obligations of non-discrimination. It also found Israel to be in violation of Article 2(2) of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) and Article 2 of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD).⁶⁷

E. Infringement of Fundamental Economic and Social Rights

Alongside international humanitarian law, Israel remains bound by its obligations under international human rights treaties applicable in occupied territory. The right to adequate housing is protected under Article 11 of the ICESCR. The right encompasses not merely access to physical shelter but also security of tenure, habitability, privacy, access to services, and protection against forced eviction.⁶⁸

Home demolitions also interfere with rights protected under the ICCPR, including the right to privacy, family life, and protection against arbitrary interference with one's home.⁶⁹ The destruction of residential property, schools, water infrastructure, sanitation facilities, roads, and electricity networks further impacts the enjoyment of the rights to health, education, work, food, water, and an adequate standard of living. These consequences are particularly severe for displaced communities, women, children, persons with disabilities, and older persons.

Where such measures disproportionately affect Palestinians while facilitating settlement expansion and the allocation of resources to Israeli settlers, concerns also arise regarding

⁶⁶ *Ibid* ICJ: [Legal Consequences arising from the Policies and Practices of Israel in the Occupied Palestinian Territory](#), in

⁶⁷ *Ibid*

⁶⁸ [International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights | OHCHR](#)

⁶⁹ [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights | OHCHR](#)

discrimination and unequal treatment contrary to international human rights law. As noted in the section above, the ICJ concluded in its Advisory Opinion that Israel's "regime of comprehensive restrictions imposed by Israel on Palestinians in the Occupied Palestinian Territory constitutes systemic discrimination based on, inter alia, race, religion or ethnic origin, in violation of Articles 2, paragraph 1, and 26 of the ICCPR, Article 2, paragraph 2, of the ICESCR, and Article 2 of CERD."⁷⁰

F. Gender-Specific Harm and the Protection of Women

The findings of this report demonstrate that home demolitions have distinct and disproportionate consequences for women and girls. Therefore, under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), to which Israel is bound to the extent that Israel exercises jurisdiction or effective control in the oPt, States are required to eliminate discrimination against women and address structural conditions that impair women's equal enjoyment of rights.⁷¹ The gendered consequences of home demolitions engage Israel's obligations under CEDAW, particularly its obligation under Article 2 to eliminate discrimination against women.

The CEDAW Committee has explicitly found that Israel's continuing demolitions and forced evictions in the oPt have a serious impact on Palestinian women's development and advancement and their enjoyment of human rights. It called on Israel to revoke policies permitting forced evictions and demolitions.⁷² The CEDAW Committee has specifically found that demolitions and forced evictions in the Occupied Palestinian Territory negatively affect Palestinian women's physical and psychological well-being and their development and advancement, and has noted that punitive demolitions disproportionately affect women and girls, particularly female-headed households⁷³. These practices may also affect women's rights to employment, health, economic and social life, and adequate living conditions under Articles 11, 12, 13 and 14 of CEDAW.⁷⁴

As such, the destruction of homes and essential infrastructure disproportionately increases women's caregiving burdens, restricts access to healthcare, undermines economic participation, heightens exposure to gender-based violence, and limits educational

⁷⁰ *Ibid* ICJ: Legal Consequences arising from the Policies and Practices of Israel in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, parag. 223

⁷¹ [Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women New York, 18 December 1979 | OHCHR](#)

⁷² [Women Convention – Concluding observations on Israel's fourth and fifth periodic reports](#) (excerpts)

⁷³ *Ibid*

⁷⁴ *Ibid*

opportunities for girls. These impacts are compounded by displacement and overcrowded living conditions that deprive women of privacy, safety, and autonomy.

The gendered consequences of demolition policies therefore engage not only humanitarian protections but also obligations relating to substantive equality, non-discrimination, and protection from gender-based violence.

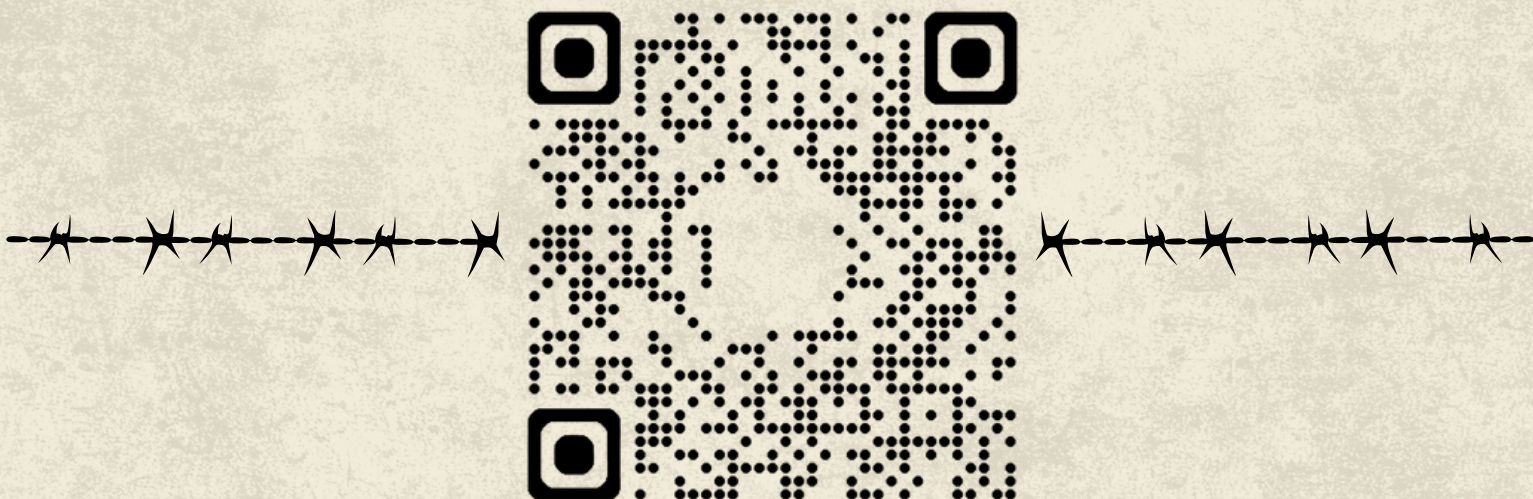
Conclusions

As this report demonstrates, home demolitions in the oPt operate as more than isolated acts of property destruction; they constitute a sustained mechanism of displacement and structural transformation that affects individuals, families, and communities across multiple dimensions. Their impacts extend from the erosion of housing security to the disruption of social structures, the deepening of economic vulnerability, and the production of long-term psychological harm, with particularly disproportionate effects on women and girls.

Within the applicable legal framework, such practices raise serious questions under international humanitarian law and international human rights law, including the prohibitions on destruction of property, forced displacement, and collective punishment, as well as obligations related to adequate housing, family life, health, and non-discrimination. When assessed in their broader context, as part of a prolonged occupation characterized by settlement expansion and territorial fragmentation, home demolitions contribute to patterns incompatible with the right to self-determination.

Despite the extensive accumulation of documentation, reports, and quantitative data on home demolitions in the occupied Palestinian territory, there remains a persistent gap in adequately capturing, analyzing, and addressing their cumulative impacts. The intersecting economic, social, psychological, and gendered consequences continue to be insufficiently systematized and are often addressed in a fragmented manner. This gap limits a comprehensive understanding of the full scope of harm and constrains the development of holistic policy and protection responses commensurate with the scale and complexity of the phenomenon.

Sept. 2026



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