



Children playing in front of a Palestinian NGO that was closed by Israeli authorities.

FACTSHEET

SQUEEZED OUT: THE STRUGGLES OF PALESTINIAN CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS IN EAST JERUSALEM

Following the occupation of East Jerusalem in 1967, many Palestinian organizations found themselves under the threat of being forcefully closed by the Israeli authorities. Since 1967, **over 100 Palestinian non-governmental organizations have been closed**. The legal ground for this policy comes under Regulation 119 of the Defense (Emergency) Regulations, 1945 which is an adapted law from the era of the British mandate in Palestine. Israel has often justified actions against Palestinian civil

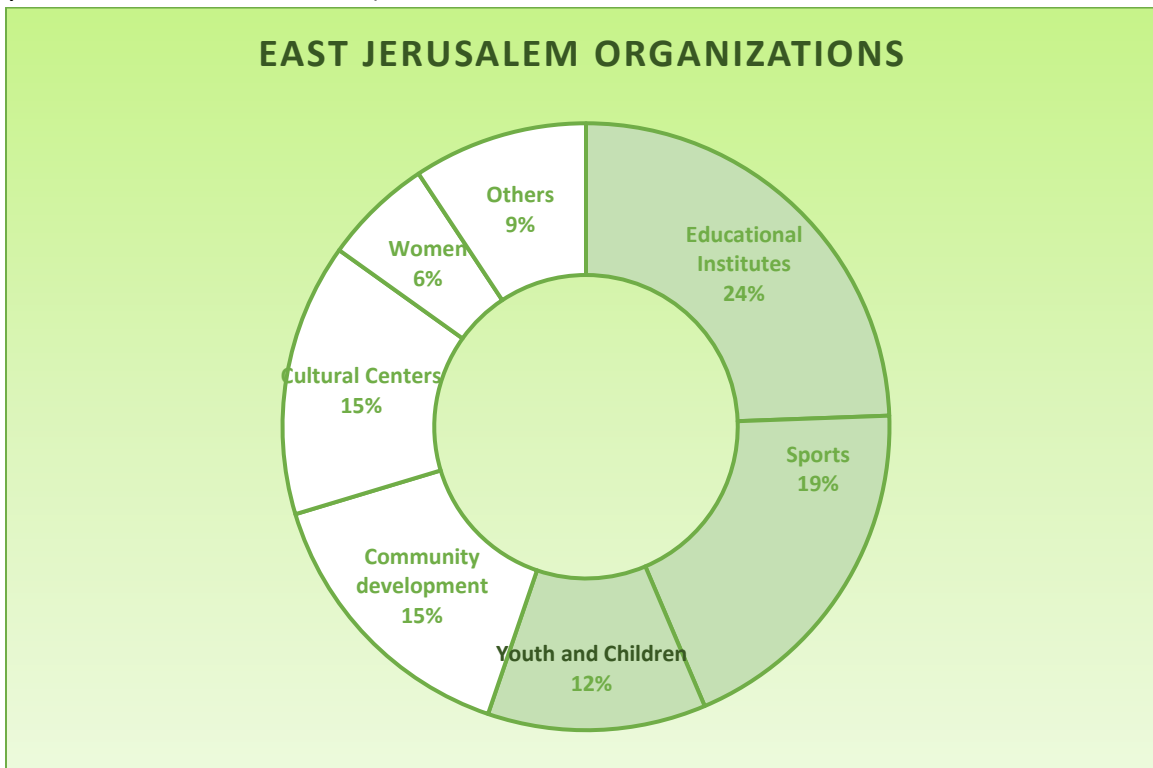
organizations by citing security concerns. They argue that some organizations, or individuals, might be involved in activities that pose a threat to Israeli citizens or to Israeli national security. In some cases, Israeli authorities may accuse certain Palestinian civil organizations of having ties with some Palestinian political parties or individuals. This can lead to legal actions, including arrests, asset seizures, or bans to operate or conduct any activity in East Jerusalem

The Need for Palestinian NGOs in East Jerusalem

In 2022, the number of Palestinian NGOs operating in East Jerusalem was estimated by more than 170 registered NGOs¹ (some of them are registered with the Palestinian Authority, but they operate in East Jerusalem). Half of these organizations (55%) are targeting the youth in Jerusalem (Educational

Institutes 42, Sports 33, and Youth and Children Development 20).

While the second half targets community development (26), culture (25), women (10), and other interests - such as health care, disabilities, human rights, etc... (16).



