



The Ministry of Education's Dumping Ground: School Conditions in the Unrecognized Villages

A Report on the Deficiencies, Hazards, and Safety Issues in Schools in Unrecognized Villages

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*"Anyone who walked around with me two weeks ago in Neve Midbar, in the Bedouin educational institutions, and saw what I saw there: after that visit I simply fell apart, because I could not believe my own eyes. I could not believe the conditions the students are placed in, small children, the way they study. The state of the whole compound. I am telling you, if I had to send my beloved granddaughter to a school like the one I saw, I would tell her, Gaia, stay with grandma, grandma is quitting her job and teaching you at home."*¹

Miri Navon, Director of the Southern District at the Ministry of Education, February 2026

Introduction

Approximately 300,000 Bedouin citizens live in the Negev. About 86,000 of them (more than a quarter) live in 35 villages that the state refuses to recognize or to regulate when it comes to planning or municipal services. These villages fall outside the jurisdiction of any local or regional authority. Many of them existed before the State of Israel was established; others were created in the 1950s, when the state forcibly moved Bedouin communities into a restricted area in the northeastern Negev known as the Siyag.

Following legal and public efforts, kindergartens and schools under the auspices of the Ministry of Education were established in some of these villages. This was done as part of the basic right of the villages' children to an education and as part of the implementation of the Compulsory Education Law, 5709-1949. There are 17 schools located in unrecognized villages, three of which are high schools, and more than 100 kindergartens. About 10,600 students in grades 1 through 12 attend the schools, and about 3,400 children aged 3 to 5 attend the kindergartens.² Many children from the unrecognized villages attend schools or kindergartens located in villages that are recognized, some because of a shortage of educational institutions in their local communities, and particularly because of the small number of high schools and the lack of special education schools in the unrecognized villages.

As a rule, educational institutions in Israel are operated by the local authority, which provides education services to the schools and kindergartens located within its jurisdiction. In the absence of a municipal authority, as in the case of unrecognized villages, responsibility for operating the educational institutions lies with the Ministry of Education. The Ministry, in turn, decided to contract out the responsibility for operating the schools and kindergartens in unrecognized villages. Consequently, two neighboring regional councils, Neve Midbar and Al-

¹Protocol no. 38 of the meeting of the Special Committee for Oversight of Barrier Removal Processes, p. 11 (February 17, 2026), available on the Knesset website.

²Ministry of Education response to a freedom of information request, July 13, 2026.

Kasum, and two private operators, ORT Israel and Sakhnin College, provide education services to unrecognized villages.

Because of years of neglect and budgetary disputes between the Ministry of Education and the regional councils, the poor physical condition of the schools in the unrecognized villages is one of the most conspicuous problems in the Bedouin education system. Yet there are no official findings and no orderly, accurate documentation of the scope and gravity of the deficiencies at the schools.

This report is based on the findings of professional, neutral safety audits that the Association for Civil Rights in Israel commissioned from an external company specializing in audits of this kind. After conducting site visits and forming its professional opinion, the company delivered reports on the condition of 11 schools located in unrecognized villages, nine elementary schools and two high schools.³ These schools are operated by the regional councils and the private operators, and are attended by approximately 7,200 students. All of the schools are recognized by the Ministry of Education and fall under its responsibility,⁴ and are supervised by the Director of the Southern District.⁵

The findings of the safety audits paint an appalling picture of students abandoned to harsh conditions unfit for learning at each of the audited schools. Black mold on the walls, restrooms without doors, ceilings and facilities in danger of collapse, sewage flooding, exposed electrical wires, and enormous quantities of scrap waste in the schoolyards are only a few examples of a reality in which every single aspect of the schools exists in a state of neglect, to the point of creating genuine safety and sanitation hazards. Despite the gravity of the situation, the real danger to the health and safety of the students is the fact that this is not be addressed, in spite of the fact that this is an ongoing failure and the issues are known to all of the relevant parties, including senior staff in the Ministry of Education. ☒

Before presenting the findings, this report will provide background information about the responsibilities of the Ministry of Education, the legal status of the schools in unrecognized villages, the state of the education system in Bedouin communities, and the main failures in the relationship between the Ministry of Education and the regional councils. The report will conclude with our demands to the Ministry of Education, the regional councils, and the private groups that operate the schools.

Background

³Some of the schools belong to two communities that are in regularization processes, Wadi al-Na'am and Rakhma. In practice, the extent of the neglect there, the complete absence of sound infrastructure, and the fact that they are not within the jurisdiction of any municipal authority make their condition and status closer to those of the unrecognized villages, and for convenience they are included with them under this heading.

⁴As noted, dozens of kindergartens also operate in the unrecognized villages. Most of them, like the schools, are in a state of extreme neglect and do not meet even the most minimal sanitary, hygiene, and safety standards. The audit findings on which this report is based, however, do not address the condition of the kindergartens.

⁵Regulation 8 of the State Education Regulations (Supervision Arrangements), 5717-1985.

