

נגבייה | نقبية | Nagabiya
מרכז הידע והמחקר של האוכלוסיה הבדואית בנגב
مركز المعرفة والابحاث للمجتمع البدوي في النقب
Bedouin Society Knowledge and Research Hub



פורום דו-קיום בנגב לשוויון אזרחי
منتدى التعايش السلمي في النقب من أجل المساواة المدنية
Negev Coexistence Forum For Civil Equality



Food Insecurity in Bedouin Communities in the Negev-Naqab:

Assessing The Multi-Dimensional Impact of Crises on the Most Vulnerable
Israeli Citizens

Food safety: prepare for the unexpected



World Food Safety Day - 7 June 2024



Food and Agriculture
Organization of the
United Nations



World Health
Organization



SUSTAINABLE
DEVELOPMENT
GOALS

Presentation for Report Submission on June 7, 2024

We are submitting this report on June 7, 2024, in alignment with the United Nations' **World Food Safety Day**. This year's theme, "**Food safety: Preparing for the unexpected**," underscores the importance of being prepared for any food safety incidents, no matter how mild or severe. Our report focuses on the Bedouin communities in the Negev-Naqab, Israel, evaluating current food safety protocols and recommending strategies to enhance preparedness and response mechanisms. By aligning our submission with this significant day, we emphasize the global relevance of our work and our commitment to ensuring the highest standards of food safety for these communities.



Negev Coexistence Forum for Civil Equality (**NCF**), is an Arab-Jewish organization dedicated to fostering a shared society between Jews and Arabs in the Naqab region. Founded in 1997, NCF works to address the neglect faced by the Bedouin community in this region and to advocate for their full rights and recognition. Our initiatives include local and international advocacy, research, community activities, public protests, media, and social media outreach, all underpinned by the Arab-Jewish partnership. One of our significant efforts includes documenting life in the Negev/Naqab through visual projects, where Bedouin women and children capture their daily experiences and human rights violations. In addition, our newly established **Bedouin Society Knowledge And Research Hub, Nagabiya**, addresses the oversight of unrecognized Bedouin villages in official databases, focusing on the neglected living conditions of over 80,000 residents. Nagabiya's research covers various topics, such as the economic viability of women integrating into the labor market, employment programs, patterns of women's employment, and demographic snapshots of the Bedouin population, with a particular emphasis on the employment challenges Bedouin women face.

ADVA Center: is a non-partisan, action-oriented Israeli policy analysis center. It was founded in 1991 by activists from three social movements: the movement for equality for Mizrahi Jews, the feminist movement, and the movement for equal rights for Arab citizens. The heart of ADVA center's work is research and advocacy for policy changes that favor disadvantaged groups in Israel.

The Negev-Naqab is a desert region located in southern Israel. It spans approximately 60% of the country's land area. The Bedouins are a traditionally nomadic Arab ethnic group living in the Negev. Our NGO uses the term "**Naqab**" (the Arabic name for the region) to acknowledge and respect the Bedouins' cultural and historical ties to the land.



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I. Executive Summary:

Food security, defined as the condition where individuals have consistent physical and economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food for a healthy and active life, is a persisting challenge worldwide. In Israel, this issue is closely linked to low income and social welfare, with significant disparities evidenced between Arabs and non-Haredi Jews, indicating a higher degree of food insecurity among Arab populations. These disparities are even more pronounced in the unrecognized villages of the Negev-Naqab, where food insecurity often remains unaddressed in official studies.

This report builds upon two recent research efforts—the collaborative study with the Adva Center conducted during the coronavirus outbreak and the NCF's Research Center, Nagabiya, analysis during the recent and on-going war — to assess food preparedness and safety in the Bedouin communities of the Negev-Naqab under challenging conditions. Our findings indicate grave challenges such as inadequate infrastructure, restricted resource access, and increased vulnerability during crises, with significant job losses and food access difficulties, especially in unrecognized villages.

Aligned with the United Nations' World Food Safety Day 2024 theme, focusing on preparedness for food safety incidents, this report delves into the escalated risks Bedouin communities face in the Negev. It underscores the need for resilient policies and robust frameworks to guarantee food safety for these vulnerable populations amidst crisis. Ultimately, this report seeks to amplify the global discourse on food security and safety by providing unique perspectives from the Bedouin communities in the Negev-Naqab region.

