**Key issues**

**Barrier**
- 56 kilometers of the Barrier’s route is located within Bethlehem governorate. If completed as planned, the Barrier will separate Bethlehem’s rural hinterland from its urban center, with Western villages becoming Palestinian enclaves within the settlement bloc.

**Settlement expansion**
- The Etzion bloc (Gush Etzion) is one of the main settlement areas in the West Bank. Israeli settlements in the West Bank are illegal under international law. The transfer of an occupying power’s civilian population into a territory it occupies is prohibited under Article 49 of the Fourth Geneva convention.

**Land confiscation**
- Western Bethlehem has been subjected to some of the largest land appropriations in the West Bank by Israel. In August 2014, the Israeli authorities declared around 4,000 dunums as state land for settlement expansion. This follows an earlier seizure of nearly 1,000 dunums to retroactively ‘legalise’ an outpost.

**Settler violence/harrassment**
- From 2009 to November 2014, OCHA recorded 161 settler attacks in the Bethlehem area. Violations typically include instances of physical violence, verbal abuse, and the deprivation of private property by setting fire to land and trees. Israeli authorities persistently fail to prevent or reduce settler attacks, or to hold perpetrators accountable for their actions.

**Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection**

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**Western Bethlehem villages**

**2015**

**refugee communities in the ‘Gush Etzion’ settlement area**

**25,000+** Palestinians in 8 communities

**62,000+** Israeli settlers residing in over 15 settlements and outposts in areas west of Bethlehem

**67%** growth in settler population over last 10 years

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**Communities of particular concern to UNRWA**

**Al Walaja**
- Due to the incorporation of half of the village into the Israeli unilaterally-declared Jerusalem Municipality area, in contravention with international law, refugees* residing in the Jerusalem section of the village have been advised that they are residing there illegally and have been subjected to repeated home demolitions. Barrier construction and the declaration of village land as National Park threaten to further weaken Palestinian farmers’ access to their lands.

**Battir**
- In order to protect its 4,000-year-old agricultural terraces and Roman-era irrigation system against the construction of the Barrier, Battir reached out to UNESCO who granted to the terraces World Heritage status in June 2014. In January 2015, the Israeli High Court removed petitions against Barrier construction in Battir from its caseload, following a statement by the Israeli government that the Barrier in this area was no longer a priority.

**Wadi Fukin**
- Wadi Fukin faces the threat of becoming a Palestinian enclave, ‘sandwiched’ between the Green Line and the ultra-orthodox settlement Beitar Illit, the fastest expanding settlement in the West Bank. The recent confiscation of over a third of the village’s land effectively rules out development of the village and its use of this land for agriculture. The village’s land has long been subjected to regular overflow of Israeli settlement sewage.

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