The right to an education and the authorities' duty to ensure the safety of educational institutions

The right to an education has long been recognized as a human right under Israeli law, and it is a central component woven into the foundational values of Israel's constitutional system. In a series of rulings, the Court has fixed the right to education as a constitutional right, and has held that education is the most significant factor in shaping an individual's character, personality, and fate, and is essential to the realization of their abilities and talents within the personal autonomy afforded to them.⁶ Accordingly, the law imposes on both the state and the local authorities a duty to ensure free compulsory education and access to education for students from the age of three until the completion of twelfth grade, regardless of their race, ethnicity, religion, place of residence, or socioeconomic status.☒ This carries additional weight when it comes to state education, whose objectives include providing equal opportunities for every student and striving for social justice.☒

The duty of the Ministry of Education to ensure an appropriate and equal education for all students also encompasses the duty to ensure that schools and kindergartens are safe to use: a school must comply with safety and sanitation standards as a condition for receiving a license.☒ Ministry of Education procedures require that the local authority conduct an annual inspection of the facilities and infrastructure at every educational institution ahead of the opening of the school year with a safety consultant for educational institutions who appears on the list of safety auditors approved by the Ministry of Education. Once the findings are received, the local authority is required to repair any deficiencies and hazards indicated and to submit a confirmation of the institution's readiness to the Minister of Education.⁷ The Ministry of Education also conducts its own safety audits of educational institutions at least once every five years for each institution.⁸ In the past, knowledge of the existence of dangerous hazards at a school, without confirmation that they had indeed been repaired, has even led to the imposition of tort liability on officials at the Ministry of Education.⁹

The state of the Bedouin education system

The education system in the Bedouin communities in general, and in the unrecognized villages in particular, is among the worst and most neglected in the country. Bedouin students in unrecognized villages have extremely limited access to quality educational services close to their homes, both because of a shortage of educational institutions and of available places at existing institutions, and because of transportation barriers, including the refusal to recognize their eligibility for school transportation, deficient public transportation in the area, and unpaved roads that make safe travel difficult. Additionally, students must contend with

⁶H CJ 4805/07 Israel Religious Action Center v. Ministry of Education, para. 52 of the opinion of Justice Procaccia (July 27, 2018); H CJ 5373/08 Abu Labdeh v. Minister of Education (February 6, 2011); H CJ 7426/08 Tebeka, Advocacy for Equality and Justice for Ethiopian Israelis v. Minister of Education (August 31, 2010); H CJ 3752/10 Rubinstein v. The Knesset (September 17, 2014); H CJ 1554/95 Shocharei GILAT Association v. Minister of Education, Culture and Sport (July 11, 1996).

⁷Director General's Circular no. 468, "Safety arrangements in educational institutions" (February 2, 2026).

⁸Sample safety audits, on the [Ministry of Education website](#) (Heb).

⁹CA 7008/09 Abd al-Rahim v. Abd al-Qader (September 7, 2010).

extremely limited access to infrastructure such as electricity, water, sewage systems, internet, and basic equipment, all of which are essential to the operation of a safe and functioning educational institution and to studying at home.

This has significant consequences for the achievements and the future of Bedouin students. The gaps begin in early childhood, when a considerable proportion of the children are not integrated into the education system at all: in the 2022-2023 school year, 5,045 kindergarten-age children in Bedouin society were not placed in kindergartens, including compulsory pre-kindergarten. These figures mean that one in every six Bedouin children aged three to five (about 17%) does not attend kindergarten. This is in stark contrast to the Jewish population, where the rate of children attending kindergarten is close to 100%. The shortage is even more pronounced among the children of unrecognized villages, who make up only 4.1% of the Bedouin children enrolled in kindergarten, even though they make up 28% of the total Bedouin population.☒

Many studies indicate that children's absence from the education system is liable to create deficits and gaps, which later manifest in high dropout figures, low rates of eligibility for a matriculation certificate, and lower income.¹⁰ Indeed, in the 2021 school year one in every six (17%) Bedouin youth in the south aged 16 to 17 was not enrolled in any educational framework, compared with only about 3% of Jewish and Arab youth in the same age group. It was further found that the dropout rate among Bedouin students stood at 3.5%, compared with 1.3% among Jewish students.☒

The differences between the populations in various aspects of education are also evident in the rate of eligibility for a matriculation certificate. According to Ministry of Education data for the 2021 school year, the rate of eligibility for a matriculation certificate in the Jewish population stood at 82.5%, in the general Arab population (excluding East Jerusalem) at 63.9%, and among the Druze at 69.4%. In contrast, only 52.1% of students in the Bedouin population completed that school year eligible for a matriculation certificate.¹¹

Added to this is an acute shortage of protected spaces for rocket and missile attacks in the unrecognized villages in general and in the schools in particular, which has become especially critical over the past three years. The lack of shelters has cost children their lives, and has prevented their access to education in times of war.☒ These figures illustrate the structural and persistent gaps between the populations and the discrimination against the Bedouin education system; against this background, the children's challenges only intensify, even before the poor conditions in which they are required to study are taken into account.

The legal status of schools in unrecognized villages

As noted in the introduction, schools in Israel are operated by the local authority, which provides education services to the schools and kindergartens located within its jurisdiction. These services include the employment of non-teaching personnel, including kindergarten aides and school assistants, as well as security, cleaning, and administrative staff. Other services they

¹⁰Taub Center for Social Policy Studies in Israel, *Inequality in Education in Israel* (2014).

¹¹Ministry of Education, *A picture of the state of the education system, school year 5781* (2021).

provide include registration for educational institutions, as well as maintenance and repair services (hereinafter jointly: education services). In the absence of a local authority, as in unrecognized villages, the duty to provide education services falls to the Ministry of Education,¹² which is also entitled to contract with an external body to provide these services. Consequently, education services at most of the schools in unrecognized villages are provided by the neighboring regional councils, the Neve Midbar Regional Council and the Al-Kasom Regional Council (hereinafter jointly: the councils or the regional councils), as well as by the Arad Municipality. The three high schools are also operated by private groups.

