

The Anatomy of Dispossession: A Deep Research Report on the Economic and Social Crises in East Jerusalem

Macro Context Overview: Systemic Policies of Demographic Engineering

The profound socio-economic crises currently afflicting East Jerusalem are not incidental consequences of conflict but rather the deliberate outcome of a multi-decade, state-sponsored strategy of demographic engineering and systemic dispossession ²⁶. This framework operates through a dense interplay of legal, administrative, infrastructural, and political mechanisms designed to systematically disadvantage Palestinian residents while simultaneously privileging Israeli settlers. At its core is the fundamental redefinition of Palestinian identity and rights within the city, transforming them from inherent entitlements into revocable privileges contingent upon unwavering allegiance to an occupying power. The most potent instrument of this policy is the concept of "Permanent Resident" status, which was conferred upon Palestinians following Israel's occupation and subsequent annexation of East Jerusalem in 1967 ^{9 31}. Unlike Israeli citizenship, this status is legally precarious and subject to arbitrary revocation without due process, creating a perpetual state of insecurity that permeates every aspect of life ^{31 33}. Since 1967, over 14,500 Palestinians have had their residency revoked, a practice widely condemned by international human rights bodies as a violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention and potentially constituting war crimes or crimes against humanity under the Rome Statute ^{31 33 34}.

This system of control has evolved through distinct phases, each broadening the scope of punitive measures. Initially, between 1967 and 1995, revocations were primarily tied to physical absence, such as residing abroad for more than seven years or acquiring foreign citizenship ^{33 34}. However, a pivotal shift occurred in 1995 when Israel reinterpreted its Entry into Israel Law to revoke residency from individuals who failed to prove Jerusalem was their "center of life," effectively penalizing any form of absence, including students studying abroad or families living in the West Bank ^{31 34}. This policy led to over 11,500 revocations in the

subsequent 19 years, fundamentally altering the demographic landscape ³⁴. More recently, since 2006, Israel has introduced punitive revocations based on a vague "breach of allegiance," targeting individuals accused of disloyalty, even if they have never left Jerusalem ^{33 34}. This evolution has rendered every Palestinian resident perpetually vulnerable, forcing difficult decisions about travel, employment, and family reunification, all under the shadow of potential forced displacement ^{31 35}. These actions collectively constitute what has been described as "silent deportation" or forcible transfer, a clear breach of international humanitarian law ³⁵.

The struggle over land and housing is the most visible and violent manifestation of this overarching strategy. The Israeli government has implemented a comprehensive suite of policies aimed at eroding Palestinian property rights and reshaping the urban fabric of the city to ensure a Jewish majority. The Jerusalem Master Plan itself reflects this discriminatory approach; despite proposing thousands of new residential units, it allocates significantly more capacity for Jewish neighborhoods through both expansion and densification, while offering far less for Arab communities ⁸. This is compounded by a systematic denial of planning permissions in Palestinian areas. For over a decade, the municipality has largely failed to advance general zoning plans, leaving tens of thousands of Palestinians unable to build legally and forcing them into unauthorized construction, which places their homes at constant risk of demolition ^{7 49}. Between 1967 and 2001, only 3,100 building permits were issued for Arab structures, a stark contrast to the nearly 51,000 Jewish homes built on expropriated Palestinian land during the same period ⁸. This disparity is further institutionalized through the separation barrier, which physically severs entire neighborhoods like Shu'fat refugee camp and Kufr Aqab from the municipal services and economic center of Jerusalem, trapping their residents in a state of limbo where they pay taxes but receive almost no services ^{8 27}. This creates "ghost zones" of deprivation and lawlessness, further marginalizing Palestinian communities ²⁷.

Settler-led eviction campaigns represent another critical tool in this arsenal of displacement. Organizations such as Elad in Silwan and Ateret Cohanim in Batn al-Hawa utilize the Israeli judicial system to pursue lawsuits against Palestinian families, often claiming ownership based on dubious interpretations of pre-1948 Ottoman-era land laws ^{41 42}. These efforts have displaced hundreds of families who have lived in their homes for generations, a process some scholars describe as "domicide"—the destruction of homes and the historical memories embedded within them, which are integral to Palestinian identity ³⁸. The goal is explicitly stated by figures like Aryeh King, former deputy mayor of Jerusalem, who acknowledged that

evictions are part of a municipal strategy to create "layers of Jews" throughout East Jerusalem to secure its status as a unified Jewish capital ²⁶ . These evictions are not merely acts of legal enforcement but are supported by state-backed police and judicial apparatuses, transforming courts into instruments of demographic engineering ^{39 43} . The combination of restrictive planning, punitive tax policies, and forced evictions creates a relentless pressure cooker that systematically pushes Palestinians out of the city, replacing their presence with that of Jewish settlers and solidifying Israel's demographic and legal claim over the entirety of Jerusalem.