II. Introduction:

The Bedouin community in the Negev-Naqab region of Israel has a rich cultural history rooted in a semi-nomadic lifestyle of herding and agriculture. Yet, this community has faced long-standing adversities. After the 1948 war and the establishment of the State of Israel, a significant majority of the Arab Bedouins (90%) were displaced from the Negev-Naqab region, and those who remained have experienced a disruption of their traditional way of life due to Israeli government policies

- **Historical Background:** The transition to Israeli military rule (enacted between October 1948 - December 1966) and national land policies disrupted the Bedouin's nomadic culture and aggravated their safety, economic stability, and food security. Resettlement of the Bedouins by the State and confinement to certain areas hindered their ability to carry out traditional farming and herding, and had a significant negative impact on their sustenance and livelihood.

III. Contemporary Challenges:

The Bedouin communities continue to grapple with forced displacement and discrimination. The majority of their villages (35) not officially recognized by the State of Israel. The lack of official recognition means these villages do not appear on official maps and are excluded from national and local planning, denying them essential public services and infrastructure. This

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significantly impacts their daily lives and economic stability. Limited access to education and employment opportunities leads to high unemployment rates and economic hardship, directly tied to food insecurity. Poor road infrastructure and remoteness restrict access to markets, further isolating these communities. Lack of water access and electricity hinder their ability to maintain basic hygiene and preserve food, increasing the risk of foodborne illnesses.

- Electricity Challenges and Food Preservation: Inadequate provision of electricity in unrecognized Bedouin villages of the Negev-Naqab region severely impacts efforts to preserve perishable food items. This section explores how inconsistent access to power compromises residents' ability to maintain food quality over time, drawing upon the life experiences shared through our interviews.

- Resident Testimony: "In our village, we produce electricity using solar panels, which is somewhat problematic because, in reality, the electricity is not consistently and regularly available. I know families who don't have electricity for many hours a day because they can't afford to install enough solar panels to generate electricity for long hours ... Once, when I didn't have enough electricity, I used to throw away a lot of perishable food, such as hummus, cream, and milk, because they need to be refrigerated all day long. As a result, I would only buy food for one day to avoid wasting."

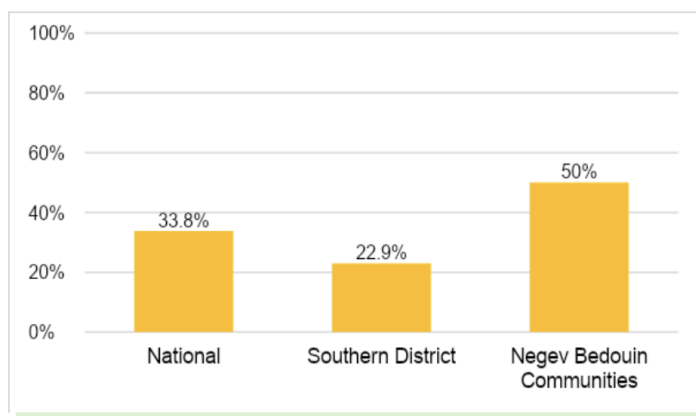
The frustrations expressed by residents regarding the daily management of food highlight an essential aspect of food security: the ability to store food safely. A lack of reliable source of electricity means that many in these communities cannot ensure the safety and longevity of their food supplies.

- Transportation challenges and access to food: Unrecognized villages face additional difficulties with transportation, further hindering residents' access to consistent food supplies and clean water. The absence of reliable roads and public transport means that even getting to sources of food or employment can be a significant challenge, as evidenced by our village interviews.

- Conclusion: Addressing food security in the unrecognized villages necessitates a multifaceted approach. The persistent challenges of unreliable electricity, inadequate refrigeration, and insufficient transportation in unrecognized villages paint a concerning picture of food insecurity and its ripple effects. The residents' testimonies underscore the daily struggle to preserve perishables and maintain a stable supply of food and medication—a fundamental right often

taken for granted. Such circumstances contribute to immediate waste and health risks, and underscore deeper, systemic issues of poverty and exclusion.

Figure 1: The Poverty Expectancy of Families – The National Security Insurance 2022



- Current Demographics and Socio-Economic Conditions: According to the Population and Immigration Authority data for June 2023, 301,308 Arab-Bedouin residents lived in the Negev-Naqab, most of

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them in recognized localities. The recognized localities include the city of Rahat, six local councils, and two regional councils that encompass 11 villages. In 35 unrecognized villages, 83,928 residents lived as of January 2022, according to the latest updated data from the Population and Immigration Authority¹.