The provision of education services by the councils originates in an agreement signed in 2005 by the Abu Basma Regional Council and the Ministry of Education, under which Abu Basma would provide education services to Bedouin residents in the Negev, including the unrecognized villages.¹³ In 2012 the Minister of the Interior decided to split the Abu Basma Regional Council into two regional councils: the Al-Kasom Regional Council and the Neve Midbar Regional Council.¹⁴ From then until today, these two councils have continued to provide education services in the unrecognized villages. They do so not in their capacity as a local authority, but in their capacity as contractors of the Ministry of Education: i.e the councils provide education services to students of recognized communities within their jurisdiction, like any other council, while also providing education services to the thousands of students who live in unrecognized villages as contractors on behalf of the Ministry of Education. Some of the students in unrecognized villages are educated in kindergartens and schools located in unrecognized villages, and some are educated at educational institutions in recognized communities within the councils' jurisdiction or in other recognized communities.

In recent years, the contracting between the Ministry of Education and the councils has been carried out through a public call for proposals issued by the Ministry of Education for the operation of the schools in the unrecognized villages, to which the regional councils respond. Under the agreement between the councils and the Ministry of Education, the Ministry undertakes to fund the components required to operate these schools and to reimburse the councils for their expenses. Unlike most schools in the country, many educational institutions in the unrecognized villages have no sewage, water, or electricity infrastructure, and some run on generators. Because these are villages without a local government, there are also no waste collection services or other sanitation services, which are essential to safeguarding children's safety and health. Accordingly, the education services the councils provide extend also to

¹²From the [court's decision of April 28, 2026 in AP 37413-01-26](#) (Heb): "[...] it is not disputed that education services must be provided to the petitioning children under the law, since responsibility for this matter is imposed by the state, and that too is not disputed".

¹³State Comptroller, Provision of services and development of infrastructure: the Abu Basma Regional Council, p. 731 (2011).

¹⁴See p. 3 of the [state's response of June 9, 2026 in AP 37413-01-26](#) (Heb), on the website of the Association for Civil Rights in Israel.

supplying diesel fuel for the schools' generators, removing waste, pumping the accumulated sewage, and pruning vegetation.¹⁵

Today, Neve Midbar and Al-Kasom jointly operate 13 schools in unrecognized villages in the Negev: 11 elementary and junior high schools and two high schools. Of these, Neve Midbar operates 11 schools, while Al-Kasom operates only two. The two high schools are also operated by private groups (ORT Israel and Sakhnin College), but to the best of our knowledge the councils are also partners in providing education services at these high schools.¹⁶ In total, in the 2025-2026 school year about 7,900 children in grades 1 through 12 attended these schools.¹⁷ These are the institutions that form the basis of this report.

Key failures in the management of the educational institutions and in the relationship between the Ministry of Education and the regional councils

The dire situation presented in this report points to two key failures in the way the schools in unrecognized villages are managed: first, it appears that the contracting between the Ministry of Education and the councils does not adequately regulate the division of responsibility and funding, since disputes continually arise over material details, among them the scope of the budgets and the responsibility borne by each of the parties. Second, the Ministry of Education does not adequately fulfill its responsibility as the central, professional government body entrusted with the education system and with the education of children of compulsory school age: despite the powers vested in it, the Ministry tends to shirk its responsibility in situations of crisis and does not make sufficient use of its powers to ensure the provision of education services. To illustrate these failures, below are several cases from recent years:

Last year a petition was filed on behalf of 15 kindergarten-age children, demanding that the Director of the Southern District at the Ministry of Education and the Al-Kasom Regional Council act immediately to resume the operation of a kindergarten located in an unrecognized village. The disagreements between the Ministry and the regional council led to the closure of the kindergarten in the middle of the school year, leaving 35 children aged 3 to 5 without an educational framework for close to six months, without any practical alternatives being offered

¹⁵See, for example, a Ministry of Education [call for proposals](#) (Heb) for the provision of education services in the unrecognized villages and the components it funds: 'Funding for local authorities adjacent to the Beersheba-Arad and Beersheba-Dimona routes that provide education services to the children of the neighboring Bedouin diaspora, 5787'.

¹⁶With respect to the high schools, the division of roles among the private bodies, the regional councils, and the Ministry of Education is fairly vague, and it is evident that the bodies themselves are not certain how their role is defined. For example, until recently the Neve Midbar Regional Council routinely provided maintenance and sanitation services to Wadi al-Na'am High School, while Sakhnin College was responsible for operating the school's educational and logistical services. Several months ago, however, the council ceased providing these services, arguing that it had been providing them without a contractual arrangement with the Ministry of Education and without receiving reimbursement. The failure to provide services at the high school quickly led to sewage flooding, accumulation of waste, and power outages, and after the Association approached the relevant parties on the matter, Sakhnin College announced that for the time being, and beyond its strict obligation, it had taken upon itself the funding and provision of the required maintenance services. The Ministry of Education did not respond. To review the Association's appeal and the response received, see the [website of the Association for Civil Rights in Israel](#) (Heb).

¹⁷Ministry of Education response to a freedom of information request, March 15, 2026.

to their families. The court compelled the respondents to reach agreements and to reopen the kindergarten, and it continues to operate to this day.¹⁸

In another case, a petition was filed against the Ministry of Education and the Neve Midbar Regional Council after budgetary disputes between them led to the shutdown of the school transportation system in the middle of the school year. This transportation system served more than 20,000 students, and its shutdown left them at home for many months. As a result, the Ministry of Education decided to remove the council's authority to operate the transportation system and to enter into an agreement with an external company.¹⁹

This past January, the Association for Civil Rights in Israel petitioned the District Court after education services in all of the unrecognized villages were halted midyear at the initiative of the Neve Midbar Regional Council because of an ongoing budgetary dispute between the council and the Ministry of Education. The council argued that the cessation in the provision of services had been forced upon it because the Ministry of Education was not meeting its budgetary commitments and was undermining its ability to make use of the existing education budgets. The Neve Midbar Regional Council further argued that the conduct of the Ministry of Education is driving the council into deep deficits, and that because it is a poor council that provides municipal services not only to its own residents but also to tens of thousands of residents of unrecognized villages, it is on the brink of financial collapse and cannot provide the necessary education services without a change in the funding provided by the Ministry of Education. The Ministry of Education, for its part, argued that the council was attempting to apply improper pressure on it in order to obtain additional budgets, and maintained that the Ministry provides reimbursement for every expense duly reported to it by the council, and even approves exceptional expenses.²⁰