Policy/Action	Impact on Palestinian Residents
Residency Revocation	Forced displacement, loss of right to live/work in Jerusalem, family separation, inability to access social services, loss of freedom of movement. ^{31 33 35}
Denial of Building Permits	Overcrowded housing, reliance on expensive/unauthorized construction, high risk of home demolition, inability to expand homes for growing families. ^{7 14 49}
Forced Evictions & Domicide	Homelessness, loss of ancestral property, psychological trauma, fragmentation of community, erasure of Palestinian identity and history. ^{26 38 41}
Separation Barrier	Physical isolation of communities, severing access to jobs, healthcare, and services, creation of "ghost zones" with minimal municipal investment. ^{8 16 27}
Arnona Tax Burden	Widespread debt, fines, property seizures, and auctions; revenue extracted from Palestinians is reinvested in settler infrastructure, financing displacement. ^{2 53}

Historical & Political Background Relevant to Daily Life

The daily struggles of Palestinians in East Jerusalem are deeply rooted in a complex history of occupation, political maneuvering, and shifting legal frameworks that have consistently subordinated their rights to a broader geopolitical agenda. The foundational event was Israel's military occupation of East Jerusalem during the Six-Day War in 1967, followed by its unilateral annexation of the territory, a move that has been consistently rejected by the international community as illegal under international law ^{7 34} . This act of annexation was not merely a territorial claim but a strategic step in a long-term demographic project aimed at ensuring Jerusalem remains a united city under Israeli sovereignty ³³ . The immediate consequence was the imposition of Israeli civil law and the introduction of the "Permanent Resident" status for Palestinians, fundamentally altering their legal standing and tying their future to the whims of Israeli domestic politics ^{9 31} . This status became the primary mechanism for controlling the Palestinian population, a reality underscored by the fact that since 1995, over 11,500 Palestinians have had their

residency revoked under the "center of life" policy, which treats any absence from Jerusalem as a justification for expulsion ^{31 34}.

The Oslo Accords of the early 1990s introduced a new layer of complexity, formalizing a permit regime that required Palestinians to obtain military-issued authorization for virtually any movement between the West Bank, Gaza, and East Jerusalem ¹⁶. While initially intended to facilitate a transition toward Palestinian self-governance, this system quickly became a tool of control, particularly after the outbreak of the Second Intifada in 2000 ¹³. During this period, Israel intensified its closure policies, establishing a permanent network of checkpoints, roadblocks, and gates that fragmented the occupied territories into isolated enclaves and severed the economic and social ties that once bound Palestinian communities together ^{11 15}. This fragmentation had a devastating impact on East Jerusalem's economy, which had previously served as a vital commercial and administrative hub for the West Bank ⁹. The construction of the Separation Wall, begun in 2002, further entrenched this division, with 85% of its route running inside the West Bank, isolating entire villages and cutting off farmers from their lands ^{14 16}. The wall effectively transformed East Jerusalem from a connected urban center into a fortified island, accessible only through a labyrinth of controlled passages that Palestinians must navigate daily ¹³.

Throughout this period, Israeli policies have consistently prioritized the interests of Jewish settlers over those of the indigenous Palestinian population. This is evident in the allocation of public funds, where Palestinian Jerusalemites, who constitute approximately one-third of the city's population, receive a disproportionately small share of municipal investment ^{8 10}. In 2019, for instance, 75% of East Jerusalem residents lived below the Israeli poverty line, compared to just 29% of Jews, a gap directly linked to systemic underfunding of services and infrastructure in Palestinian neighborhoods ²⁷. The 2018 five-year plan for East Jerusalem, while officially framed as an effort to reduce inequality, was widely seen by critics as a strategy to assert Israeli sovereignty by compelling Palestinian schools to adopt the Israeli curriculum and by cataloging all lands in the registry to facilitate future expropriation ²⁷. This plan allocated NIS 445 million to education, with half conditioned on schools adopting the Israeli curriculum, raising significant concerns about the erosion of Palestinian cultural and national identity ^{23 27}. The ultimate goal of many of these policies is to alter the city's demographic composition, with Israeli officials publicly discussing targets of a 60% Jewish and 40% "Arab" population ³³. Projections suggest that the current demographic trajectory could see

Jerusalem become a majority-non-Jewish city by 2045, making such policies increasingly urgent for proponents of a purely Jewish Jerusalem ²⁷.

International recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital on December 6, 2017, and the subsequent relocation of the U.S. embassy in May 2018, significantly emboldened these annexationist policies ²⁷. This move was perceived globally as a green light for Israeli settlement expansion and other actions that undermine the prospects for a two-state solution. It fueled a wave of new construction projects and reinforced the narrative that East Jerusalem is an inseparable part of Israel, thereby legitimizing discriminatory practices on the ground ²⁷. The cumulative effect of these historical and political developments is a society characterized by profound inequality and precarity. Palestinians in East Jerusalem live under a dual legal system, subject to military law enforced by Israeli authorities while being denied basic civil rights enjoyed by their Israeli counterparts ¹⁴. Their lives are dictated by a permit regime that governs their movement, their ability to build on their own land, and their access to essential services ¹³. This legacy of occupation and political manipulation has created a reality where daily existence is defined by uncertainty, exclusion, and the constant threat of dispossession.

Economic Indicators in East Jerusalem (Last 10–15 Years)

Over the past decade and a half, the economic landscape of East Jerusalem has been characterized by chronic stagnation, increasing precarity, and a deepening chasm between Palestinian and Israeli communities. The region's economy has steadily diminished relative to the rest of the Occupied Palestinian Territory, with its contribution to the overall GDP falling from an estimated 14-15% before the second intifada to below 7% by 2010 ⁹. This decline is a direct result of Israeli policies that have systematically disconnected East Jerusalem from the broader Palestinian economy, including annexation, settlement expansion, and the construction of the separation barrier ⁹. The labor market is a microcosm of this structural weakness. While East Jerusalem's labor force participation rate is lower than in the West Bank due to its proximity to the Israeli job market, the nature of this employment reveals a deep-seated inequality ⁹ ²⁹. Palestinian workers are overwhelmingly concentrated in low-wage, manual labor sectors such as construction, cleaning, and hospitality in West Jerusalem and Israeli settlements ³⁰.

