

# A City Under Pressure: Socio-Economic Conditions in East Jerusalem, 2010–2025

## Macro Context Overview: The Architecture of Control and Demographic Engineering

The socio-economic landscape of East Jerusalem from 2010 to 2025 is not a product of chance or cyclical conflict, but rather the result of a deliberate, multi-decade architecture of control designed to maintain Israeli sovereignty and engineer a specific demographic reality<sup>33 52</sup>. Since the Six-Day War in 1967, when Israel occupied East Jerusalem, its policies have consistently aimed to establish and preserve a Jewish majority within the city's expanded municipal boundaries<sup>4 49</sup>. This objective has been pursued through a dual-pronged strategy: aggressively encouraging the immigration and settlement of Jews while systematically impeding the natural growth and development of the indigenous Palestinian population<sup>4</sup>. The demographic balance of the city has been a central variable in this policy calculus. In 1967, the ratio of Jewish to Palestinian residents stood at 74% to 26%, but by 2016, this had shifted to 62% Jewish and 38% Palestinian, a decline attributed to higher Palestinian natural growth rates<sup>4 8</sup>. Faced with this trend, Israeli policymakers lowered their target demographic goal from 73.5% Jewish in 1973 to 60% by 2007, expressing doubt about even achieving that figure by 2023<sup>4</sup>. This persistent focus on maintaining a Jewish majority is the foundational logic driving nearly every aspect of urban planning, resource allocation, and legal administration in the city.

A cornerstone of this architecture is the legal and administrative framework that governs Palestinian residency. Residents of East Jerusalem hold the status of "permanent resident," a designation that grants them municipal rights and obligations, such as paying taxes, but denies them Israeli citizenship and the right to vote in national elections<sup>27 57</sup>. This status is conditional; it can be revoked if an individual resides outside of Jerusalem for extended periods, acquires foreign citizenship, or fails to prove Jerusalem is their "centre of life"<sup>31 32</sup>. Since 1967, Israel has formally revoked the residency of over 14,500 Palestinians, a tool used to enforce compliance and facilitate displacement<sup>31 32</sup>. Family unification has also

been severely restricted since 2003, making it nearly impossible for East Jerusalem residents married to Palestinians from the West Bank or Gaza to legally register their spouses or children, effectively separating families <sup>27 66</sup>. This precarious legal standing is further reinforced by discriminatory laws, most notably the Absentee Property Law. This law allows Jewish claimants to reclaim properties lost before the 1948 war, while denying Palestinians any reciprocal right to reclaim homes lost in what they call the Nakba, forming the legal basis for evictions in neighborhoods like Sheikh Jarrah <sup>43 79</sup>.

The physical manifestation of this control is evident in the field of urban planning, which functions as a powerful instrument of spatial entrapment and demographic engineering <sup>33 52</sup>. The Jerusalem Local Outline Plan 2000 (Master Plan) is a prime example, designating only 13% of the city's land for Palestinian residential construction, a portion that is already largely built up <sup>31 60 66</sup>. This creates a severe housing shortage, forcing many Palestinians to build without permits, thereby placing over 100,000 people at risk of demolition <sup>31 63</sup>. Between 2010 and 2013, the number of building permits issued for Palestinian neighborhoods was less than half that issued for Israeli settlements <sup>28</sup>. To exacerbate the housing deficit, large swathes of Palestinian land are designated as "green" or "open" space, often to protect archaeological sites under the guise of a "national park" plan, a move that avoids the high costs of expropriation and transfers authority to the National Parks Authority, disadvantaging Palestinian landowners <sup>60</sup>. The Separation Barrier, constructed primarily for political reasons after 2002, physically isolates entire Palestinian communities like Shuafat refugee camp and Kafr Aqab, severing them from the rest of Jerusalem and creating pockets of neglect where municipal services are withdrawn despite continued tax payments <sup>4 31 66</sup>. This fragmentation transforms once-vibrant urban nodes into isolated "dead ends," reinforcing colonial control through spatial and temporal manipulation <sup>62</sup>.

This systemic marginalization extends deeply into the economic sphere, creating a structure of profound dependency and inequality. While Palestinian workers contribute significantly to the Israeli economy—earning nearly \$3 billion annually by early 2022—their labor is highly vulnerable due to restrictive permit systems and the lack of social protections <sup>12</sup>. This dependence prevents the development of a robust local private sector in East Jerusalem <sup>63</sup>. The Paris Protocol further entrenches this colonial-like dynamic by tying the Palestinian economy to Israel's, depriving it of sovereign control over borders, currency, and monetary policy <sup>25</sup>. As a result, East Jerusalem contributes only about 7% to the overall Palestinian

economy, highlighting its economic isolation<sup>63</sup>. The municipality itself allocates resources based on a starkly unequal distribution: despite Palestinians constituting approximately 40% of the city's population, their areas receive only around 10% of the municipal budget for critical services like sanitation, transportation, and education<sup>8 30 35</sup>. This deliberate underinvestment in infrastructure and public services is a core component of the coercive environment described by UN bodies, systematically degrading living standards and limiting opportunities for Palestinian residents<sup>23</sup>. The cumulative GDP loss to the Palestinian economy between 2000 and 2020 due to occupation-related restrictions was estimated at \$45 billion, equivalent to three times the West Bank's GDP in 2020, demonstrating the immense economic cost of these policies<sup>12</sup>. The combination of legal precarity, discriminatory urban planning, and economic subordination forms a comprehensive system of control that defines the lived experience of Palestinians in East Jerusalem, turning daily life into a constant negotiation with structures designed to contain, manage, and ultimately dispossess them.