The socio-economic condition of the Bedouin community is marked by deep disparities. Latest available data underscores the impact of these disparities: the poverty rate among the Bedouin population of the Negev is more than one and a half times the national Israeli average and more than double the rate in the region in which they live. The statistics are extremely concerning for Bedouin families, with over half living in poverty². The alarmingly high poverty rate among Negev Bedouins exacerbates food insecurity. The absence of proper infrastructure and services in unrecognized villages means these communities struggle more to access food, face challenges in maintaining food safety due to lack of utilities, and have limited means to improve their economic situations, further trapping them in a cycle of poverty and food insecurity.

Poverty is closely tied to food safety and security; without a stable income, families are unable to procure enough food, and even when food is available, they may lack the resources to store and prepare it safely. The Bedouins' geographic remoteness and isolation, due to poor internet and road infrastructure, also limit their access to markets and information that could improve their food safety knowledge and practices. These conditions emphasize the urgent need for policy interventions that enhance both the sense of security and the actual physical and economic accessibility to safe, nutritious food for the Bedouin communities.

Crucially, these issues cannot be tackled in isolation; they demand a comprehensive approach that addresses the integral role of infrastructure, including reliable energy and accessible transportation, within marginalized communities. Policy solutions and investments must prioritize the creation of sustainable and inclusive systems that support the basic needs and well-being of all community members. Doing so will not only improve food security but also enhance the overall quality of life for those living in the unrecognized villages of the Negev-Naqab.

- Legal Framework and International Standards for Food Safety: The contemporary approach to addressing global security now simultaneously focuses on the interconnectedness of food security, established as a policy concern in 1975, with energy security, which gained attention in the 2000s, and water security, which became prominent in the 2010s. While the United Nations (UN) does not have specific international laws regarding food safety, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) collaborates with the World Health Organization (WHO) to establish guidelines through the Codex Alimentarius Commission. The Codex develops international standards, guidelines, and codes of practice to ensure food safety and quality. Though not legally binding, these standards serve as references for national regulations and are recognized internationally. Israel is actively involved in the Codex Alimentarius Commission, contributing to international food safety standards. These standards should and must then be integrated into Israel's national regulations to ensure food safety within the country in general, and in regard to the Naqab Bedouin communities in particular.

¹ The data was extracted from: Online database - Life characteristics of the Bedouin population in the Negev Demography, 27.6.23, (il.ac.bgu). See there for age distribution and other demographic and spatial characteristics.

² "The Plight of the Bedouin in the Negev" - Negev Coexistence Forum for Civil Equality (NCF), 2023. // "Unrecognized Villages in the Negev: A Human Rights Crisis" - Human Rights Watch, 2022.

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- The Water-Energy-Food Nexus: A Comprehensive Approach for Bedouin Villages

in Israel: We have come to recognize that food, energy, and water security are closely related, advocating that policies should cover all three sectors together. This integrated perspective informs extensive research and shapes policy interpretation by the UN and the EU. Israel has adopted this integrated approach but still often fails to incorporate water and energy considerations fully when discussing food security. It should be noted that in most of the interviews, the close connection between food security and water security was mentioned.³ The following research by our team in collaboration with the Adva Center specifically targets the unrecognized Bedouin villages in the Negev-Naqab region. These villages, undocumented in national statistics and without basic infrastructure, mirror challenges faced by remote Indigenous populations globally. Among the residents, children, women, and the elderly are particularly susceptible to food insecurity.

Our research takes a qualitative approach through interviews with various population segments within these villages, aiming to provide insights into the state of food security. Preliminary findings imply a substantial prevalence of food insecurity, as these communities are heavily reliant on public assistance. Highlighting the severity of the issue, a 2008 Ministry of Health report indicated that 16.9% of Bedouin children in the first and second grades were underweight, with higher rates in unrecognized villages, particularly affecting girls. Although this data is dated, it underscores the persistent challenges and the need for updated research.

Moreover, the relevance of the Water-Energy-Food Nexus framework to the situation in unrecognized villages is evident. Endorsed by the United Nations, this model underscores the intertwined nature of water, energy, and food security, advocating for a holistic policy-making approach. Our study posits that integrated policies acknowledging these interdependencies are essential to address the multifaceted risks of food insecurity in these marginalized communities.

IV. Impact of the Pandemic on Food Security⁴

The existing challenges of electricity, food preservation, and transportation faced by unrecognized Bedouin villages were significantly exacerbated during the COVID-19 pandemic. The imperative for social distancing and the disruption of essential services due to the pandemic further increased the difficulties in maintaining food security. The lack of reliable electricity and adequate infrastructure made the compliance with public health guidelines and the management of the already precarious living conditions even more challenging for these communities. This context sets the stage for an exploration of the impact of COVID-19 on these villages, highlighting how the pandemic intensified existing vulnerabilities.