The court granted ACRI's request and issued an interim order requiring the Ministry of Education and the Neve Midbar Regional Council to continue providing education services to the children of unrecognized villages without interruption, and to work toward reaching an agreement in order to ensure the continued regular provision of education services through the end of the school year. Moreover, in light of the major sanitation, maintenance, and safety deficiencies at the educational institutions, the court ordered the Ministry of Education and the regional council to urgently address all issues relating to waste removal, sewage pumping, and faulty air conditioners, since the failure to address these matters endangers students' health.✕

Nearly annually, parents' committees and civil society organizations are forced to turn to the courts because of an urgent crisis originating in a financial dispute between the Ministry of

¹⁸AP (Beersheba) 78735-03-25 John Doe (a minor) v. Director of the Southern District. For further information, see the [website of the Association for Civil Rights in Israel](#) (Heb). The petition was filed by the Association for Civil Rights in Israel, the Regional Council for the Unrecognized Villages (Al-Siraj Fund Ltd.), and 15 children.

¹⁹AP (Beersheba) 14812-11-23 Abu Quraynat v. Ministry of Education. For further information, see the [website of the Association for Civil Rights in Israel](#) (Heb). The petition was filed by the Association for Civil Rights in Israel, the Regional Council for the Unrecognized Villages (Al-Siraj Fund Ltd.), the Negev Coexistence Forum for Civil Equality, the Atid Bamidbar association, parents' committees, and parents.

²⁰See the [responses of the state and of the council in AP \(Beersheba\) 37413-01-26 Abu Quraynat v. Director of the Southern District](#) (Heb), on the website of the Association for Civil Rights in Israel.

Education and one of the two councils with which it contracted to provide education services to the children of unrecognized villages. In most cases the dispute has far-reaching consequences for the ability of students to receive a proper education, or any education at all. The disputes between the Ministry of Education and the councils change from case to case, but the broader story is that a crisis will erupt at the educational institutions in the unrecognized villages, the regional councils or the parents' committees shut down classes, and the Ministry of Education stands idly by and takes no immediate, active measures to ensure the students' welfare or educational access.²¹ The Ministry of Education consistently places the responsibility for the schools in unrecognized villages on the councils, and regards itself as responsible only for transferring budgets, even though the councils do not provide adequate services.☒

Consequently, the condition of the schools deteriorates, and the education of thousands of Bedouin children, which is insufficient to begin with and suffers from considerable neglect, is harmed still further. The students are the ones affected by the disputes between the authorities, and are forced to spend long hours at educational institutions that pose physical and safety hazards, in conditions that sometimes render learning impossible. Petitions to the court have often been the only means of compelling the Ministry of Education to act, to engage with the councils, and to find even a temporary solution.

In order to underscore the scope and gravity of the existing deficiencies, below are findings from safety and sanitation audits conducted at 11 schools in the unrecognized villages in August 2026.

The audit

The audits were conducted by an external and ²²company that specializes in safety audits at educational institutions and is certified to conduct such audits, in accordance with the criteria and standards set by the Ministry of Education.²³ According to the audit reports the company submitted to ACRI, "the findings were identified by comparing the existing situation with the required standards set out in the guidance lists for conducting an audit, which are also held by the local authorities and by the district safety officers".

The audits were commissioned by the Association for Civil Rights in Israel, and the inspection was carried out by a safety consultant on behalf of the company, in coordination with the parents' committees of the various schools. It is important to emphasize that the Association for Civil Rights in Israel did not accompany the tours of the schools and did not intervene in the visits, in the findings, or in the reports issued; the findings below reflect the deficiencies identified by the company.

²¹See also similar cases: [a petition to open the school year in the Al-Kasom Regional Council \(September 2, 2019\)](#) (Heb); [a petition to renew education services for the children of the unrecognized villages \(November 11, 2019\)](#) (Heb).

²³See the Ministry of Education procedure: [Guidance list for conducting an audit at a school, kindergarten, boarding school, and youth village](#) (Heb) (updated to September 2025).

The audits were conducted at 11 schools in unrecognized villages, listed in the table below, on August 9 and 10, 2026:

School name	School ID number	School type	Community	No. of students	Operator	Date of audit
Al-Amal	618462	Elementary	Al-Sayyid	1,010	Al-Kasom	August 9, 2026
Tel Arad	618116	Elementary	Tel Arad	398	Al-Kasom	August 9, 2026
Abu Quraynat A	618033	Elementary	The unrecognized part of Abu Quraynat	729	Neve Midbar	August 9, 2026
Bir al-Mashash	618785	Elementary	Bir al-Mashash	495	Neve Midbar	August 9, 2026
Abu Quweider Elementary School	618603	Elementary	Abu Quweider	1,205	Neve Midbar	August 9, 2026
ORT Abu Quweider High School	761643	Secondary	Abu Quweider	367	ORT Israel	August 9, 2026
Rakhma	632786	Elementary	Rakhma	379	Neve Midbar	August 10, 2026
Al-Azazma A	618702	Elementary	Wadi al-Na'am	862	Neve Midbar	August 10, 2026
Al-Azazma B	618108	Elementary	Wadi al-Na'am	1,171	Neve Midbar	August 10, 2026
Al-Azazma C	618892	Elementary	Wadi al-Na'am	202	Neve Midbar	August 10, 2026
Wadi al-Na'am High School	785303	Secondary	Wadi al-Na'am	384	Sakhnin College	August 10, 2026

The areas covered by the audits included:

- Access routes to the institution.
- The institution's infrastructure, including sewage, water, and electricity.
- Electrical safety.
- Sanitation, hygiene, and drinking water.
- The condition of the buildings and of the schoolyards, including windows, fencing, flooring, and vegetation.
- The condition of the equipment, the furniture, and the sports and play facilities.
- Fixed and mobile hazards at the institution.
- Emergency preparedness.

