



POLICY PAPER

CIVIL DEFENSE INFRASTRUCTURE DISPARITIES IN BEDOUIN COMMUNITIES IN THE NEGEV

SITUATION ASSESSMENT AND OPERATIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS

4 March 2026

Introduction

Civilian protection of the home front is a central strategic component of national resilience and the State's security, anchored in the basic contract between the State and its citizens. Since the attack of October 7, 2023 and until November 2024, more than 27,000 rockets, missiles, and unmanned aerial vehicles were launched toward Israel. The failure of protection has exacted a heavy and tangible human cost: at least 63 civilians were killed as a result of these launches, including 43 on the northern front and 20 on the southern front (State Comptroller, 2026). These figures do not include those killed as a result of later military engagements.

The absence of equal protection for Arab communities is not an isolated failure but rather an ongoing systemic failure. The widening protection disparities reflect not only socio-economic disparities, but also government policy. The failure to close protection gaps identified in the past (State Comptroller, 2026) stands out particularly in light of the intensity of the current threat and may indicate a retreat by the State from its most basic

duty. Physical protection is not merely an engineering need but also a normative and moral obligation, since without protection, the basic right to life cannot be ensured.

The absence of civil defense infrastructure in Bedouin Arab communities in the Negev is especially severe. This is reflected both in private protection (within homes) and in the public sphere, including protective infrastructure in educational institutions. Bedouin citizens paid a heavy price in October 2023 and afterwards due to the absence of adequate shelters and other defense protection solutions.

The State's Obligation

The right to life and bodily integrity is a principal constitutional right anchored in the Basic Law: Human Dignity and Liberty. In the *Eduardo Wasser v. Minister of Defense* (HCJ 8397/06) ruling, the Supreme Court stated that the State is not obligated to protect its citizens from every threat and may consider budgetary constraints and other factors related to risk management. However, in principle, the State has an obligation to provide a reasonable response to citizens who are concretely exposed to rocket fire.

In practice, an intolerable gap exists between the State's declared commitment to the safety of its citizens and its implementation. This policy creates what can be described as a "legal vacuum": constitutional rights exist on paper but are not translated into reality. The State often relies on budgetary, planning, and administrative arguments to evade its responsibility toward its citizens, creating a reality that effectively disregards human life.

Data Analysis: Protection Disparities (2018–2026)

Data on protection disparities show a strong correlation between levels of protection and socio-economic status as well as ethno-national identity. The State Comptroller's report (2026) presents a troubling picture: while well-established municipalities benefit from solid infrastructure, many local authorities in lower socio-economic clusters remain exposed.

Protection disparities are also related to the ethno-national identity of citizens: 46% of citizens in Arab society lack standard protection, compared to 26% in the general population (State Comptroller, 2018). These differences are also evident in communities located near conflict zones (within 9 km). In Jewish localities, the level of protection approaches 100%, while in Arab communities within the same distance, more than half of residents lack adequate protection.

Absence of Public Shelters

Bedouin communities in the Negev have extremely few public shelters. For example, in Rahat, a city of approximately 80,000 residents, located about 30 km from the Gaza Strip, there is not a single standard public shelter (State Comptroller, 2026). In comparison, Kiryat Gat (with a population of 80,000, and located approximately 22 km from the Gaza Strip) has over 100 public shelters (GovMaps). The absence of public shelters severely limits the

ability to maintain essential services during emergencies and increases the vulnerability of residents facing threats from missiles.

According to the Negev Coexistence Forum (2025), several established Bedouin towns have no public shelters at all, including Hura, Segev Shalom, Kuseife, Lakiya, Ar'ara (Negev), and Tel Sheva. This means that large populations remain without even the most basic protective infrastructure.

The situation is similarly severe in Bedouin regional council localities, which were recognized by the State after 2000. In Abu Talul (3,254 residents), there is only one public shelter, while in Tarabin al-Sana (1,460 residents), there are none.

Here too, nearby Jewish localities have significantly higher numbers of public shelters. These figures highlight an almost complete absence of public defense infrastructure in Bedouin communities and reveal a severe disparity between populations.

Absence of Protection in Private Homes

According to data from the Negev Coexistence Forum (2025), the percentage of residents without safe rooms in the seven long-established Bedouin towns ranges from about 30% in Segev Shalom to 66% in Lakiya. In the Bedouin regional council localities, the percentage ranges from 79% in Abu Krinat to 100% in some villages. In the unrecognized villages, there is virtually no private defense infrastructure at all.

The shortage of safe rooms is linked in part to development disparities reflected in the very slow pace of planning implementation and issuance of building permits. Planning barriers, development constraints, and the economic hardship faced by many residents result in limited availability of protection solutions and place residents' lives at risk.

Absence of Protection in Educational Institutions

Protection of educational institutions is a prerequisite for maintaining basic functioning during emergencies. Tens of thousands of students in Arab communities attend schools without adequate protection. The situation is particularly difficult in the Bedouin educational institutions in the Negev.

In several Bedouin regional councils, nearly half of the schools lack defensive protection infrastructure entirely. In other towns, a significant share of educational institutions remain unprotected.

According to data provided by the **Ministry of Education to the Knesset Research and Information Center (2024)**, as of November 2023:

- **48% of schools** in the regional councils **Al-Qasum and Neve Midbar** have **no protection at all**.
- In **Kuseife**, **18% of educational institutions** lack protection.

- In **Tel Sheva** and **Ar'ara**, **9% of institutions** lack protection.

Overall, **21% of educational institutions in recognized Bedouin towns have no protection**, and many others have **partial or inadequate protection**. The national average is **15%** (Yechimovich-Cohen, 2024).

During emergencies, schools and kindergartens often serve as shelters for families because no other protective infrastructure exists. However, numerous existing shelters have been converted into classrooms due to overcrowding, making them unusable as shelters in emergency situations.

Many shelters also suffer from serious infrastructure deficiencies, including a lack of ventilation, water supply, and accessibility for persons with disabilities.

Unrecognized Villages

Unrecognized Bedouin villages in the Negev are largely left without standard defense protection infrastructure. Areas corresponding to these villages are often classified in missile interception systems as “open areas,” which may reduce interception attempts and warning alerts.

The human cost has been significant. Several Bedouin citizens were killed by missile fire during recent escalations. Temporary protective structures deployed in these villages provide only minimal coverage relative to the needs of tens of thousands of residents.

Government Policy and Budgetary Constraints

Despite government resolutions aimed at reducing disparities affecting Arab communities, implementation has been slow. Budget cuts and freezing of funds have further limited the ability of local authorities to close protection gaps.

In addition, the closure of the emergency coordination center serving Arab communities, which was established after October 7, 2023, weakened coordination with national emergency authorities and reduced the flow of information to residents during emergencies.

Summary and Policy Recommendations

Civil defense infrastructure disparities in Bedouin communities in the Negev are not inevitable but rather the result of policy choices and flawed priorities. Civilian protection cannot be divided along social or ethnic lines. Abandoning part of the population ultimately weakens national resilience as a whole.

Urgent policy measures are required, including the rapid deployment of shelters and protective infrastructure in public buildings and villages, removal of planning barriers preventing the construction of safe rooms, expansion of warning systems, rehabilitation of existing shelters, reopening emergency coordination mechanisms, and strengthening local emergency response capacity.

Civilian protection is a fundamental component of the contract between the State and its citizens. Failure to ensure equal protection represents a systemic failure that requires immediate correction before further loss of life occurs.