- Economic Consequences and Resource Scarcity: The coronavirus crisis subjected residents of unrecognized villages to acute economic pressures. Income loss became a widespread concern as movement restrictions impaired the ability of villagers to work, particularly for men who commonly served as family breadwinners. In response to these financial hardships, families adopted stringent measures to conserve resources. A villager

³ Nexus Security Food-Energy-Water Governance 2019, C Westl-Pahl, Policy & Science Environmental Challenge Coordination level, pp. 356-367; see also State Comptroller's Report on Systemic Issues, Aspects of Equality in the Negev, Annual Report 72A, Part 1, pp. 96-115

⁴ <https://www.dukium.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/NCF-ADVA-Food-Insecurity-Negev.pdf>

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shared candidly, "We were very careful and cut back on our food consumption due to movement restrictions." This new economic reality forced families to ration their supplies and forego dietary variety, exacerbating the already pressing issue of food scarcity. With limited capacity to stockpile, residents faced the daily challenge of ensuring enough food was available to meet basic nutritional needs.

- **Alterations in Social Support:** Community cohesion, a vital lifeline for many in these villages, suffered greatly during the pandemic. The omnipresent fear of contracting the virus led to a significant withdrawal from traditional forms of mutual aid. Given the deep-set cultural norms around sharing and support, the shift away from seeking assistance from neighbors was profound. "Poverty deepened and reliance on God or aid organizations became the only solace," observed a resident, reflecting a sense of isolation and abandonment. This severance of communal ties took away a critical support system, which had often served as an informal safety net during times of need.

- **Lack of Awareness and Access to Aid:** The NGO manager's insights revealed an information gap that left many Bedouins unaware of the aid they were entitled to from state mechanisms such as National Insurance. "During the coronavirus, I encountered families who lost their source of income and were entitled to receive money and allowances... but they didn't receive anything because they didn't know how," the manager explained. This lack of awareness points to broader systemic issues connecting poverty with informational access; unsurprisingly, it has denied many Bedouins the ability to utilize available social support, ultimately leading to deeper levels of economic and food insecurity.

- **Concluding Observations on COVID-19 Impact:** The COVID-19 pandemic has not only intensified existing vulnerabilities for residents of unrecognized villages in the Negev — it has brought to light significant disparities in infrastructure and governance. With diminished access to both formal support and traditional community networks, these communities have endured disproportionate hardship, demonstrating a clear need for inclusive policies and improved aid distribution mechanisms.

While comprehensive planning and equitable resource allocation solutions are essential long-term goals, immediate, focused actions are equally important. This report recommends practical steps to bolster food security for over 80,000 citizens living in unrecognized villages: - Enhancing access to food and essential supplies

- Improving women's mobility to support household food security
- Preserving and revitalizing communal mutual aid systems
- Encouraging self-cultivation of food to reduce dependency on outside sources
- Elevating awareness of available support and how to access it
- Formulating emergency response strategies tailored to the unique needs of these communities

The implementation of these measures requires urgent attention and will be instrumental in mitigating the pandemic's lingering effects. While this chapter concludes here, the discussion and advocacy for change must continue to promote a more equitable and resilient future for the unrecognized villages in the Negev.

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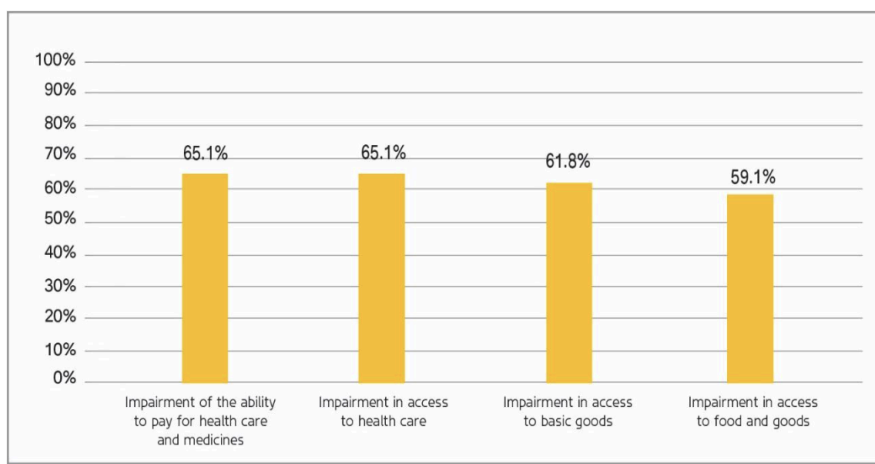
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V. Effect of the War on Food Security⁵