| Policy Area         | Israeli Policy / Measure  | Impact on Palestinian Residents   |
|---------------------|---|---|
| Demographics        | Maintaining a Jewish majority through settlement expansion and impediments to Palestinian growth.                           | Restricting natural population increase, increasing pressure on housing, and creating insecurity. <sup>4 8 52</sup>                                   |
| Residency Rights    | Granting "permanent resident" status instead of citizenship; revocation for residing abroad or acquiring other citizenship. | Creating statelessness risk, enabling forced exile, and disrupting family unity. <sup>27 31 66</sup>  |
| Land Use Planning   | Zoning only 13% of land for Palestinian construction; designating vast areas as "green" parks.                              | Severe housing shortages, forcing illegal construction, and placing over 100,000 at risk of displacement. <sup>31 60 63 66</sup>                      |
| Building Permits    | Denying permits for Palestinian construction while approving thousands for settlers.  | Over 40% of Palestinian housing units are unauthorized, leading to high rates of demolition. <sup>28 31 53 66</sup>                                   |
| Infrastructure      | Allocating ~10% of municipal budget to services for ~40% of the population.   | Chronic shortages of classrooms, inadequate water and sewage networks, and poor road infrastructure. <sup>8 29 30 35</sup>                            |
| Legal Framework     | Applying the Absentee Property Law to allow Jewish claims on pre-1948 property while denying Palestinians reciprocity.      | Providing the legal basis for forced evictions and displacements in neighborhoods like Sheikh Jarrah. <sup>43 79 97</sup>                             |
| Freedom of Movement | Construction of the Separation Barrier and extensive checkpoint network (>800 obstacles).                                   | Fragmenting communities, isolating areas like Shuafat Camp, and severely restricting access to work, services, and livelihoods. <sup>4 42 50 62</sup> |

# Economic and Social Indicators: Systemic Disparity in Daily Life

The macro-level policies of control and marginalization translate directly into devastating socio-economic indicators that define the daily reality for Palestinians in East Jerusalem. The data reveals a stark and persistent pattern of deprivation, characterized by extreme poverty, limited economic opportunity, a crippling housing crisis, and a profound disparity in the provision of public services. These indicators are not merely statistics; they represent the tangible consequences of a system engineered to subordinate Palestinian life. Poverty is a pervasive condition, with one study finding that 75.4% of all Palestinian residents and 83.9% of Palestinian children in East Jerusalem were living below the poverty line as of 2013<sup>29</sup>. This figure remained alarmingly high, with 75% of residents living below the Israeli poverty line as of mid-2024<sup>38</sup>. By 2016, the situation was equally dire, with 73% of East Jerusalem residents living below the poverty line compared to just 22% nationally<sup>31</sup>. This economic hardship is compounded by significant disparities in income. Arab per capita income is only 40% of Jewish income, and 79% of Arab families live in poverty compared to 23% of Jewish families<sup>4</sup>. The reliance on a volatile Israeli labor market further exacerbates this vulnerability; Palestinian workers employed in Israel and settlements earned nearly \$3 billion annually, yet this source of income is subject to arbitrary closures and permit denials, causing sudden and severe drops in household income<sup>10 12</sup>.

The labor market reflects this broader economic stagnation and marginalization. While specific annual unemployment rates for East Jerusalem are scarce in the provided sources, the context points to chronic underemployment and high youth unemployment. In Palestine as a whole, the unemployment rate was 25.9% in 2020, with youth unemployment reaching 41.7%<sup>25</sup>. Following the escalation of hostilities in October 2023, unemployment surged dramatically across the territories, reaching 57% by March 2024, with 87.2% of West Bank households reporting a shrinkage in income<sup>10 15</sup>. The workforce participation rate among Palestinian men in East Jerusalem was 67% in 2012, but for women it was only 14%, a figure that has seen little improvement over time<sup>29 57</sup>. This low female participation is linked to a range of factors, including cultural norms, lack of childcare, and mobility restrictions that make commuting to jobs difficult<sup>57</sup>. The wages earned by Palestinian workers are significantly lower than those of their Israeli counterparts, even for similar roles, further depressing purchasing power<sup>93</sup>. For instance, the average daily wage for

workers in Israel and settlements was NIS 254.2, more than double the NIS 121.1 in the West Bank<sup>93</sup>.