The audit findings were divided into three main levels of treatment priority:

- Priority 0: a hazard that requires immediate removal.
- Priority 1: there exists a large gap between the finding and safety requirements. The time until the deficiency is actually repaired will be determined by the local authority.

- Priority 2: there is a small to moderate gap between the finding and safety requirements. The time until the deficiency is actually repaired will be determined by the local authority.

The audit findings

The findings presented below constitute only a partial survey of the audit results. The findings are divided into four categories: safety on the school grounds; structure, infrastructure, and equipment; sanitation and hygiene; and emergency preparedness.

Safety on the school grounds

Access routes to the school, parking, and transportation

At 10 of the 11 schools audited there are deficiencies in the students' access routes to the school, which expose them to the danger of being run over. At the Abu Quraynat school, for example, the students' pedestrian access route borders lanes designated for vehicles without a continuous and clear separation demarcating them. At the Tel Arad school, the vehicle parking area is unmarked and located inside the schoolyard, and scrap and abandoned vehicles have accumulated in the bus parking and waiting area. At Wadi al-Na'am High School it was found that there is no safety fence or guardrail between the road and the classroom compound, so that there is a real danger of vehicles veering off the road toward the school.

Similarly, at 10 of the 11 schools surveyed it was found that the area around the entrance and the area for dropping off and picking up students lack organized, shaded waiting areas, which forces the students to wait for long periods under the scorching sun, exposing them to the dangers of dehydration and heat stress. At Wadi al-Na'am High School, reaching the school involves walking a long and isolated route, which also includes no shading.

At 8 of the schools audited it was found that vehicles travel on unpaved gravel surfaces. According to the reports, travel on gravel surfaces raises heavy dust that poses a danger of respiratory illness; at 7 schools with the same gravel surfaces, the surfaces are not properly leveled and maintained and include pits and depressions that create risks of tripping, falling, and injury.



The classroom compound at Wadi al-Na'am High School, exposed to the road



Parking and drop-off area at Bir al-Mashash

Trash and vegetation in the schoolyard

10 of the 11 schools have trash heaps in the schoolyard, including old and broken furniture, construction materials, scrap, and garbage; in some cases, these are veritable mountains of garbage. This poses an enormous health and safety danger to the students, since the trash includes items that are sharp, rusted, or foul-smelling; attracts pests; and provides fertile ground for the proliferation of harmful bacteria. In going out into the playground, the children risk injury, exposure to sanitation hazards, and harm to their health and safety.

At the Abu Quweider Elementary School a notable and extensive accumulation of construction detritus, concrete fragments, ceramic tiles, and metal parts was found, which the report classified as a Priority 0 hazard, a safety hazard requiring immediate removal. In the Abu Quweider schoolyard an additional Priority 0 hazard was documented: an active and unfenced construction and renovation area within the yard, containing openings, ladders, and tools accessible to the students.

At 9 of the 11 schools surveyed, wild, neglected, and thorny vegetation was found across an extensive area, including vegetation with protruding branches, which creates a danger of scratches, cuts, and injury, and also serves to attract pests and the resultant sanitation hazards. 5 schools have paths, passageways, and access routes blocked by vegetation and garbage, which impede movement and prevent students from passing safely, particularly in an emergency.

The trash situation is particularly dangerous at several schools. Al-Azazma A contains a major fire hazard due to an accumulation of dry pruning and thorns that constitute "extremely

dangerous combustible material"²⁴, alongside broken asbestos panels discarded in the yard that pose a danger of releasing hazardous particles into the air. At Al-Azazma B, an extensive area of ground was documented as being entirely covered with enormous quantities of plastic bags, food packaging, and refuse, alongside paths blocked with wood leavings and cardboard, described as a "fire load trapped between two portable structures"²⁵ that threatens to trap fire and smoke. At Abu Quweider High School the main pedestrian path between the buildings is completely blocked by piles of concrete blocks, sheet metal, and a heavy piece of engineering machinery, alongside a waste removal container loaded beyond its capacity.



The schoolyard at Abu Quweider Elementary School



The schoolyard at Al-Amal

Sports fields and facilities

The audit found that 8 of the 11 schools had a shortage of safe and properly-organized sports and recreational facilities, in addition to sports fields exposed to direct sunlight, without any shade. The facilities in use at 6 schools did not undergo an annual periodic inspection, nor did they have a valid safety certificate attesting to their stability, raising concerns that they will overturn or collapse during use or when struck by a ball.

Sports facilities at 5 schools may pose a danger to the students at play and that do not follow the standards set by the Ministry of Education. At Tel Arad, non-standard sports facilities were found located at the edge of the road. At two other schools, including Abu Quraynat, it was found that the surface of the field is not sound or conducive to playing safely: it is worn, cracked, and dilapidated, and includes pits, cracks, and accumulations of sand and dirt that create risks of slipping and tripping. In the sports hall at Abu Quweider Elementary School, the ceiling contains

²⁴Safety audit at Al-Azazma A, p. 3.

²⁵Safety audit at Al-Azazma B, p. 4.

acoustic boards and panels that are coming apart and hanging and tilting downward, which are liable to fall onto the students.



