Executive Summary

# Impact of the War on Bedouin Women and Children in the Unrecognised Villages

This executive summary highlights the disproportionate impact of the ongoing war on Bedouin Arab women and children residing in unrecognized villages. These communities face a multitude of challenges, including a lack of shelters, food insecurity, disruptions to education, a rise in domestic violence, employment hardships, and inadequate access to healthcare and legal rights. The report offers a series of recommendations for government intervention and community support to address these issues and ensure the protection and well-being of Bedouin women and children during this critical time.

*"We have nowhere to go. We don't know whether to go outside or stay inside because nowhere is safe. I went to school, but even there, there are no shelters."* - F. from Al-Zarnouq

*"My eight year-old is traumatized. She doesn't want to sleep at night, and even started wetting her bed again. When the sirens start, she cries and asks me if we are going to die."* - A. from Abu Tlool

## Security

- The Bedouin community in the Negev faces significant shortages in shelters, especially in unrecognized villages. These areas are not covered by Iron Dome protection, leaving citizens feeling abandoned.
- Recommendations include mapping areas lacking protection, promptly installing shelters, especially in unrecognized villages, providing comprehensive support for families of the murdered and missing including guidance, financial assistance, and psychological treatment, and formulating a national plan for the return of the hostages.

## Nutritional Security

- Many Bedouin women in unrecognized villages already lived below the poverty line at the start of the war, and now face increased food insecurity due to supply chain disruptions.
- Proposed solutions include government-supported food distribution and expansion of existing local agricultural initiatives such as community gardens.

## Education

- Remote learning and a lack of shelter infrastructure in schools exacerbates disparities, hindering access to education.
- Recommendations include further government needs-mapping on a school-by-school basis, followed by immediate funding for school shelters, funding of transportation to schools, and providing infrastructure for remote learning including computers.

## Domestic Violence

- Conflict situations increase domestic violence, compounded by the prevalence of illegal firearms within Arab society. The Abraham Initiatives report that in 83.3% of cases of femicide in Arab society, the murder is committed using firearms. New government policy increasing access to firearms significantly raises the risk of gender-based violence.

- Undocumented migrants: Thousands of Bedouin men are married to Palestinian women without legal status, who depend on their spouses for rights and livelihoods, placing them at heightened risk of domestic violence.
- Rehabilitation programs for violent individuals and support services for women, including trauma-informed mental health programmes, are crucial. Local authorities must ensure such services are widely advertised and accessible to women in unrecognised villages. There must be increased supervision over the distribution and maintenance of firearms.

## Employment

- Women face challenges accessing work due to childcare responsibilities, the lack of public transportation and inconsistent cellular reception. This is exacerbated during wartime. Most women in the Bedouin community work on zero-hour contracts, with less protections against layoffs and reductions in work hours due to the war.
- Women report a significant decrease in their sense of security and safety in the workplace since the outbreak of the war, affecting their employment and psychological well-being.
- Proposed solutions involve protection mechanisms against discrimination-related layoffs, ensuring adequate compensation for hourly workers, and providing clear employment guidelines for essential working mothers.

## Access to Healthcare

- Lack of healthcare access in unrecognized villages leads to neglect of women's health needs. In war, deep psychological distress from the lack of security of the villages and trauma from violence against Arab citizens of Israel compound existing issues.
- Immediate solutions include opening clinics in the villages, ensuring continuity of care especially for children and pregnant women, increased mental health resources, and specialized intervention by welfare agencies.

## Access to Rights

- Existing infrastructure does not adequately support Bedouin women in the unrecognised villages in understanding and exercising their rights, especially in filling out forms and accessing digital resources. This is especially prominent in the war in relation to employment contexts and seeking compensation for damages from the war.
- Recommendations include improving accessibility to information and providing specialized assistance for children who have lost parents. Tailored support should be provided to undocumented women who are at increased risk of rights violations.

## Representation of Women

- We call for the government to increase representation of women in decision-making bodies, especially those dealing with security issues and civil rehabilitation processes.
- Advisory mechanisms should be established including diverse civil society experts and groups specialised in women's rights, to ensure gender issues are taken into consideration in decision-making processes affecting Israeli society as a whole.

Since 2001, **Itach-Ma'aki: Women Lawyers for Social Justice** promotes the rights and voices of marginalized women in Israel. Our goal is to pave the way toward a shared society based on the values of gender equality, equal access to justice, and the integration of a gender lens into policy. Our Center for Bedouin Women's Rights tackles poverty, access to social welfare, and gender-based violence (GBV) through legal aid, social support, and advocacy.