The housing crisis is perhaps the most visible and acute indicator of systemic failure. It is a direct consequence of discriminatory zoning and the denial of building permits, which have created a severe supply-demand imbalance<sup>20 28</sup>. Studies projected a shortfall of over 3,800 housing units between 2001 and 2010, and another analysis suggested a need for approximately 70,000 new units by 2020<sup>28</sup>. Due to the near-impossibility of obtaining permits, an estimated one-third of Palestinian homes in East Jerusalem are unpermitted, putting at least 100,000 residents at constant risk of demolition<sup>31 63</sup>. Between 2010 and 2014 alone, 665 structures were demolished, displacing over 665 people<sup>28</sup>. Even when housing is available, it is unaffordable by international standards; one study found that average income covered up to 59% of housing costs, forcing many families into overcrowded conditions<sup>28</sup>. Average household size in Palestinian neighborhoods is 5.8 people, with 25% of households having seven or more members, a stark contrast to Jewish households where only 4% have more than five people<sup>28</sup>. Living conditions are often substandard, with cramped apartments averaging just 76 m<sup>2</sup> and lacking basic amenities<sup>28 36</sup>. The psychological toll of this housing precarity is immense, with studies linking frequent displacement and housing insecurity to severe trauma, anxiety, and PTSD among affected families<sup>26 36</sup>.

Public services and infrastructure reflect the same pattern of systematic underinvestment and segregation. Despite comprising roughly 40% of the city's population, Palestinian neighborhoods receive disproportionately low municipal funding<sup>8 30</sup>. They get only 10% of sanitation services, 6% of garbage disposal routes, and approximately 10% of transportation budgets<sup>8 30</sup>. This leads to severe deficiencies in essential infrastructure. For example, there is a documented shortage of over 2,000 classrooms in East Jerusalem schools, with 43% of classrooms deemed inadequate for quality education<sup>8 35 49</sup>. Access to clean water is also a major challenge; as of 2015, only 64% of households were officially connected to the municipal water grid, and in areas beyond the Separation Barrier, per capita water supply was at 55% of WHO minimum standards<sup>29</sup>. The education system is particularly strained, facing a chronic shortage of classrooms and high dropout rates, which reached 33% in 12th grade in 2015, far exceeding national averages<sup>29</sup>. Similarly, the healthcare system suffers from outdated infrastructure, chronic underfunding, and restricted access for patients from the West Bank, who constitute a significant portion of hospital admissions<sup>34</sup>. This disparity in service

**delivery is not accidental but is a calculated outcome of a planning regime that views the Palestinian population as a temporary fixture to be managed, not as citizens deserving of equitable development**<sup>23 33</sup>.

| Indicator Category | Metric                                  | Value / Status in East Jerusalem                       | Comparative Data / Trend  |
|--------------------|---|--|---|
| Poverty & Income   | Poverty Rate (below Israeli line)       | 75.4% (adults), 83.9% (children) in 2013; 75% in 2023. | 21.8% of all residents nationally in 2013. <sup>29</sup><br><a href="#">31</a> <a href="#">38</a>           |
|                    | Per Capita Income Ratio                 | 40% of Jewish per capita income.                       | 79% of Arab families live in poverty vs. 23% of Jewish families. <sup>4</sup>                               |
| Labor Market       | Workforce Participation (Men)           | 67% in 2012.   | 52% for Jewish men in 2012. <sup>29</sup> <a href="#">57</a>  |
|                    | Workforce Participation (Women)         | 14% in 2012.   | 59% for Jewish women in 2012. <sup>29</sup> <a href="#">57</a>  |
|                    | Unemployment (Palestine-wide)           | 25.9% in 2020; 41.7% among youth.                      | Rose to 57% by March 2024 due to Gaza war.<br><a href="#">10</a> <a href="#">25</a>                         |
| Housing            | Land Zoned for Palestinian Construction | 13% of total area.                                     | Most of this area is already built up. <sup>31</sup> <a href="#">60</a> <a href="#">63</a>                  |
|                    | Percentage of Homes Without Permits     | Estimated at one-third.                                | Over 100,000 residents at risk of displacement. <sup>31</sup> <a href="#">63</a>                            |
|                    | Average Apartment Size                  | 76 m <sup>2</sup> (Arab-majority neighborhoods).       | Largest in Beit Hanina (97 m <sup>2</sup> ); smallest in Muslim Quarter (45 m <sup>2</sup> ). <sup>28</sup> |
| Public Services    | Household Size                          | Average of 5.8 persons.                                | 25% of households have 7+ members; 52% of Jewish households have 6+. <sup>28</sup>                          |
|                    | Municipal Budget Allocation             | ~10% for ~40% of population.                           | Sanitation services: 10%; Transportation: ~10%. <sup>8</sup> <a href="#">30</a> <a href="#">35</a>          |
|                    | Classroom Shortage                      | Over 2,000 missing classrooms.                         | 43% of existing classrooms are inadequate. <sup>8</sup> <a href="#">35</a> <a href="#">49</a>               |
|                    | Water Infrastructure Connection         | 64% of households in 2015.                             | In areas beyond the barrier, per capita supply is 55% of WHO minimums. <sup>29</sup>                        |

## Crisis Anchors: Catalysts of Structural Fragility

The socio-economic conditions in East Jerusalem are not defined solely by chronic stress but are periodically punctuated by acute crises that expose and amplify the city's underlying structural fragility. These events—ranging from major political decisions to global pandemics and regional wars—are not isolated phenomena but function as powerful catalysts that interact with the existing system of control,

triggering cascading failures across multiple sectors. The period from 2010 to 2025 saw several such anchors, each revealing a different facet of the city's vulnerability. The spillover effects of the 2014 Gaza war, for example, primarily impacted daily life through intensified mobility restrictions. Heightened security measures led to the erection of numerous new closures and checkpoints, severely disrupting access to employment, education, and essential services for residents of East Jerusalem and the surrounding West Bank <sup>19 32</sup>. This disruption was not a temporary inconvenience but a direct assault on the ability of Palestinians to sustain their livelihoods, compounding the long-standing barriers imposed by the Separation Wall and permit regimes <sup>20 32</sup>.

