



Fact Sheet about the Rights of the Bedouin in the Negev

Historical Background and Government Development

- The formerly nomadic and semi-nomadic Arab Bedouin tribes from Israel's Negev region and Egypt's Sinai Peninsula traditionally engaged in herding, agriculture and moving goods and people across the desert.
- By the 20th century, most Bedouin settled in permanent areas, established their own system of land ownership recognized by the Ottoman Empire and later by the British Mandate, and continued to engage in agriculture and animal husbandry.
- During Israel's War of Independence in 1948, the vast majority of Bedouin living in the Negev fled or were forced to areas in present-day Egypt and Jordan; only about 11,000 of approximately 65,000 Bedouin inhabitants remained in the Negev.
- The new Israeli government used martial law to force the remaining Negev Bedouin to live within an arid area known as the Siyag (Hebrew for the "Fence"), located between Beer Sheva, Arad, Dimona, and Yeruham, confiscating most Bedouin land outside of this area as state land.
- The 1965 Planning and Building Law established a hierarchy of planning bodies responsible for creating master plans at the national, district, and local levels. The master plans that arose out of this law during the latter half of the 1960s failed to acknowledge the existence of Bedouin residential areas in the Siyag. These villages thus disappeared from official maps. All land within the Siyag became zoned exclusively for industrial, military, or Jewish agricultural purposes. Without master plans for Bedouin villages, every existing and future Bedouin structures became "illegal" within the region where the government had confined them.
- Approximately half of the Negev Bedouin population was relocated into seven urban townships, which were established at the end of martial law (in 1966). These townships are Tel-Sheva, Rahat, Kseife, 'Ar'ara, Segev-Shalom, Hura, and Laqiya.
- These townships did not succeed as the Israeli government had hoped. This is not surprising since the townships make the traditional Bedouin lifestyle impossible, suffer from overcrowding, and provide few job opportunities.
- Another 90,000 Bedouin live in 45 villages in the Negev. Thirty-five of these villages have not yet been recognized or provided the most basic services by the Israeli government, and are not regulated by regional or municipal planning and zoning. Ten of these 45 villages are in the pipeline of formal recognition by the government.
- Requirements to become a recognized new Jewish community are much less stringent in practice than those to obtain recognition as a Bedouin village. Israel has established more than 100 new exclusively Jewish communities in the Beer Sheva District of the Negev, with an average population of only 300 residents. In contrast, the 45 Negev Bedouin villages and agricultural communities, each have between 400 and 4,800 residents and remain unrecognized, even though they meet the indicated criteria required of new Jewish communities.



Demographics and Socio-Economic Politics

- Due to high birth rates, Israel's Bedouin population has grown to approximately 190,000. By 2020, it is anticipated that the Bedouin population of the Negev will be 300,000.
- Unrecognized Bedouin villages in the Negev are traditionally characterized by the highest poverty rates in Israel. In 2007, 71.5% of Bedouin households were under the poverty line, compared to 54.5% and 16.2% in the non-Bedouin Arab and Jewish sectors respectively.
- In 2011 alone, more than 1,000 demolition orders were carried out against Bedouin homes in Israel.
- In February 2009, the average unemployment rate for the seven Bedouin townships was 16.2%. This compares to a 7.6% national unemployment rate over the same time period.
- Approximately one third of Israeli Bedouin citizens aged 45-59 and some 38% of those aged over 60 are unable to read and write.
- Only five unrecognized Bedouin villages have been able to establish some form of school; none of these exceed middle-school level education.
- The Israeli government provides no health care services in the unrecognized Bedouin village. Only a couple of villages that have been recognized or are in the process of recognition have access to government health clinics, and these clinics remain ill-equipped to treat serious ailments.
- Despite not being required to serve in Israeli army, several hundred Bedouin young adults enlist each year. The IDF's Desert Reconnaissance Battalion is a highly touted tracker unit composed entirely of Bedouin volunteers.

Land Disputes and the Goldberg Commission Plan, Prawer Plan, and Begin Plan

- The Negev desert as a whole is equivalent to approximately 3,212,370 acres of land. Bedouin land claims amount to less than 5% of the area of the Negev.
- While the Bedouin community asserts claims to less than 5% of the land of the Negev, they make up about 25% of the population of the region.
- The land disputes between the State and the Negev Bedouin center on the lack of written deeds of sale and ownership in the Bedouin community, where land possession and ownership has been traditionally determined by custom and oral agreements between tribes.
- In late 2007, the government created the Goldberg Commission to make recommendations regarding Bedouin property rights and their communities in the Negev. Though no members were residents of the Negev, the commission recommended that the government recognize most of the Bedouin villages, allow most of the homes to go through a legalization process, and establish a committee to hear and settle traditional land claims.



- The Goldberg Commission's recommendations, however, refrained from recognizing ownership rights of the Negev Bedouin to their land or granting objective recognition criteria for their settlements.
- In 2009, the Israeli government established the Praver Committee to outline a plan to implement the Goldberg Commission's recommendations.
- Under the Praver Plan it is estimated that some 30,000 to 40,000 people in at least 25 of the unrecognized Bedouin villages could be forcibly dispossessed and relocated.
- The Israeli government approved the Praver Plan in September 2011 and on January 3, 2012, the government proposed "The Law for Regulation of Bedouin Settlement in the Negev" (2012) ("The Praver Plan Law") which got delayed over the course of 2012 as a result of the early elections.
- Benny Begin (a Minister without a portfolio) became the lead legislator charged with responding to public grievances about the plan, and advancing procedural aspects of the plan and legislation.
- On January 23, 2013, MK Begin released his proposal for changes to the draft law based on his public consultations. The proposed amendments to the Praver Plan, many reflecting key principles from the 2008 Goldberg Commission Report, improved the tone and posture of the government towards its Bedouin citizens, even if not much substance actually changed.
- The Israeli cabinet approved Begin's proposed revision to the Praver Plan on January 27, 2013.
- The plan will cost Israeli taxpayers 6 – 8 billion shekels.
- The Regional Council of Unrecognized Villages along with planning and human rights NGOs proposed an alternative plan to recognize and provide social services and public infrastructure to the unrecognized villages, rather than relocate them. The alternative plan emphasized the Bedouin community's historic ties to the land, the high costs involved with a large scale population transfer.

Human Rights Issues

- All major binding human rights treaties that Israel has ratified insist on equality and freedom from discrimination. Many of these treaties include articles guaranteeing the right to adequate housing.
- The United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Right to Adequate Housing defines this right as: "The right of every woman, man, youth and child to gain and sustain a safe and secure home and community in which to live in peace and dignity." Additional human rights standards for indigenous people are covered by the non-binding United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.
- While "the State of Israel does not accept the classification of its Bedouin citizens as an indigenous people," the UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, James Anaya, does consider the rights of Bedouin Israelis to be relevant to the purview of his mandate.