They face systemic discrimination, receiving longer workdays without overtime compensation and earning less than half the average Israeli wage for similar work ⁹. In 2009, the average monthly wage for employed East Jerusalem Palestinians working in Israel was NIS 4,032, less than half the Israeli average of NIS 8,131 ⁹. This economic dependency on the volatile Israeli sector makes households acutely vulnerable to sudden closures or escalations, as witnessed during the Second Intifada and the 2023-2024 regional conflicts ⁴ ²⁹.

Unemployment and poverty rates paint a grim picture of widespread hardship. By 2010, over 79% of East Jerusalem families were living below the poverty line, a figure that has remained alarmingly high ³⁰. In 2019, 72% of Palestinian families in East Jerusalem lived below the poverty line, compared to just 26% of Jewish families ⁴⁸. The poverty rate among children is even more staggering, with 84% of Palestinian children in East Jerusalem living in poverty in 2010 ⁹. This economic precarity is exacerbated by a severe lack of local economic opportunities. Despite a five-year plan launched in 2018 allocating nearly 2 billion shekels to improve the business environment, Palestinian entrepreneurs report seeing little benefit due to physical inaccessibility, language barriers, and a lack of IT schools ¹⁰ ²⁷. New enterprise establishment in J1 areas (East Jerusalem) has been dwarfed by that in J2 areas (West Bank), highlighting the adverse impact of annexation without integration on entrepreneurship ⁹. The informal economy constitutes a massive portion of employment, accounting for 62.1% of total employment in the OPT in 2020, with workers lacking social security benefits, paid leave, and formal contracts ²⁸. This lack of formalization traps workers in a cycle of vulnerability, with many reporting wages below the minimum wage and facing financial challenges due to limited access to credit ²⁸.

The cost of living in East Jerusalem is persistently inflated, driven by a combination of Israeli-controlled import tariffs, fuel pricing policies, and a discriminatory municipal property tax known as Arnona ¹ ⁴ ⁵³. Inflation in East Jerusalem has consistently outpaced that of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, reaching 2.6% year-on-year in Q3 2021 and surging to 4.6% in Q4 2023 ¹ ⁴. This price pressure affects everything from basic commodities to fuel. Gasoline prices in Palestine are nearly three times the global average, a direct result of Israeli tax policies and exchange rate mechanisms, as all fuel derivatives are imported from Israel ¹ ⁴. Similarly, local prices for sugar, rice, and flour are priced at multiples of their global values due to import taxes and high production costs ⁴. The Arnona tax, levied on properties regardless of income, places an unsustainable burden on low-income

families and small businesses ⁵³ . An estimated 70-80% of Palestinian taxpayers owe unpaid Arnona, leading to a cascade of negative consequences including fines, property seizures, and legal cases ⁵³ . This tax serves as a powerful tool of economic pressure, with the revenue collected from Palestinians often reinvested in settler infrastructure, effectively using Palestinian wealth to finance their own displacement ⁵³ . The combined effect of these pressures has led to a persistent cost-of-living crisis, pushing many families to the brink of subsistence ² .

Major regional escalations and global shocks have repeatedly thrown the fragile economy into crisis. The COVID-19 pandemic dealt a catastrophic blow, causing the collapse of tourism, which is a cornerstone of the local economy, particularly in the Old City ¹ ⁹ . Business closures surged, with over 280 shops closing in East Jerusalem in the preceding 15 years alone ⁹ . The subsequent regional escalation in late 2023 had an even more severe impact. The prevention of approximately 175,000 Palestinian workers from accessing jobs in Israel caused the national unemployment rate to spike to 46%, with the economy contracting by 28.6% annually ⁴ . This period also saw a dramatic surge in inflation, driven by the blockade on Gaza, depreciation of the Shekel, and disruptions to supply chains ⁴ . Prices for transportation, food, and housing skyrocketed, creating a stagflationary environment where incomes fell while prices rose ⁴ . Even in periods of relative calm, the economy remains structurally weak. The average price of owner-occupied dwellings in Israel increased by 12.75% year-on-year in Q1 2024, but this growth masks the extreme unaffordability for the average East Jerusalemite, whose purchasing power is decimated by low wages and high costs ³ . The long-term outlook remains bleak, with the economy trapped in a cycle of dependence, inflation, and underinvestment, leaving its Palestinian residents in a state of chronic economic distress.

Economic Indicator	Status/Trend in East Jerusalem
Poverty Rate	>70% of families lived below the Israeli poverty line in 2010; 72% in 2019. 84% of Palestinian children in poverty in 2010. 9 30 48
Unemployment Rate	High and volatile. Surged to 46% in Q4 2023 due to closures. Pre-crisis rates were already elevated. 4 9
Inflation Rate	Consistently higher than the West Bank and Gaza. 4.6% in Q4 2023. 1 4
Average Wage	Average monthly wage for Palestinians working in Israel was NIS 4,032 in 2009 (less than half the Israeli average). 9
Business Closures	Over 280 shops closed in East Jerusalem in 15 years prior to 2009. Tourism collapse post-2020 severely impacted commerce. 1 9
Cost of Living	Fuel prices ~3x global average. Basic goods (sugar, flour) priced at multiple of global values. 1 4
Informal Economy	Constitutes 62.1% of total employment in the OPT as of 2020. Widespread lack of formal contracts and social benefits. 28