It is worth mentioning that none of these organizations declare to have a political agenda, they operate in different kind of fields such as legal aid, psychological support, human rights, educational activities, and other types of services that aim to ensure a better quality of life for Palestinian Jerusalemites. The reason behind the need for such organizations is

the absence of that type of service within the Israeli municipal institutions and the lack of trust towards the Israeli-oriented institutions that do not acknowledge the sociopolitical situation of Palestinians within the Palestinian context. Nonetheless, a significant portion of them encounter numerous obstacles, resulting in a reduction of their

¹ According to PNGO (Palestinian NGO Network) there are 172 NGOs that are registered in East Jerusalem

operational capacity. These constraints range from restrictions on employing individuals holding Palestinian IDs (*since they will not be able to enter Jerusalem to work*) and publicizing any public activity that they are planning to conduct (*in order not to be banned by the Israeli authorities*). Many activities that Palestinian NGOs hold require a presence on the field, such as street advocacy campaigns, flash mobs, and summer camp tours. Many of the public areas such as Damascus Gate require approval from the Israeli municipality to allow activities at, and many Palestinian organizations do not prefer any kind of

coordination and communication with the Israeli municipality because it can be seen as normalization with the Israeli side, as well as giving it legitimacy over the Palestinian freedom of expression.

Consequently, between 2001 and 2006, as Israel constructed the separation wall, tens of Palestinian organizations were forced to vacate East Jerusalem and compelled to relocate to Ramallah or Bethlehem to sustain their activities. Some of these organizations managed to retain certain programs aimed at serving the Palestinian population in East Jerusalem.

Shrinking Space

One of the most common ways to describe the situation of Palestinian NGOs in East Jerusalem is to use the phrase "Shrinking Spaces," which refers to Israel's systematic use of legal and administrative obstacles to undermine the existence of Palestinian civil society organizations and their representatives.

Although the type and severity of the challenges faced by Palestinian organizations vary, they all lead to setbacks ranging from **day-to-day restrictions** associated with the occupation or **blockade**, lack of funding, disrupted or **limited access to financial services**, and direct attacks on NGO staff and assets. As a result, many Palestinian organizations in East Jerusalem do not function on stable ground, fearing closure at any moment, affecting their long-term strategies and flexibility of work.



A closure order on the entrance of Nidal Center, Old City

Financial Limitations and Maintaining Staff

The real predicament for Palestinian NGOs in East Jerusalem lies in their struggle with limited funding. The majority of funding for Palestinian civil society is directed toward organizations operating in the West Bank (Area “C” and other marginalized areas). Consequently, this results in deficiencies in the programs carried out in East Jerusalem. Usually, these limited funds will be reflected directly on salaries, which leads to a notably low monthly income for Palestinian NGOs’ employees in East Jerusalem (*compared to the living conditions, the cost of living, and the high prices in the city*). Therefore, a major challenge for Palestinian NGOs is to retain their staff in order not to go to the Israeli job market, which offers much higher income when compared to the salaries provided by Palestinian NGOs. Hence, it is difficult for Palestinian civil society organizations to compete with organizations that are related to the municipality or its community centers. As a result, in many cases, employees are attracted to these institutions.

Furthermore, since the programs of Palestinian organizations rely on “project-based” funding, this does not provide a

sense of job security among staff. Upon completion of a project, it is more likely that the employees’ contract will finish, prompting them to seek employment elsewhere.

Israeli Banks and Palestinian NGOs in Jerusalem

Another aspect that Palestinian organizations in East Jerusalem are struggling with is the censorship and heavy surveillance that is enforced on them by the Israeli banks. Most of the organizations in East Jerusalem receive funds and financial aid from the West Bank through Israeli banks, making the process of receiving funds very complex and falling under many circumstances of uncertainty, causing delays for employees’ salaries and irritating postponements for other financial obligations.

One of the Israeli banks’ tactics is issuing warnings to institutions to close the accounts of Palestinian organizations, followed by complicating the implementation of all types of banking transactions, including deposits and withdrawals. This being one example of the “Shrinking Space”.

Conclusion

Palestinian NGOs in East Jerusalem are the only available space for Palestinian Jerusalemites to connect with their identities and find an escape from the dominant Israelization over the city. **These organizations do not operate smoothly and they are under a constant imminent threat of closure** due to the Israeli policies that aim to erase the Palestinian identity of the city. This can be seen in the restriction and the constant harassment of Palestinian organizations.