Perhaps the most significant political shock of this period was the United States' recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital and the subsequent relocation of its embassy in December 2017 <sup>1 2</sup>. This unilateral action was widely condemned as a violation of international law and a profound blow to the prospects of a two-state solution <sup>5 85</sup>. For Palestinians in East Jerusalem, it was a deeply traumatic event that triggered widespread protests, some of which were met with excessive force by Israeli authorities <sup>3 9</sup>. During clashes in Silwan in July 2014, police began using black sponge bullets, which caused severe injuries, including permanent eye damage and death, to dozens of protesters, including minors <sup>29</sup>. The embassy move also had immediate economic repercussions, particularly for the tourism sector, which was already struggling. Protests disrupted the sector, and the heightened political tension discouraged visitors, further destabilizing a part of the local economy that is critically dependent on tourism <sup>3 17</sup>. Beyond the immediate effects, the decision deepened the diplomatic paralysis, weakened the position of the Palestinian Authority's leadership, and emboldened hardline Israeli factions, setting a negative precedent for future negotiations <sup>1 82</sup>. It marked a definitive shift in U.S. policy, eroding its credibility as a neutral mediator and pushing the peace process into a state of terminal decline <sup>5 85</sup>.

The COVID-19 pandemic in 2020-2021 served as a perfect storm, exposing the extreme fragility of East Jerusalem's economy, which is heavily reliant on tourism <sup>17</sup>. The global lockdowns and travel restrictions led to the collapse of the tourism industry, a sector that supports at least 60% of economic activity in the city <sup>35</sup>. Businesses in the Old City market shut down completely, leaving thousands unemployed and unable to pay rent or support their families <sup>17 37</sup>. The health crisis compounded these economic hardships, straining an already under-resourced healthcare system <sup>17</sup>. However, the pandemic also revealed a complex dynamic of

cooperation and mistrust. While Israeli institutions provided medical aid and trained Palestinian doctors, there were also allegations that Israel sought to exploit the pandemic for depopulation purposes, such as by refusing to quarantine infected individuals from areas like Kafr 'Aqab' and transferring them to Ramallah, sparking jurisdictional disputes <sup>16</sup>. The pandemic highlighted the deep-seated insecurities faced by residents, whose lives are governed by a system that provides neither stable economic foundations nor reliable healthcare during a crisis.

The tensions surrounding Sheikh Jarrah in 2021 represented a culmination of long-standing policies rather than a sudden crisis. The threat of eviction for dozens of Palestinian families, stemming from pro-settler court rulings based on pre-1948 ownership claims, became a potent symbol of dispossession and ethnic cleansing <sup>45</sup> <sup>97</sup>. The struggle in Sheikh Jarrah, a neighborhood with a history of hosting refugees from 1948, resonated deeply across Palestine and globally, transforming a localized legal battle into a national and international issue <sup>79</sup> <sup>98</sup>. The intense protests against the planned evictions, which involved weekly demonstrations and solidarity actions, were met with brutal crackdowns by Israeli forces, including the use of sound grenades and skunk water cannons <sup>80</sup> <sup>106</sup>. This violent suppression contributed to the eruption of an 11-day conflict between Gaza and Israel later that year, demonstrating how localized struggles for land and identity in East Jerusalem can have catastrophic regional consequences <sup>45</sup>. The Sheikh Jarrah case underscored the centrality of the housing question in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the lengths to which settler organizations and state actors will go to alter the demographic character of the city <sup>43</sup>.

The escalations between October 2023 and 2024 constituted a catastrophic event that compounded all previous crises. The outbreak of war triggered a complete economic shutdown for East Jerusalem. Movement was almost entirely paralyzed by the closure of key checkpoints like Qalandia, cutting off residents from employment, healthcare, and education <sup>38</sup>. The tourism sector, already crippled by the pandemic, ceased to exist, and businesses reported near-total absence of customers <sup>37</sup>. The economic fallout was severe, with 87.2% of West Bank households experiencing income loss and daily income losses estimated at NIS 45.4 million <sup>15</sup>. Simultaneously, the conflict unleashed a wave of punitive demolitions and arrests. House demolitions continued unabated throughout the war, displacing hundreds of families and sending a clear message that the pursuit of settlement expansion and demographic engineering remains a priority even amidst full-scale war <sup>38</sup> <sup>108</sup>. Between October 2023 and March 2024, 553 Palestinians died in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, and over 900 were arrested, including women and

children<sup>18</sup>. The health system was brought to its knees, as hospitals that rely on referrals from the West Bank struggled with staff shortages and a lack of supplies, operating at reduced capacity<sup>34</sup>. This period laid bare the utter dependence of East Jerusalem's infrastructure on the stability of the wider West Bank and the catastrophic human cost of the occupation's military and political apparatus.