Social Indicators: Education, Healthcare, and Housing

The socio-economic crisis in East Jerusalem is most palpable in its public services, where systemic underinvestment and discriminatory policies have created vast disparities in the quality of life for Palestinian and Jewish residents. The education system, in particular, is a stark example of this inequality. Palestinian students in East Jerusalem face a litany of challenges, including chronic overcrowding, a severe shortage of classrooms, and inadequate funding [9](#) [23](#). By 2020, there was a shortfall of over 3,700 classrooms, forcing many schools to operate in sub-standard conditions [23](#). The dropout rate is exceptionally high, with 40% of students failing to complete high school, a figure that stands in sharp contrast to the 7.4% dropout rate in West Jerusalem [9](#) [23](#). This educational deficit is directly linked to resource allocation; per-student funding in East Jerusalem schools is a fraction of that in West Jerusalem schools, and the number of available classrooms has dwindled [9](#). The Israeli government's 2018 five-year plan for East Jerusalem, which allocated 445 million shekels to education, has been criticized for conditioning funding on schools adopting the Israeli curriculum, a move seen by many as an attempt to impose a national narrative and control Palestinian identity [23](#) [27](#). This "dual-curriculum dilemma" forces students and families into a difficult choice between preserving their cultural heritage and securing an education recognized by Israeli institutions, further complicating their futures [23](#).

Access to healthcare is equally compromised by a combination of physical barriers, bureaucratic hurdles, and systemic neglect. Movement restrictions imposed by Israeli authorities are a primary impediment, preventing patients from the West Bank and Gaza Strip from accessing specialized care in East Jerusalem hospitals ²¹ ²³ . Patients with Palestinian license plates are often barred from passing checkpoints, forcing them to walk for hours, a journey that is particularly arduous for the sick, elderly, and disabled ²³ . Between October 2023 and May 2024, 44% of medical permit applications from East Jerusalem residents were either denied or pending, a dramatic increase from previous periods ²³ . Within East Jerusalem itself, residents face significant health disparities. They experience higher rates of chronic diseases like diabetes and cardiovascular disease, linked to socioeconomic stressors and limited access to preventive care ²⁵ . Mental health services are virtually non-existent, yet the need is immense, stemming from constant exposure to violence, trauma, and the anxiety of living under occupation ⁹ ²³ . The Palestinian Authority's withholding of clearance revenues, a tactic used by Israel to exert political pressure, has further crippled the health system by delaying salaries for health workers and depleting stocks of essential medicines, reducing hospital capacity to around 70% ²³ . Infrastructure is another critical area of concern. Approximately 40% of households in East Jerusalem are not legally connected to a water network, and sewage systems are similarly inadequate, contributing to poor sanitation and public health risks ⁴⁹ .

Housing represents the central battleground of the crisis, where economic pressures, legal manipulation, and physical force converge to threaten the very existence of Palestinian families. The most pressing issue is a severe housing shortage, exacerbated by decades of restrictive planning policies that deny Palestinians the right to build legally ⁷ . As a result, an estimated 20,000 unplanned housing units exist in East Jerusalem, placing over 100,000 residents at constant risk of demolition ²⁶ ⁴⁹ . In 2020, 170 Palestinian homes were demolished in East Jerusalem, the second-highest number recorded since UN records began in 2009 ²⁶ . This is not merely an act of enforcement but a weaponized tool of displacement. Settler organizations use the Israeli court system to file eviction lawsuits against families who have lived in their homes for generations, displacing them to make way for Jewish settlers ⁴¹ ⁴² ⁴⁵ . These evictions, often referred to as "domicide," destroy not only homes but also the cultural and historical identity tied to them ³⁸ . The municipal property tax, Arnona, adds another layer of economic coercion. With rates not tied to income, it disproportionately burdens low-income families, and an estimated 70-80% of Palestinian residents are in arrears ⁵³ . Unpaid taxes can lead

to property seizures and auctions, which often result in the sale of homes to Jewish buyers, thus financing the displacement of the original owners ⁵³ . The cumulative effect of these pressures is a pervasive sense of insecurity and hopelessness, trapping Palestinian families in a cycle of fear and precarity.

Social Service	Key Challenges for Palestinian Residents in East Jerusalem
Education	Severe classroom shortage (>3,700 missing); extremely high school dropout rate (40%); inadequate funding vs. West Jerusalem; curricular control debates. ^{9 23 27}
Healthcare	Barriers to medical treatment due to movement restrictions and permit denials; high rates of chronic illness; near-total absence of mental health services; infrastructure deficits (water/sewage). ^{9 21 23 49}
Housing	Extreme housing shortage; high risk of home demolition (over 100,000 people at risk); widespread forced evictions by settler organizations; crippling burden of unpaid Arnona tax. ^{26 38 49 53}
Infrastructure	Poor road maintenance, garbage collection, and public transport; inadequate water and sewage connections for a large portion of the population. ^{6 47 49}
Poverty	Over 70% of families live below the poverty line; 84% of children are poor, limiting access to adequate nutrition, education, and healthcare. ^{9 30 48}

Key Crisis Drivers: Mobility Restrictions, Inflation, and Financial Exclusion

The daily life of Palestinians in East Jerusalem is governed by a pervasive and oppressive system of movement restrictions that function as a primary driver of the city's multifaceted crisis. This is not a sporadic feature of conflict but a permanent, institutionalized regime of control that fragments society, cripples the economy, and inflicts profound psychological harm ^{13 15} . The system is incredibly complex, comprising a dense network of fixed and temporary checkpoints, earth mounds, roadblocks, and gates that regulate every aspect of Palestinian mobility ¹² . As of March 2024, there were 793 such obstacles in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, a 23% increase over the preceding nine months ¹² . This extensive infrastructure effectively divides the territory into isolated enclaves, making simple tasks like traveling to work, visiting a doctor, or attending a family member's funeral fraught with difficulty, unpredictability, and danger ¹¹ . The human cost of this system is severe and documented. There are numerous accounts of women dying in childbirth at checkpoints, and ill or wounded Palestinians dying because they were delayed en route to hospitals ¹¹ . Since October 2023, health-related

access incidents involving ambulances and mobile clinics have more than doubled, underscoring the life-threatening nature of these restrictions ¹².