Boards and panels about to fall in the sports hall at Abu Quweider Elementary School



A field covered in sand, Abu Quraynat

Shading

At 8 of the 11 schools a significant shortage of shaded areas was documented in the yards and open spaces, with extensive parts of the yard and activity areas exposed to direct sunlight, without adequate shade relative to the size of the areas and the number of students. At all eight of the schools the sports field is entirely unshaded and exposed to the elements.

The lack of shade poses a danger of dehydration and severe heat stress to the students and the staff during time spent and activity outdoors, particularly in the extreme climate and heat conditions that characterize the Negev region. The lack of shade also reduces and limits the possibility of safe and continuous use of the outdoor spaces, which deprives the students of suitable areas for play, rest, physical activity, and educational and social activities during the school day.



Playgrounds exposed to the sun, without shading, at Bir al-Mashash and at Al-Amal

The school fence

At 8 of the 11 schools surveyed it was found that the fence surrounding the school grounds is damaged, unstable, and inconsistent, such that it does not create a safety zone surrounding the school, as required of an educational institution.

At some of the schools, parts of the fences could easily be moved, uprooted, and breached. At Al-Azazma B, for example, open, loose, and disintegrating sections of the fence were documented, which were covered with bamboo in an improvised manner, creating wide breaches in the fence. This impairs the ability of staff to supervise the students and to maintain control over the entry and exit of those present. There is no way to protect them from strangers or from animals, which can easily enter the compound, thereby undermining the students' sense of safety.

Additionally, some of the fences have sharp edges, protrusions, and rusted sections within reach of students. The fences thus become a significant safety hazard that risks cuts, puncture wounds, entanglement, and injury, particularly during play and climbing. At Al-Azazma A, a fence with sharp, rusted metal edges protruding directly into the students' walking route was reported. At Abu Quweider High School, several fencing deficiencies were found, including a torn and bent chain-link fence with sharp and dangerous edges positioned in front of the electrical cabinet.



A disintegrating fence at Al-Azazma
A



A breach in the fence at Al-Azazma B



A chain-link fence adjacent to an
electrical cabinet at Abu Quweider
High School

Structure, infrastructure, and equipment

Sewage

At all 11 schools there is no connection to a central sewage system: the wastewater is removed by means of an old cesspool that does not adequately meet the needs of the schools. Signs of leakage and wastewater overflow were found at all of the schools during the inspections. None of the cesspools are fenced, locked, or marked, and there are risks that the cover will collapse and someone will fall into the pit, or of exposure to sanitation hazards, wastewater, odors, pests, and illness.

According to the reports from the audits, many of the cesspools give off a strong stench that makes it difficult for students to remain in the classroom. At some of the schools the cesspools are broken or old. The cesspools fill up quickly and therefore overflow every few days; over the years the sewage flooding has worsened at some of the schools because of significant delays in the frequency of sewage pumping.



An open cesspool at the Bir al-Mashash school

Electricity supply and electrical safety

At 5 of the 11 schools there is no connection to electricity infrastructure, and electricity is provided by a generator. At 4 of the schools the generator is not properly insulated and separated from the students, and there is no adequate demarcation or warning signage. The health and safety risk this entails must be emphasized: generators emit hazardous gases, intense noise, and non-ionizing radiation, which are liable to cause health issues and to aggravate chronic illness. They also expose those around them to safety risks, including burns, electrocution, and injuries.☒ Their proximity to the students, without any proper barriers, aggravates these risks.

At the Al-Azazma A school, the use of the generator carries attendant environmental damage: it was found that in the vicinity of the generator there is "acute soil contamination and massive leakage of fuels and oils directly onto the ground and onto the wood and plastic surfaces scattered around the generator's open installation".²⁶

It should further be noted that a connection to a generator depends on a regular supply of diesel fuel from the schools' operator. A delay in the diesel supply, as has occurred many times in recent years in the unrecognized villages, disrupts the school's ability to function and at times shuts it down entirely. As stated in the reports, "a situation in which basic infrastructure essential to the operation of the educational institution depends on a generator and on the availability of fuel, alongside the safety and noise hazards attendant on its operation, undermines the conditions of safety and of remaining at the institution and the ability to maintain a continuous, equal, and sound study routine".☒

At 6 of the 11 schools there are numerous hazards that pose an immediate danger of electrocution, such as exposed electrical wires and cables outside their protective conduits or within the students' reach. At 5 schools, open and exposed electrical panels or cabinets were found, without an internal protective cover and without suitable locks, which allow children to touch electrical components with their bare hands and constitute a danger of electrocution, a danger of contact with water or moisture, and a serious fire hazard. Likewise, at 3 schools, damaged electrical outlets or switches were documented that are not fixed in place, or that are detached from the wall and protrude outward.

Two electrical hazards were classified in the reports as Priority 0 hazards, to be addressed immediately in order to prevent injury. The first is an unlocked electrical panel at Abu Quweider Elementary School located within the yard, open with exposed elements; the second is exposed electrical panels at Al-Azazma B that do not have sealing or an internal cover panel, which increase the risk that any spark or short circuit would immediately ignite the cladding of the portable wall and cause a rapid fire that could trap the students.

Additional deficiencies in the electrical installations were found at the Rakhma school, where the external electrical cabinet is located at a relatively low height and its doors are wide open without any internal plastic panel; at Bir al-Mashash, where improvised and unprofessional use of adhesive tape around damaged outlets, switches, and junction boxes in the classrooms and

²⁶Safety audit at Al-Azazma A, p. 13.

close to the air conditioners was documented; and at Wadi al-Na'am High School, where electrical outlet boxes were found that had detached from the wall and protrude outward dangerously. At Al-Azazma A, a tall wooden pole that serves as communications infrastructure and carries taut communications cables was found leaning over the building at a sharp and dangerous angle and in danger of imminent collapse.