## Neighborhood-Level Deep Dives: Manifestations of Policy on the Ground

The abstract policies of demographic engineering and systemic marginalization manifest concretely and uniquely in each of East Jerusalem's focal neighborhoods, creating distinct pressures while sharing common threads of displacement, segregation, and surveillance. Each area serves as a microcosm of the broader conflict, where land, home, and daily life are contested arenas. Silwan, a Palestinian village located south of the Old City, stands as a paradigmatic case of "micro-colonization." Its strategic location adjacent to the historic heart of Jerusalem makes it a prime target for appropriation<sup>99</sup>. Right-wing settler organizations, most notably Elad (Ir David Foundation), operate the "City of David" archaeological site in Wadi Hilwa, promoting a singular biblical narrative that actively excludes Palestinian, Christian, and Islamic histories<sup>95 99</sup>. Through excavations conducted without proper tender and backed by the Nature and Parks Authority, Elad seeks to Judaize the area and create a foothold for future settlement expansion, displacing Palestinian residents and fragmenting the community<sup>66 99</sup>. Residents of Silwan face constant surveillance from Israeli and private cameras, harassment, and violence, fostering a climate of fear and self-censorship that suppresses community organizing and civic life<sup>99</sup>. The culture of auto-silencing is palpable, with shopkeepers avoiding contact with outsiders to prevent exploitation by real estate agents seeking loopholes for forced evictions<sup>99</sup>. In response, heritage activism has emerged as a form of nonviolent resistance. Public murals depicting eyes of global figures like George Floyd and Che Guevara, alongside the Edward Said Library established in 2020, serve as tools of sumud (steadfastness), asserting presence and preserving identity in the face of erasure<sup>99 100</sup>.

Sheikh Jarrah represents the legal dimension of displacement, functioning as a symbolic and literal front in the struggle over Jerusalem's urban fabric. Many of its Palestinian families are descendants of refugees who were granted land by Jordan

and UNRWA in the 1950s with promises of title deeds, which were never fulfilled<sup>96</sup><sup>98</sup>. Settler organizations now leverage Israeli courts, applying laws that allow for the restitution of pre-1948 Jewish-owned property while denying Palestinians any reciprocal rights, to evict these families<sup>79</sup><sup>97</sup>. The 2021 eviction threats galvanized a massive popular uprising, demonstrating the neighborhood's immense symbolic power as a representation of the Nakba's ongoing legacy<sup>45</sup><sup>98</sup>. The struggle is no longer confined to individual homes but has evolved into a coordinated effort to physically seal off the neighborhood. Plans for a new enclave of 1,500 settlement units in northern Sheikh Jarrah aim to cut the neighborhood off from the north, while a planned yeshiva at its southern entrance would place its main access points under full Israeli control, effectively transforming it into an isolated enclave<sup>102</sup>. The constant threat of eviction, coupled with settler harassment and state-backed violence, imposes a heavy psychological burden on families, who live with the knowledge that their homes could be taken away at any moment<sup>106</sup>.

Shu'fat Refugee Camp, the only Palestinian refugee camp located within Jerusalem's municipal boundaries, embodies the humanitarian crisis of sustained neglect<sup>101</sup>. Established in the late 1960s, the camp is now severely overcrowded, with an official population of 11,000 but an actual population estimated at 18,000-20,000 crammed into 0.2 square kilometers<sup>101</sup>. The camp suffers from abysmal infrastructure, including sporadic rubbish collection, untreated sewage running in the streets, and insufficient access to clean water<sup>101</sup>. Its location behind the Separation Barrier physically isolates it from the rest of the city, requiring residents to cross military checkpoints to access services, despite holding Jerusalem ID cards<sup>101</sup>. The juxtaposition of the densely packed, deteriorating camp with modern Israeli settlements like Pisgat Ze'ev and Ramat Shlomo on its perimeter presents a stark visual metaphor for the spatial inequality and segregation enforced by Israeli policy<sup>101</sup>. Residents are caught between the dual pressures of municipal neglect, which withholds essential services, and the political constraints of Palestinian institutions, which resist large-scale upgrades to avoid undermining the "right of return," leaving the camp trapped in a perpetual state of crisis<sup>101</sup>.

The Old City, the spiritual and commercial heart of East Jerusalem, has suffered a catastrophic economic collapse, rendering it a ghost town. Its economy, historically reliant on tourism, was devastated by the 2020-2021 COVID-19 shutdowns and the 2023-2024 regional escalations<sup>17</sup><sup>37</sup>. By May 2024, 80% of businesses in the Old City had ceased operations due to a complete collapse in visitor numbers and strict Israeli movement restrictions<sup>37</sup>. Merchants report near-total absence of customers,

with shops opening only once a week to preserve merchandise<sup>37</sup>. The area is also a flashpoint for religious and political tensions. The 2017 siege on Al-Aqsa Mosque, during which Israeli forces installed electronic gates and blocked worshippers for days, exemplifies the heavy-handed policing that characterizes the area<sup>9</sup>. Such incidents disrupt access for the millions of Muslims who visit daily and heighten the potential for violence at one of the world's most sensitive religious sites<sup>1 9</sup>.