The economic consequences of this mobility regime are devastating. It disrupts supply chains, increases transportation costs for businesses, and makes it impossible for farmers to access their agricultural lands, especially those located in the "seam zone" cut off by the separation barrier ⁴ ¹⁶. This fragmentation prevents the development of a cohesive regional economy, pushing Palestinian businesses into isolated local markets and reducing profitability ¹¹. The tourism sector, once a vital source of income for the city, has been repeatedly decimated by closures and the associated climate of fear ⁹. The most acute economic shock occurred during the 2023-2024 regional escalation, when the prevention of 175,000 Palestinian workers from entering Israel led to a catastrophic surge in unemployment to 46% and a 28.6% annual contraction of the Palestinian economy ⁴. Beyond the direct impact on labor, the permit system itself is arbitrary and non-transparent, with applications often denied without explanation and no meaningful appeal process, creating a system of perpetual uncertainty that undermines economic stability ¹³. The psychological toll is immense, fostering a climate of anxiety, humiliation, and alienation, which is reflected in survey data showing a significant increase in reported threats from Israeli police and settlers since 2010 ⁵¹.

Compounding the crisis of mobility is a relentless assault on household finances through inflation and financial exclusion. Inflation in East Jerusalem is chronically high, driven by Israeli policies that control key components of the cost of living ¹. Local gasoline prices are nearly three times the global average, a direct result of Israeli tax structures and currency conversion rates ¹ ⁴. Similarly, basic imported commodities like sugar and flour are priced at several times their world cost due to Israeli import tariffs and logistical costs ⁴. This creates a chronic cost-of-living crisis that pushes a majority of families below the poverty line ². The burden is made worse by discriminatory tax policies. The Arnona municipal property tax, for instance, is levied based on property size, not income, placing an unbearable strain on low-income households and small businesses ⁵³. This tax, coupled with other fees and penalties, is a critical tool for economic pressure, with an estimated 70-80% of Palestinian taxpayers owing back payments, leading to fines, property seizures, and auctions that often benefit Jewish buyers ⁵³. The revenue generated from these taxes is frequently reinvested in settler infrastructure, creating a perverse system where Palestinians effectively subsidize their own displacement ⁵³.

Finally, Palestinians in East Jerusalem face systemic financial exclusion, which limits their economic agency and reinforces their dependency. No Palestinian-owned banks operate in J1 areas, and Israeli banks do not adequately serve Palestinian needs ⁹. Palestinian banks, in turn, refuse to accept real estate guarantees from East Jerusalem residents, effectively cutting them out of the housing finance market and forcing them to rely on informal lending networks ⁹. This lack of access to formal financial services contributes to a high level of informality in the economy, with 62.1% of employment being informal in 2020 ²⁸. This informality leaves workers vulnerable, with few protections and little access to social security. Financial inclusion in Palestine is significantly lower than in Israel, exacerbating economic precarity ²⁸. Together, these drivers—mobility restrictions, inflation, and financial exclusion—create a suffocating environment that strangles economic opportunity, inflates the cost of survival, and systematically dispossesses Palestinians of their resources and their right to a dignified livelihood.

Neighborhood-Level Focus: Silwan, Sheikh Jarrah, Shu'fat Camp, and the Old City

The abstract economic and social indicators of crisis find their most visceral expression in the lived realities of specific neighborhoods across East Jerusalem, each with its own unique set of challenges rooted in the city's broader policies of control and dispossession. Silwan, located just outside the walls of the Old City, is a focal point of the struggle over housing and land. The neighborhood, home to approximately 33,000 Palestinians, has been subjected to intense settlement activity since the 1980s, with dozens of Israeli settlers relocated into heavily protected compounds ⁴⁵. This has led to repeated human rights violations, including forced evictions and displacement of Palestinian residents ⁴⁵. The primary driver of displacement is the campaign by the settler organization Ateret Cohanim, which uses the Israeli court system to pursue eviction lawsuits against Palestinian families in the Batn al-Hawa area, aiming to reclaim properties originally built in the 1880s ⁴². These legal actions place around 100 families at risk of forcible eviction, threatening to erase a historic Palestinian neighborhood to make way for a Jewish settlement enclave ⁴³ ⁴⁵. Compounding the legal pressure is the crippling burden of unpaid Arnona taxes, which can reach up to \$8,500 per 100 square meters of commercial space, pushing many small businesses to close ⁵³. The daily life of Silwan residents is marked by the constant threat of eviction, settler harassment,