In the wake of the conflict between Israel and Hamas, which erupted on October 7, 2023, Nagabiya - NCF's Research and Information Hub of Bedouin Society in the Negev-Naqab – swiftly initiated a comprehensive study of food security, by analyzing administrative data and survey responses from 350 Bedouin men and women across the Negev-Naqab. The research scrutinized economic and occupational repercussions of the hostilities on local Bedouin communities. Administered during the final fortnight of November 2023, the survey captured the sentiment approximately six weeks post-initial conflict, offering insights from a cross-section of society: 46.3% from planned towns, 36.3% from unrecognized villages, and 17.4% from recognized villages. The Israeli Employment Service provided administrative data, aiding an in-depth evaluation of the war's consequences on the Bedouin population.

Conveying the starkness of war's impact, a substantial segment of participants detailed significant disruptions to their everyday necessities. Two-thirds of the respondents faced intermittent access to essentials, with food and health care accessibility profoundly compromised. For residents in unrecognized villages, the situation was even more grim, with up to 75% experiencing access barriers to these fundamental services.

Figure 7: Reports of Impairment in Access to Goods, Food, Medicines, and Health Care among All Survey Respondents



“Each day brought uncertainty, not knowing if we could obtain enough food,” confided a respondent from an unrecognized village. The figures echo these anecdotes, as 65.1% of all surveyed reported moderate to very severe challenges in procuring food and other goods. These adverse

circumstances were heightened in the unrecognized villages, where nearly 72% of participants reported difficulty in purchasing food and essentials; a slightly larger proportion, 73.5%, indicated experiencing problems in securing basic needs as a direct result of the war.

Findings also revealed a compelling correlation between educational achievement and the level of food insecurity endured during the crisis. Individuals with lower levels of education faced more substantial challenges. Those with a high school education or less reported the greatest hardships, which could suggest a higher susceptibility to food insecurity. This relationship places an additional layer of vulnerability on the already disadvantaged residents of

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unrecognized villages, who were far more likely to have their access to basic goods disrupted, a situation that can precipitate more profound food insecurities if left unaddressed.

Concluding observations on the impact of war: the study establishes an unequivocal link between the deprivations of war and the immediate risk of food insecurity, most notably among the less educated segments of the Bedouin population in unrecognized villages. The data underscores the need for well-targeted support and strategic interventions to alleviate the compounded risks of food insecurity for the Bedouin community, especially in the aftermath of armed conflict. Targeted support could range from improving educational opportunities to establishing more robust emergency response systems, ensuring that these communities are better prepared to withstand and recover from such crises.

VI. Comprehensive Conclusion:

The narrative of the Bedouin communities in the Negev-Naqab is marked by a series of interlinked challenges that have compounded over time. From the ongoing struggles due to contemporary socioeconomic constraints and systemic discriminatory policies to the amplified distress caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and the recent war, these events have each left an indelible mark on Bedouin society.

The pervasive food insecurity, exacerbated by each new crisis, underscores a pattern of systemic neglect and the urgent necessity for targeted interventions. COVID-19 not only disrupted economic stability and social support systems but also laid bare the disparities in access to information and aid. Meanwhile, the war inflicted immediate and severe disruptions in basic service access, plunging the already vulnerable communities—especially those in unrecognized villages—into deeper insecurity.

During the outbreak of the war, we took immediate action to address food security by distributing food packages to over 3,200 families, even though it is not part of our NGO's usual work. This emergency response highlighted the urgent need for food aid in unrecognized Bedouin villages amidst the turmoil. Our intervention underscored the necessity for well-targeted support and strategic interventions to mitigate the compounded risks of food insecurity for the Bedouin community, especially in the aftermath of armed conflict. Targeted support could range from improving educational opportunities to establishing more robust emergency response systems, ensuring that these communities are better prepared to withstand and recover from such crises.

A holistic approach, sensitive to the unique circumstances of the Bedouin population, is paramount in addressing these multifaceted challenges. This includes enhancing direct support, improving infrastructure, ensuring equitable access to education, and providing regular and reliable information on available resources. Proactive and inclusive policies must be adopted to protect these communities against the ripple effects of national emergencies and conflicts.

Furthermore, strengthened collaboration between government, NGOs, and Bedouin community leaders could enhance resilience, leading to more sustainable solutions. If these steps are taken, the cycle of adversity could be broken, allowing the Bedouin communities in the Negev-Naqab to not just navigate crises but to thrive beyond them.

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