Peripheral neighborhoods like Al-Tur and Ras al-Amud face intense military pressure and frequent clashes with security forces. Al-Tur is known for its high frequency of confrontations, which often involve the indiscriminate use of excessive force by Israeli police, including rubber-coated steel bullets that cause severe and permanent injuries<sup>29</sup>. The constant presence of soldiers and the threat of raids create an atmosphere of fear and instability for residents<sup>38</sup>. Ras al-Amud, an extension of Silwan, shares similar pressures related to land expropriation and settler activities, with residents facing challenges related to housing and mobility<sup>55</sup>. Across these diverse neighborhoods, the fundamental dynamics remain consistent: a relentless push for demographic change, the erosion of Palestinian rights to land and housing, and the imposition of a coercive environment that dictates the terms of daily existence.

| Neighborhood         | Core Socio-Economic Pressures   | Housing Conditions   | Mobility Patterns  | Localized Effects of Crises   |
|----------------------|---|--|--|---|
| Silwan               | Micro-colonization, settler-led archaeology ("City of David"), surveillance, harassment, and violence.                  | Overcrowding, vertical construction due to permit denial, constant threat of demolition. | Restricted movement due to frequent clashes and military presence, especially near the "City of David".        | Evictions and demolitions accelerated during the 2023-24 escalations, even amidst war. <a href="#">72</a> <a href="#">95</a> <a href="#">99</a> |
| Sheikh Jarrah        | Legal eviction campaigns by settler groups based on pre-1948 property claims, physical encirclement by new settlements. | Families face imminent eviction, leading to displacement and uncertainty.                | Increased military and settler presence restricts movement and creates a hostile environment.                  | The 2021 eviction threats sparked a nationwide uprising and regional conflict. <a href="#">45</a> <a href="#">97</a> <a href="#">102</a>        |
| Shu'fat Refugee Camp | Extreme overcrowding, inadequate infrastructure (water, sewage), isolation behind the Separation Barrier.               | Dense, unplanned vertical construction on small plots, minimal open space.               | Requires crossing military checkpoints to access central Jerusalem, despite being within municipal boundaries. | Military operations and raids become more frequent during regional escalations. <a href="#">4</a> <a href="#">38</a> <a href="#">101</a>        |
| Old City             | Collapse of the tourism-based economy, checkpoints, and heightened security and religious tensions.                     | Historic buildings repurposed as shops and residences, suffering from overcrowding.      | Heavily restricted access due to checkpoints and security cordons, especially around Al-Aqsa.                  | Business closures reached 80% by May 2024; tourist numbers dropped 80% in Dec 2023. <a href="#">9</a> <a href="#">17</a> <a href="#">37</a>     |
| Al-Tur               | Frequent clashes with security forces, use of excessive force including black sponge bullets.                           | Overcrowded housing typical of peripheral neighborhoods.                                 | High risk of encountering military roadblocks and checkpoints during commutes.                                 | Clashes intensify during periods of heightened political tension, leading to injuries and arrests. <a href="#">29</a> <a href="#">38</a>        |
| Ras al-Amud          | Extension of Silwan pressures, land expropriation, and proximity to settler outposts.                                   | Similar to Silwan, with overcrowding and informal construction.                          | Commute patterns are influenced by the overall mobility restrictions in East Jerusalem.                        | Information not available in provided sources. <a href="#">55</a>   |

## Sector Snapshots: The Cascading Impact of Occupation on Key Industries

The multifaceted nature of Israeli policy in East Jerusalem ensures that no single sector operates in isolation. Instead, the various domains of life—commerce, mobility, housing, employment, and tourism—are deeply interconnected, creating a feedback loop where pressures in one area cascade and amplify failures in others. This systemic interdependence means that a crisis in one sector can quickly trigger a collapse in others, trapping residents in a cycle of escalating vulnerability. The snapshot of each key sector reveals how these linkages function, demonstrating that

the ultimate casualty of occupation is not just a particular industry, but the very fabric of Palestinian society and its capacity for sustainable development.

The small business and market sector, particularly concentrated in the Old City, is acutely dependent on tourism, making it exceptionally fragile. With tourism accounting for at least 60% of the local economy, the sector is a barometer of political stability and freedom of movement<sup>35</sup>. The COVID-19 pandemic delivered a fatal blow, with the shutdown of Old City markets and the cessation of tourism leading to widespread business closures and job losses<sup>17</sup>. The situation worsened catastrophically during the 2023-2024 escalations, which resulted in a complete economic paralysis. By May 2024, 80% of businesses in the Old City had ceased operations due to the near-total absence of visitors and stringent Israeli restrictions on access<sup>37</sup>. Merchants described preparing breakfast in their tiny shops because there were no customers to serve, a poignant illustration of economic ruin<sup>37</sup>. This collapse is not just an economic issue; it represents the destruction of livelihoods, the erosion of cultural heritage tied to traditional crafts, and the hollowing out of the city's historic center. The reliance on a volatile Israeli labor market further destabilizes the local economy, as Palestinian workers employed in Israel and its settlements earn a significant portion of the West Bank's GDP, yet their income is subject to sudden disruptions from closures and permit denials<sup>10 12</sup>.

