



People pictured walking along one of the streets in the Old City in East Jerusalem. File photo: Albin Hillert/WCC

Fact sheet - Demographics of East Jerusalem

October 2024

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Jerusalem's population, East and West, is 966,200 of which 350,000 Muslims and 11,241 Christians amount to the Palestinian population in East Jerusalem but under the Israeli municipal boundaries. Muslims amount to 36% and Christians to 1.1% of the overall population. The Christian population used to be 12,900 persons in 1910, and the decline is staggering as the current population size resembles that of more than 120 years ago.

Lack of housing is a major issue in East Jerusalem. In 2023, 7,800 building permits were issued in the city, but mostly for Israelis, while the Palestinians have no way of accommodating the natural birth rate of 2.81 children per woman. 25,000 housing units are needed right away to accommodate 100,000 people, and another 4,000 to 5,000 units are needed per year to accommodate the population's natural growth including 2,263 marriages taking place per year.

Palestinians are living in congested conditions, of average 5 persons in an apartment of 110 square meters, while the physical structures do not accommodate the needs of disabled persons. Congestion is also on the streets, with 75% of the population indicating that they suffer from congested traffic roads that are not being improved by anyone, while West Jerusalem and the settlements in East Jerusalem have state-of-the-art roads.

East Jerusalem Palestinians are living on only 13% of the municipal land, while 87% of the land is designated for Israelis. The total land that comprises the Israeli municipality in East and West Jerusalem is 76 kilometers. The East Jerusalem Municipality used to be 6.5 kilometers in 1967. Israel annexed an additional 24 kilometers from the West Bank for "the benefit of the public," where settlements were built. There is additional to 52 kilometers in the East Jerusalem periphery where construction is now allowed by Palestinians.

Palestinians are living in 13 neighborhoods where their developmental needs can be targeted and addressed; namely in: Al Thuri, Old City, Sur Baher, Kafr Aqab, Sharafat, Um Tuba, Jabal Al Mukabber, Beir Owna, Silwan, Beit Safafa, Shu'fat, Al Sawahira Al Gharbiya, and Beit Hanina. Although they constitute 37% of the population in Jerusalem, and they pay municipal and income tax, the municipality spends 10% of its budget in the Palestinian neighborhoods.

No less than 80,000 Jerusalem Palestinians are living behind the Separation Wall that isolated eight Palestinian neighborhoods from the city, even though they are within Jerusalem's municipal boundaries as drawn by Israel in 1967. The Separation Wall fatally tears the social-economic fabric of Palestinian Jerusalem; and has led to a near-total halt in municipal services, development of physical and social infrastructures, and emergency medical and relief services in the isolated neighborhoods. The residents are living in no man's lands that are gradually turning into pockets of poverty and neglect, and they are required to go through checkpoints to enter their own city.

The data reveals a bleak picture of poverty among the Palestinian population in East Jerusalem. An alarming 75.4% of all Palestinian residents, and 70% of children, are living below the Israeli poverty line. Only 69% of the men and 26% of the women in the eastern

part of the city were working in 2021. An average Palestinian family spends 50% of its income on three items: food, energy, and clothing, while other needs are relegated to lesser priority. Extreme poverty is concentrated among sections of the Muslim population, particularly in the Old City.

The youth need particular attention, as those between the age of 15 and 29 are acutely marginalized economically and socially, and they need programmes that engage the youth with society. Approximately 30% of children are not enrolled in an educational framework. At the same time 43% of the existing classrooms in the official municipal education system are defined as inadequate and do not meet the requirements for attaining the rights of children and youth to "a good" education. In East Jerusalem, there is an immediate shortage of 1,938 classrooms, on top of the natural growth needs of the youth population.

While the tourism sector plays a most-crucial role in the economy of East Jerusalem, the sector has been hard hit due to three years of COVID-19 followed by the Gaza War. In East Jerusalem there are 45 incoming tourism offices, 13 hotels and guest houses, 298 tour guides, 296 tourist buses, and 350 souvenir shops. At least 60% of the East Jerusalem economy relies on the tourism sector, and includes direct and indirect tourism service providers. Tourism operators estimate that approximately, 7,000 Palestinians are working in various professions in the tourism sector.

In 1973, Israel's Gafni Commission decided that a demographic balance must be maintained at a ratio of 70% Israelis to 30% Palestinians in Jerusalem, and that Palestinians must never exceed this ratio. The social and economic hardship endured by Palestinians in Jerusalem is due to the effort by government agencies to keep the number under the pre-determined ratio. As per Israeli law since 1967, Palestinians were considered as permanent resident immigrants, and can therefore be evicted should they choose to live outside Jerusalem for an extended period of time.

The facts and figures about the demographics of East Jerusalem are useful from a developmental perspective, in that they help churches, governments as well as non-governmental organizations, and the United Nations, to ensure that the needs of Palestinians are addressed in the various sectors including economic opportunity, housing, and education. Building the community's resilience is vital for the protection of Jerusalem's multi-religious and multi-cultural identity. A harsh occupation has been imposed since 1967, and life became subject to a myriad of restrictions that impede the well-being of the city's Palestinian population and natural growth. Right now, power relations between the Israeli occupation and defenceless population renders the Palestinians in East Jerusalem unable to meet their own developmental needs. The international community can look at the demographic figures and make decisions in the various developmental sectors on the short-term. External help is vital, to pave the way for a political solution that ensures justice and dignity for all in Jerusalem over the long-term.



World Council of Churches



The World Council of Churches' Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel (WCC-EAPPI) was created in 2002, based on an appeal from local church leaders to create an international presence in the country. Since then, the programme provides a continuous presence of 25-30 Ecumenical Accompaniers (EAs), with a vision of just peace for all people in the Holy Land.

For three months, EAs accompany local communities, offering protective presence, collecting documentation, and witnessing daily struggles and hopes – be it for shepherds in the Jordan Valley, school children at risk of settler harassment, people passing through checkpoints in the separation barrier, or communities under threat of demolition.

The WCC-EAPPI works intentionally together with people of all faiths and no faith, in the conviction that God is God of all creation, and the source of all human efforts towards love, justice, and peace.

For contact details and more information, please visit: www.eappi.org

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