and the erosion of their community fabric⁴³. Sheikh Jarrah, a historic Palestinian neighborhood, has become a powerful symbol of the struggle over land, identity, and sovereignty⁴³. Since the 1950s, dozens of Palestinian families, many of whom were displaced during the 1948 Nakba, have lived there under Jordanian and UNRWA arrangements⁴³. However, their presence has been challenged by Israeli settler organizations, such as the Sephardi Council, which have pursued legal claims to their homes based on pre-1948 Jewish ownership^{39 43}. These legal battles, supported by discriminatory laws that allow Jews to reclaim properties lost in 1948 while denying Palestinians the same right, culminated in forced evictions beginning in 2009^{39 43}. Today, more than 70 Palestinian families face the threat of displacement⁴³. The situation escalated dramatically in 2021, when Israeli forces maintained strict checkpoints at all entrances to the neighborhood, restricting Palestinian movement while allowing unrestricted access to settlers and journalists, intensifying the atmosphere of siege and resistance⁴⁴. The Jerusalem Municipality's unveiling of plans to build a new settlement enclave in central Sheikh Jarrah, requiring the demolition of nearly 40 residential buildings, marks a new phase in this displacement campaign, explicitly aiming to erase an entire Palestinian neighborhood⁴³. The story of Sheikh Jarrah encapsulates the intersection of settler-colonialism, legal manipulation, and state-sanctioned violence in the pursuit of demographic engineering.

Shu'fat Refugee Camp, home to tens of thousands of refugees, exemplifies the crisis of mobility, infrastructure, and youth marginalization. Located east of the separation barrier, the camp is physically isolated from the main body of East Jerusalem, with Israeli authorities having ceased operations there after the wall was erected²⁷. Residents pay municipal taxes but receive almost no services, creating a de facto exclusion from the city's municipal functions^{8 27}. This isolation is compounded by a severe lack of infrastructure and services. The camp suffers from extreme overcrowding, limited access to clean water and proper sewage systems, and a scarcity of recreational spaces^{27 49}. The youth of Shu'fat face a bleak future, trapped in an environment of neglect with few prospects for education or employment. High rates of unemployment and overcrowding contribute to a sense of hopelessness and frustration, making the camp a breeding ground for social problems and a flashpoint for political unrest²⁷. The daily commute for residents to access services, education, or work in West Jerusalem is a grueling ordeal, navigating a series of checkpoints and gates that can take hours, further entrenching their marginalization and reinforcing their status as outsiders in their own city¹².

The Old City of Jerusalem serves as the economic heart of East Jerusalem, but its vitality has been severely undermined by the convergence of tourism collapse, mobility restrictions, and discriminatory taxation. The Old City housed 40,600 people by 2010, with around 2,400 commercial establishments, half of which were in tourist-related sectors ⁹. However, the sector has suffered immensely. During the Second Intifada, guest numbers dropped by 86%, and over 280 shops closed in East Jerusalem in the 15 years leading up to 2009 ⁹. The COVID-19 pandemic delivered a final blow, collapsing tourism and causing widespread business closures ¹. Shopkeepers now face a triple threat: reduced customer flow due to mobility restrictions and closures, the crippling weight of unpaid Arnona taxes that can amount to thousands of shekels per store, and a steep rise in the cost of living for basic necessities ² ⁵³. The once-vibrant markets are now a shadow of their former selves, filled with empty storefronts and struggling vendors. The Old City is a microcosm of the broader economic strangulation affecting East Jerusalem, where a vital sector of the economy has been systematically dismantled by a combination of political instability, punitive fiscal policies, and the physical fragmentation of the city.

Human-Centered Narratives: Composite Stories of Resilience and Struggle

To comprehend the profound impact of these systemic pressures, it is essential to construct composite narratives that embody the experiences of individuals and families navigating this challenging environment. These stories, while fictional, are grounded in the patterns and testimonies detailed in the research, offering a human lens through which to understand the abstract statistics and policies. They highlight the interconnectedness of economic hardship, social fragmentation, and the constant threat to personal security.

A Shop Owner in the Old City: Fatima, a 58-year-old woman, has run her family's small souvenirs shop in the Christian Quarter of the Old City for over three decades. Her father established it after fleeing his village in 1948, and it has been a pillar of her family's livelihood ever since. Her story is one of resilience tested by successive shocks. When the Second Intifada erupted in 2000, she watched her customer base vanish overnight as tourism collapsed ⁹. After a slow recovery, the arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 felt like a death knell. Tourists disappeared, and the few remaining visitors were hesitant to spend money ¹. The financial strain was immense, but she managed to

keep the doors open by dipping into savings and taking on debt. Then came the regional escalation in late 2023. The checkpoints surrounding the Old City became impenetrable, and the last trickle of visitors dried up completely. Her rent became an impossible burden. To make matters worse, she received a notice from the municipality demanding payment of over 100,000 NIS in accumulated Arnona taxes, a sum she cannot possibly afford ². Each day is a battle. She watches as neighboring shops shutter their windows permanently. The call to prayer echoes over the silent alleyways, a sound that now feels like a dirge for a way of life that is slowly disappearing. She fears not just for her business, but for the possibility that her family's home above the shop, which also carries the Arnona tag, will be next on the list for seizure and auction ⁵³.

A Student from Silwan: Layla, a 17-year-old high school senior, dreams of becoming a doctor. Her ambition is a rare spark of hope in the shadow of her family's precarious situation in the Batn al-Hawa neighborhood of Silwan. Her daily routine begins at 5 AM, when she must cross several checkpoints to get to school in West Jerusalem. The wait can be hours, and she has missed exams before simply because the gates were closed due to a security alert ¹⁹. The commute is stressful and exhausting, leaving her little time or energy for studying. School itself is a challenge. Her class of 60 students is crammed into a single room meant for 30, and the textbooks are worn and outdated ²³. Her greatest fear, however, is the threat hanging over her family's home. Her uncle is one of the families facing eviction by the settler organization Ateret Cohanim, and the weekly protests outside the courthouse feel increasingly desperate ^{42 45}. Every night, she lies awake listening for news of another eviction order. The thought of losing her home, her grandmother's home, is a nightmare that haunts her. It would mean not only homelessness but also the end of her education, as her family would be forced to scatter. She wonders how she can focus on her studies when her future is so uncertain. Her dream of healing others feels distant, overshadowed by the daily reality of fighting to keep her family's home intact.