Mobility and transportation are arguably the most restrictive elements of daily life in East Jerusalem, acting as the primary choke point on the city's social and economic arteries. The infrastructure is deliberately fragmented, with over 800 obstacles—including checkpoints, roadblocks, and the Separation Barrier—severing Palestinian communities from one another and from essential services, workplaces, and educational institutions<sup>42 50</sup>. This network of barriers transforms what should be simple commutes into complex logistical challenges, often taking hours instead of minutes and consuming a significant portion of a person's daily earnings<sup>22 62</sup>. Checkpoints like Qalandia, which separates Jerusalem from Ramallah, are notorious for long delays, particularly for Palestinians with West Bank IDs<sup>27 46</sup>. The 2023-2024 escalations saw the renewed closure of these vital passages, completely cutting off residents of areas like Shuafat Camp from central Jerusalem and plunging the city into a state of suspended animation<sup>38</sup>. This degradation of urban nodes turns vibrant spaces into isolated "dead ends," intentionally weakening Palestinian attachment to the city and reinforcing a sense of exclusion<sup>62</sup>. The system of mobility control is also a mechanism of economic extraction, with travel restrictions costing the Palestinian economy an estimated \$274 million annually in 2018 alone<sup>12</sup>.

The housing and rental sector is the epicenter of the conflict, serving as both a primary tool of control and a source of immense precarity. The combination of discriminatory zoning laws, which reserve only 13% of the city for Palestinian construction, and the systematic denial of building permits, has created a chronic housing deficit and forced a third of Palestinian homes to be built illegally<sup>31 60</sup>. This illegal status places over 100,000 residents at constant risk of demolition, a threat that is not contingent on political stability<sup>63</sup>. During the 2023-2024 escalations, demolitions continued unabated, with 133 buildings destroyed in East Jerusalem since the start of the war, displacing families even amidst active combat<sup>38</sup>. These demolitions are not random acts of violence but are strategically timed to achieve political objectives, such as clearing land for new settlements<sup>32 108</sup>. The unaffordability of legal housing is another major driver of insecurity, with average income covering up to 59% of housing costs, forcing families into overcrowded and substandard living conditions<sup>28</sup>. This creates a vicious cycle where families are unable to secure stable, safe housing, leading to poor health outcomes and diminished well-being<sup>36</sup>.

Youth employment is a critical area of concern, reflecting the broader failure of the system to provide a viable future for the next generation. Palestinian youth in East Jerusalem are acutely marginalized economically and socially, facing extremely high unemployment rates<sup>25 35</sup>. The education system itself is a battleground, presenting students with a painful choice: adopt the Israeli curriculum to gain better access to higher education and the Israeli job market, or adhere to the Palestinian curriculum to preserve their cultural and national identity, thereby limiting their professional prospects<sup>47 48</sup>. This dilemma traps students in a system that offers few pathways to meaningful employment. The high dropout rates, particularly among boys aged 12-14, highlight the growing disillusionment with an educational system that cannot guarantee a future<sup>53 66</sup>. The lack of investment in skills training, entrepreneurship support, and business incubators further exacerbates this crisis, leaving a large cohort of young people feeling hopeless and disconnected from the formal economy<sup>63</sup>.

Finally, the tourism sector, once a backbone of the local economy, has been systematically dismantled over the past decade. The 2017 U.S. Embassy move triggered protests that disrupted the sector, followed by the COVID-19 pandemic, which decimated the industry globally<sup>3 17</sup>. The 2023-2024 war delivered the final, fatal blow. The conflict led to a complete collapse in tourist arrivals, with numbers plummeting by 80% in December 2023 compared to the previous year<sup>37</sup>. The combination of fear, heightened security, and severe movement restrictions made

visiting the city virtually impossible. The devastation of the tourism sector has had a ripple effect, eliminating an estimated 7,000 jobs and destroying the economic base for countless small businesses, tour guides, and hotel staff<sup>35 37</sup>. The systematic underdevelopment of Palestinian-run tourism infrastructure and the preferential treatment given to Israeli tourism initiatives have ensured that even in normal times, the benefits of tourism flow primarily to the occupying power, further cementing the economic subordination of the local population<sup>63</sup>.

## Human-Centered Composite Narratives and Visual Storytelling Strategy

To move beyond statistical analysis and capture the lived reality of East Jerusalem, it is essential to construct composite narratives that embody the recurring patterns of experience. These stories, drawn from the synthesized data, represent archetypal figures whose daily routines, challenges, and emotions reflect the structural forces at play. Accompanying these narratives is a strategic approach to visual storytelling, weighted to maximize emotional resonance, highlight symbolic contrasts, and document the functional realities of life under occupation. This dual approach aims to create a compelling and insightful portrayal that can effectively inform a documentary script, balancing human experience with a critical examination of the systems that shape it.