A communications pole in danger of imminent collapse
at Al-Azazma A



An exposed electrical cabinet, Abu Quweider
Elementary School

Deficiencies in the buildings

At 8 of the 11 audited schools, serious deficiencies were found in the buildings, including broken drywall, collapsing ceilings, shattered ceramic tiles, damp, mold, and broken windows. According to the reports, advanced physical wear and tear is evident at the schools in the portable structures, many of which are decades old. As a result, in many of the classrooms entire rows of ceramic tiles have shattered or cracked, some became sunken inward and created pits that expose the underlying sand and concrete, and in some cases sharp, jagged tile fragments have been left. All of these place the students in danger of injury.



A ceiling in danger of collapse at Al-Azazma B



Black mold at Abu Quweider High School

In some cases, the walls and ceilings of the aging buildings have warped, peeled, and even developed actual holes; at one of the schools, the drywall panels have begun to collapse. At two schools, torn and crumbling wall carpeting was reported, which, because the material is flammable, creates "an unsafe environment that invites fires or injuries".²⁷ In the case of Tel Arad, "the age of the building makes daily maintenance difficult" and "the material of the building is fatiguing and suffering natural wear".²⁸

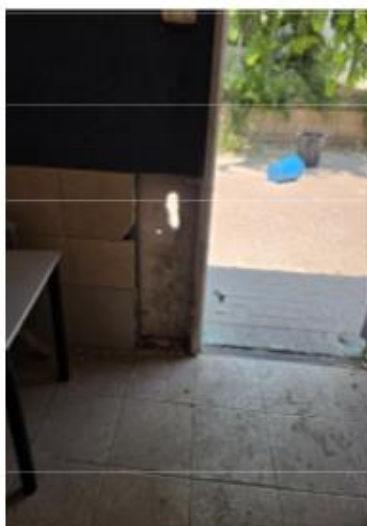
Broken, shattered, or defective windows were also documented at 8 schools because of the failure to use shatterproof glass as required in order to protect the students from pests and from the elements. At 6 schools, hazards from damp or mold were documented, including black mold, corrosion, and damp resulting from water coming in through the roof.

²⁷Safety audit at Al-Azazma A, p. 17.

²⁸Safety audit at Tel Arad, p. 17.



A shattered window at Al-Azazma A



A hole in the wall at Al-Azazma B



Crumbling wall cladding at Tel Arad

Classroom furniture and equipment

At 7 of the 11 schools, defective or broken items of furniture or equipment were documented, including tables, chairs, and whiteboards, many of them with loose, protruding, sharp, or broken parts. Use of furniture or equipment in such poor conditions constitutes a safety hazard, exposing the students to dangers of injury, falling, or collisions during routine use and movement in the classroom. It further emerged that some of the equipment is not safe and cannot serve the children in their studies.

At all of these schools except one, numerous cabinets were reported to not be properly fixed to the wall. According to the reports, the cabinets are in danger of overturning, since "tall, narrow cabinets of this kind tend to lose stability easily and to collapse forward onto the desks, causing very serious injury to the students sitting there".²⁹



²⁹Safety audit at Rakhma, p. 17.

A broken cabinet not fixed to the wall at Al-Amal

A desk at Rakhma

A desk at Bir al-Mashash

Air conditioning systems

Faulty and improperly-maintained air conditioners were documented at 6 schools. According to the reports, many of the air conditioners are not in working order, and some also generate considerable noise or cause leaks. It was further found that under the extreme weather conditions that characterize the Negev, the systems do not provide adequate climate control and do not cool or heat the classroom as required. As a result, the students and the staff are forced to spend many hours in scorching hot or freezing classrooms, which impairs their ability to concentrate and to remain at the institution. It harms students' health, and increases their risk of illness.



Broken air conditioners in classrooms at Al-Azazma B

Sanitation and hygiene

Restrooms

The findings regarding the restrooms paint a particularly harsh picture: at 10 of the 11 schools, serious deficiencies were found: missing or broken doors, damaged cisterns and flushing mechanisms, toilets without a seat, defective sinks and faucets, a shortage of paper and soap dispensers, exposed plumbing, damp, and filth.

Additionally, the restroom stalls do not afford students even the most basic privacy: at 7 of the 11 schools there are broken doors and partitions, and in many cases there is no restroom door at all. In some of the restroom stalls, the windows do not provide adequate privacy and protection: for example, at Al-Azazma C the windows in the restroom are entirely open, with no screening or glass.

Defective sinks or toilets were reported, at 7 schools, including toilets in which the water cannot be flushed, broken toilet bowls, and sinks without faucets or without a water connection at the time of the audit. At the Al-Amal and Tel Arad schools an acute shortage of restroom stalls was

reported: there were only three stalls for girls and three stalls for boys were at each, which is not sufficient for the number of students attending the school.

At the Al-Azazma B school old squat toilets are in use: "the toilets were found to be very dirty and neglected, and the standing surface around them worn and contaminated. In educational institutions this type of facility does not meet standards of hygiene and accessibility, and it creates a serious sanitation hazard. Danger of illness".³⁰

The dire condition of the restrooms at the ten schools, and the presence of a large number of deficiencies in a single room, endangers students' health. The report noted of the Al-Azazma A school: "The combined neglect of broken toilets, absence of faucets, absence of doors, stench and damp in the walls creates a passively contaminated environment. Children avoid using the sanitary facilities because there is no privacy. Children forced to use such facilities are at the highest risk of contracting bacteria, parasites, and skin diseases and infections".