A Mother Balancing Work and Childcare in Shu'fat Camp: Amira, a 35-year-old single mother, works two jobs to support her two young children. She cleans offices in West Jerusalem, a grueling 12-hour day that requires her to be on buses and at checkpoints for most of the day. The commute is long and unpredictable, and the work is physically demanding for low pay ^{29 47}. The second job is sewing at home, piecework that pays even less. Her days are a blur of exhaustion, trying to balance her long absences with the demands of caring for her children, who attend overcrowded schools in the camp ⁴⁹. The cost of living is a constant battle. Prices for everything—from milk to bread—are soaring, and she often has to choose between buying food and paying the electricity bill ^{1 2}. The psychological toll is immense. She worries constantly about her children's safety, knowing they play in an area plagued by crime and neglect ²⁷. She

dreads the moment they ask for something and she has to say no. Last month, her daughter fell ill and needed to go to the hospital. Getting an emergency permit took two days, and by the time they arrived, the clinic was understaffed and the medication was unavailable ¹². The incident shattered her feeling of control. She sees her children's faces and wonders what kind of future awaits them in a place that seems to offer so little. The constant stress has taken a physical toll; she suffers from chronic headaches and insomnia, but there is no time or money for herself.

A Taxi Driver Dealing with Checkpoints and Urban Fragmentation: Samer, a 45-year-old taxi driver, remembers a time when he could drive anywhere in Jerusalem freely. Now, his job is a daily exercise in frustration and unpredictability. He navigates a city that has been carved up by a maze of checkpoints, roadblocks, and gates, turning a ten-minute trip into a two-hour ordeal ¹³. His customers are predominantly Palestinian residents of East Jerusalem who need to get to work in West Jerusalem or the settlements, but they are always fearful. "When you see the checkpoint lights flashing red, my heart sinks," he says. "I don't know if I'm going to be stopped for minutes or hours." He has lost countless fares this way. The checkpoints are not just traffic bottlenecks; they are sites of tension and sometimes violence. He has seen passengers harassed, and he himself has been stopped and questioned for hours after a car-ramming attack, simply because he is Palestinian ⁴⁷. The urban landscape itself feels hostile. He drives past gleaming new developments in Jewish neighborhoods that seem miles away from the neglected streets of his own community ³. His income has plummeted. He barely makes enough to cover his expenses, let alone save for his children's education. The fragmentation of the city is not just physical; it is social and psychological, and his cab is a moving testament to the division that defines his city.

A Youth in Shu'fat Camp Dealing with Unemployment and Overcrowding: Tarek, a 22-year-old university graduate, sits in the small, crowded apartment he shares with his parents and three siblings. He has a degree in computer science, but finding a job in East Jerusalem is nearly impossible. Most of the high-tech companies are in West Jerusalem, and he lacks the Hebrew proficiency and professional network to break in ³⁰. Some friends have found work in menial jobs, but Tarek refuses to settle for that. He spends his days scrolling through online job boards, sending out dozens of applications that go unanswered. The lack of opportunities is crushing. He feels trapped in a place with no future. The camp is stifling, and the constant noise and overcrowding add to the tension. He has tried to start his own small tech business, but without access to capital or reliable internet, it has gone nowhere. He feels invisible, a bright mind with no outlet. His friends are drifting apart, some getting married early out of desperation, others turning to drugs. Tarek knows he is lucky to have his education, but it feels like a useless luxury. The psychological pressure

is immense. He feels like a failure, unable to provide for himself or his family. He looks out the window at the concrete towers of the camp and wonders if this is all there is, or if he should give up and try to emigrate, risking the chance of being denied entry back into his own city³¹.

Data Sources & Visual Blueprint for Documentary Content

This report is based on a comprehensive analysis of information from a wide range of credible sources, including United Nations agencies, international human rights organizations, academic research centers, and local advocacy groups. The following table lists the primary sources used to gather the data presented in this document. This transparency ensures the verifiability and credibility of the findings.

Source Category	Organization/Entity	Role in Providing Information
United Nations Agencies	UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA)	Provided data on movement obstacles, agricultural impacts, and access incidents related to the separation barrier. 12 14
	World Health Organization (WHO)	Provided data on medical permit applications and health-related access incidents. 12 23
	United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA)	Provided data on refugee camps, healthcare provision, and economic conditions. 18 39 46
International Human Rights & Civil Society Organizations	Amnesty International	Provided analysis on forced evictions in Silwan and their characterization as criminal practices. 45
	B'Tselem	Provided data on the density and nature of checkpoints in the West Bank. 11
	Association for Civil Rights in Israel (ACRI)	Provided data on municipal budget allocations and the experiences of Palestinian women. 10 47
	Ir Amim	Provided reports on the state of education in East Jerusalem and municipal funding disparities. 19 25
	Visualizing Palestine	Collaborated with Palestinian organizations to produce educational visuals on apartheid practices. 34
Palestinian Government & Statistical Bodies	Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS)	Provided official data on poverty rates, unemployment, inflation, and education statistics. 21 36 48
	Palestine Monetary Authority (PMA)	Provided official forecasts and data on inflation and stock market performance. 1 4
Academic & Research Institutions	Jerusalem Institute for Policy Research (JIIS)	Provided data on high-tech investment in Jerusalem. 10
	The Lancet	Published academic studies on health inequalities and non-communicable diseases. 25
Media Outlets & Specialized Websites	Haaretz	Reported on Arabic signage issues on public transport. 47
	Times of Israel	Reported on the dropping of Arabic announcements on buses. 50
Israeli Government & Municipal Sources	Israel Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS)	Provided official data on population demographics, labor force participation, and house prices. 3 9 10
	Jerusalem Municipality	Provided data on demolition cases and responses to Freedom of Information requests. 7
	State Comptroller and Ombudsman of Israel	Published a report criticizing the provision of social services to the Arab population. 25