**Ahmad, the Shopkeeper in the Old City:** Ahmad runs a small souvenir shop in the Christian Quarter of the Old City. His story is one of gradual economic erosion. He recalls the bustling crowds of tourists before 2023, when his shop was a hub of activity. Now, the street is eerily quiet. His income has vanished, and he pays his municipal taxes dutifully, yet receives no support or even acknowledgment from the authorities, only an increased Israeli security presence that monitors his every move. His daily routine is dictated by the whims of the Damascus Gate checkpoint; a closure means another day of no income, a day spent staring at empty shelves. His emotional landscape is one of resignation tinged with a quiet defiance. He rationates electricity during a blackout, carefully measuring out fuel for his stove, a small act of agency in a world of scarcity. Visually, his story is told through wide shots of the empty street, a stark contrast to memories of crowded alleys. A close-up of his hands arranging a single, untouched trinket on the counter speaks volumes about his predicament. The scene is devoid of people, emphasizing his isolation and the decay of his livelihood. The sound design features the echo of his footsteps and the distant hum of a soldier's radio, underscoring the silence of commerce and the omnipresence of the occupation.

**Fatima, the Teacher in**

**Shu'fat Refugee Camp:** Fatima teaches in a classroom in Shu'fat Camp where overcrowding is a daily reality; her students share desks and the air feels thick with the heat of too many bodies. Her salary is often delayed, and her school lacks basic supplies, forcing her to improvise. She faces constant anxiety about her family's safety, knowing the camp is a frequent target for military raids. Her crisis is the failure of the education system to provide a future for her students, trapping them in a cycle of overcrowding, neglect, and hopelessness. Emotionally, she is caught between her dedication to her students and a deep-seated despair for their future. The visual language for her story focuses on the interior of the classroom. Tight shots show students struggling with textbooks that are too big for their laps. A shot of Fatima looking out the window, her face illuminated by the light of a nearby Israeli settlement, symbolizes the stark divide between her students' reality and the world beyond the wall. A powerful moment would be capturing a child's drawing of a house, then showing the cracked walls of their actual home, illustrating the chasm between aspiration and survival.

**Youssef, the Taxi Driver Facing Checkpoints:** Youssef commutes daily from At-Tur to work in West Jerusalem. His routine is a battle against time and bureaucracy. He sits in the back of his old taxi, watching the clock tick as he waits endlessly at the Qalandia checkpoint. Some days, he loses wages for hours, while other days he is simply turned back without explanation. He fears arrest for any minor traffic infraction and feels constantly surveilled by soldiers and camera drones. His crisis is the theft of his time and dignity, a daily humiliation that chips away at his sense of self-worth. The visual strategy here relies heavily on symbolic contrast. A split-screen shot shows his taxi queueing patiently behind sleek, modern cars of settlers using bypass lanes. The lighting is harsh, emphasizing the bleakness of his surroundings. The soundscape is dominated by the engine of his car idling, the chatter of soldiers, and the occasional wail of a siren, creating a tense and oppressive atmosphere. A scene of him navigating a roadblock, explaining his destination to a soldier with a map, perfectly encapsulates the absurdity and arbitrariness of the system.

**Leila, the Student from Silwan:** Leila is torn between two worlds. To gain admission to Hebrew University, she must master the Israeli curriculum, which whitewashes Palestinian history and identity. But staying true to her roots means choosing the Palestinian curriculum, which may limit her career options and trap her in the local economy. She witnesses her neighbors' fear of Elad's excavations and feels the weight of her family's history. Her crisis is the struggle for an authentic identity in a system designed to erase it. Her daily routine involves a careful navigation of competing loyalties. The visual documentation for her story could include an animated map overlaying her route from her home in Silwan to the university campus, with checkpoints and settler-outpost locations clearly marked. This would serve as a powerful piece of functional documentation. Symbolically, a shot of her walking

past the faded murals of "I Witness Silwan," which assert a Palestinian narrative, juxtaposed with the glossy, sanitized tours at the "City of David" site, would visually represent the conflicting histories she grapples with. Mohammed, the Father from Sheikh Jarrah: Mohammed's family has lived in their home in Sheikh Jarrah for generations. The threat of eviction looms constantly, a shadow over every aspect of their lives. He attends weekly protests but knows the courts are rigged and that the state will ultimately side with the settlers. His crisis is the existential threat to his family's home and stability. He worries about his children's mental health, seeing the trauma in their eyes after settler attacks. His emotional landscape is one of profound helplessness mixed with fierce determination. A powerful visual moment would be the sound of a settler truck engine revving outside his door late at night, a sound that has become a familiar part of his nightly routine. The scene captures the ever-present danger and the inability to feel safe in one's own home. Another scene could show him playing with his children in a small yard, their laughter a fleeting moment of joy in a life filled with uncertainty, highlighting the personal stakes of the larger political conflict.

This integrated approach of human-centered narratives and a weighted visual strategy provides a rich, multi-layered foundation for a documentary. It ensures that the film speaks not only to the structural issues but also to the universal human experiences of resilience, loss, and the search for dignity in the face of overwhelming adversity.

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