Sinks without a faucet at Al-Azazma
A



Squat toilets at Al-Azazma B



Restroom stalls at Abu Quraynat

Drinking facilities

At 10 of the 11 schools there are not enough drinking fountains supplying cold drinking water relative to the number of students at the schools, and the existing fountains are in poor condition. At Abu Quweider Elementary School, for example, it was reported that there are only three drinking fountains, even though about 1,200 students attend the school: i.e one drinking fountain for every 400 students. At the time of the audit, the drinking fountains were not working and did not dispense water. At the Abu Quraynat school there is an acute shortage of drinking fountains, as well as drinking foundains that are entirely unusable.

³⁰Safety audit at Al-Azazma B, p. 17.

A scarcity of functioning drinking fountains raises the risk of illness and of exposure to sanitation hazards. It also increases the risk of dehydration and heat stress, particularly in the climate and heat conditions that characterize summer in the Negev.



A drinking facility at the Abu Quraynat school

Emergency preparedness

Protected spaces

None of the 11 schools had an adequate protected space on the school grounds. There are portable protection units in the villages themselves, outside the school grounds, but these are intended to serve the entire community living in the village, cannot accommodate all the students and staff, and in most cases there are no more than two. Not infrequently, the access routes to the portable protection units are also dangerous and difficult to reach in an emergency: at Al-Azazma C, for example, the area in front of the protection units is made of sandy soil, full of small stones and loose gravel, which poses a danger of tripping, falling, and injury to students hurrying to take shelter.

As stated in the reports, "this situation creates a substantial gap in the protection of the students and the staff during emergency events, and does not ensure, for all those present at the institution, available, safe, and controlled access to a standard protected space within the required time for taking shelter. The absence of an adequate institutional protection solution harms the security and the sense of protection of the students and the staff".³¹ Indeed, many parents from the unrecognized villages reported that children suffered intense feelings of anxiety, distress, and fear in the absence of any protection, and had great difficulty recovering and resuming their normal routines afterward.

³¹See, for example: safety audit at Rakhma, p. 18.

The shortage of protected spaces also has consequences for educational continuity and routine during tense periods: while schools with adequate protection can continue their activities or return to normal in accordance with official instructions, the absence of protective spaces at the schools in the unrecognized villages is liable to leave their students without a framework in times of crisis, and to deepen the gap between them and other students.

Firefighting equipment

Serious deficiencies were found in the firefighting equipment in 8 of the 11 schools. At most, the firefighting equipment is incomplete and not in working order. At some of the schools the equipment has expired or has not undergone an inspection, and at some the cabinet itself is defective, such that the equipment cannot be reached quickly in the event of a fire.

At the Al-Azazma B school, the fire extinguishing station and the fire hose reel are entirely out of service, and were classified as a "sweeping safety failure".³² Reliable and functioning firefighting equipment is essential in order to ensure an immediate response in the event of a fire and to prevent life-threatening incidents.

Summary and Demands

The findings as a whole point to ongoing failures in the maintenance of the audited schools. The scope of the deficiencies, their prevalence, and their reoccurrence across all of the schools that were audited indicate persistent infrastructural neglect and a significant gap between the conditions required for educational institutions to function and the reality. This situation not only creates immediate physical risks, but also undermines the ability to maintain a continuous, safe, and equal study routine, as well as the ability to provide students with a sense of security and protection. The findings reflect profound failures in providing basic and proper conditions for an educational environment, and illustrate the need for urgent and systemic interventions rather than piecemeal solutions alone. Under these circumstances, ACRI is demanding the following to address these failures:

1. **Immediate repair of all deficiencies, ongoing maintenance, and oversight:** The Ministry of Education, the regional councils, and the private groups operating the schools must act without delay to repair all of the deficiencies at all of the educational institutions in the unrecognized villages, to urgently repair all of the identified safety and sanitation hazards that pose a risk to the students, and to provide the Ministry of Education with confirmations of the repairs after an inspection has been conducted by independent companies. The Ministry of Education must ensure that this process is budgeted and supervised accordingly. In order to prevent recurrences, the Ministry of Education, together with those operating the schools, must act to create an orderly

³²Safety audit at Al-Azazma B, p. 15.

system for ongoing maintenance, oversight, and follow-up for repairs, including frequent periodic inspections and examining the implementation.

2. **Improvement of the contracting and funding system:** Given that disputes arise between the parties over the scope of their commitments and over the sources of funding every year, contracting between the Ministry of Education and the body operating the school, the scope of the funding, and the division of responsibility between the parties must be defined in advance and in detail, including responsibilities for maintenance, repairs, and funding for both. A process for handling disputes (such as mediation) must be established as part of the system in order to prevent repeated shutdowns of education services.
3. **Improvement and regulation of school buildings and infrastructure:** In the long term, action must be taken to connect the schools to essential infrastructure such as water, sewage, and electricity; to replace the portable structures with permanent buildings; and to remove planning barriers to obtaining permits so that the schools can expand the facilities that they require, such as additional classrooms, sports fields, and more. Students can thereby be assured of a safe, proper, and dignified learning environment.
4. **Cooperation and communication with the parents' committees:** The parents' committees at the schools in unrecognized villages are the best informed about the condition of the schools, both because they are in continuous contact with the school principal, the educational staff, and the community, and because their children experience the schools firsthand. Today, the parents' committees receive no response when they point to the many hazards at the schools and raise concerns about their children's safety. Involving the students' parents, providing a clear address where they can direct their inquiries, and listening and responding to them in a timely manner are essential components in improving the school conditions and ensuring a safe and appropriate learning environment.
5. **Clarification of the division of roles among those operating the high schools:** It is evident, at least with respect to one of the high schools, that there is a significant gap between the ways in which the Ministry of Education, the council, and the private group perceives its role. There is, therefore, a need to clarify the division of roles among the parties, and to ensure that sanitation issues (such as garbage collection), which are routinely handled by local authorities, is assigned to a specific group and budgeted accordingly.