This section provides a blueprint for translating the research findings into a compelling and impactful documentary video. The suggested scenes, moments, and

visual elements are designed to be descriptive and dynamic, capturing the essence of the crisis through powerful imagery and sensory detail.

Potential Visual Scenes & Moments for Video Use

1. Opening Sequence - A City Divided: Begin with a sweeping aerial shot of Jerusalem, juxtaposing the modern, well-maintained architecture and parks of West Jerusalem with the densely packed, older neighborhoods of East Jerusalem. The camera then zooms in on the separation barrier, visually slicing the city in two. This immediately establishes the theme of fragmentation and inequality.

2. Mobility Restriction Montage:
Checkpoint Queue: A long line of cars backed up at a crowded checkpoint. The scene is filled with the ambient sounds of impatient horns, radios playing, and the occasional shout of an officer. A clock ticks slowly in the corner to emphasize the delay.
Walking to School: A teenage girl, Layla, walks with her books slung over her shoulder, her face weary. The camera follows her from behind as she navigates poorly lit, unpaved roads to reach a bus stop that is far from her home ⁴⁷. The distance she must travel highlights the inadequacy of public transport.
Ambulance Delays: A tense sequence showing an ambulance stuck in a traffic jam caused by a roadblock. Inside, a patient is shown in pain, their face blurred for privacy. The camera cuts to the clock ticking, emphasizing the life-and-death stakes of these delays ^{11 12}.

3. The Economic Landscape:
Empty Old City Shops: A quiet, sunlit shot of the Christian Quarter in the Old City. Many shop windows are boarded up, displaying signs for "FOR LEASE" or "CLOSED." The only sounds are the distant calls of pigeons and the echo of footsteps.
Tax Notice: A close-up of a crumpled piece of paper—a tax demand letter from the municipality for over 100,000 NIS. The camera pulls back to reveal Fatima, the shop owner, staring blankly at it, her hands trembling slightly ².
Price Disparity: A split-screen comparison. On one side, a bag of sugar in a supermarket in East Jerusalem. On the other, the same product on a shelf in a supermarket in Tel Aviv, with a price tag that is a fraction of the cost. A voiceover explains the discrepancy ⁴.

4. Housing and Community Struggle:
Courtroom Drama: A somber, static shot from the gallery of a courtroom. We see a Palestinian family, their faces etched with worry, as a judge reads an eviction order. The camera lingers on their expressions of shock and despair ^{39 44}.
Protest Scene: A wide shot of a protest in Sheikh Jarrah or Silwan. Palestinian residents, including women and children, hold banners and

chant. The camera then focuses on a few Jewish Israeli activists joining them, creating a diverse and determined image of solidarity ⁴¹ ⁴⁶. ***Home Demolition:** A powerful and heartbreaking shot of the aftermath of a home demolition. Only the rubble remains, with a few personal belongings still recognizable amidst the debris. A child's toy is visible in the foreground.

5. Daily Life in Shu'fat Camp: **Crowded Apartment:** A claustrophobic shot from inside a small, crowded apartment. Family members are cooking, doing homework, and sleeping on the floor, illustrating the extreme density and lack of space ²⁷. **Commute to Work:** A shaky, handheld shot from inside a crowded bus, filmed from the perspective of a worker, Samer. The camera captures the tired faces of passengers, the motion of the bus, and the occasional sight of a checkpoint through the window ⁴⁷. ***Youth in Limbo:** A medium shot of Tarek, the unemployed youth, sitting on the floor of his apartment, surrounded by university textbooks. He stares blankly at a laptop screen with a "No Internet Connection" message. The silence is heavy.

Ambient Sounds & Quotes Snippets
Soundscape: The dominant sounds should be the ambient noise of the city—market chatter, church bells, the call to prayer, the hum of traffic—but punctuated by the harsh, mechanical sounds of metal detectors, the shouts of soldiers at checkpoints, and the ominous rumble of bulldozers preparing for a demolition.
Quotes (for voiceover or subtitles): "Jerusalem is our home, but we are treated like guests, and sometimes even less." — Composite quote reflecting the sentiment of many residents. "My biggest fear is not losing my shop. My biggest fear is losing my home." — Fatima, the shop owner. ******"Every day is a test of patience and nerves." — Samer, the taxi driver. "We are told our city is holy, but our lives here are anything but sacred." ***** — Composite quote from a mother in Shu'fat Camp. "They want us to leave, and they are using every tool in their book to make it happen." ***** — Composite quote from a resident facing eviction.

By weaving together these data-driven insights with a narrative structure built on human-centered stories and a powerful visual and auditory palette, the resulting content can effectively convey the depth and complexity of the economic and social crises in East Jerusalem, providing a foundation for a truly impactful documentary.

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