

A Good year for settlements; A Bad Year for Israel: Summary of Settlement Activity in 2023

February 2024, Settlement Watch

The year 2023 in the West Bank was one of the most challenging years for the prospects of a political resolution based on two states between Israel and the Palestinians. However, for the settlement enterprise, it was probably the best year since the Oslo Accords. The formation of the Netanyahu government in December 2022 created unprecedented conditions for the expansion of settlements, including the promotion of a record number of construction plans, minimal law enforcement against illegal settler activity, substantial budgets, and, most significantly, almost unconditional political support for settlers, even in cases involving violence against Palestinians.

Key Findings:

- a. **Establishment of new outposts and displacement of Palestinian communities** – A record number of 26 new outposts were established during 2023, while 21 Palestinian communities were forcibly displaced from their homes.
- b. **Advancement of construction plans** – A record number of 12,349 housing units were promoted in settlements in the West Bank (East Jerusalem excluded).
- c. **The legalization of 15 illegal outposts was advanced.**
- d. **Structural and administrative changes towards annexation of the Occupied Territories.**
- e. **Development and promotion of roads** – Allocation of approximately 3 billion Shekels for roads in settlements, constituting around 20% of the total Israeli road investment.

a. Establishment of New Outposts

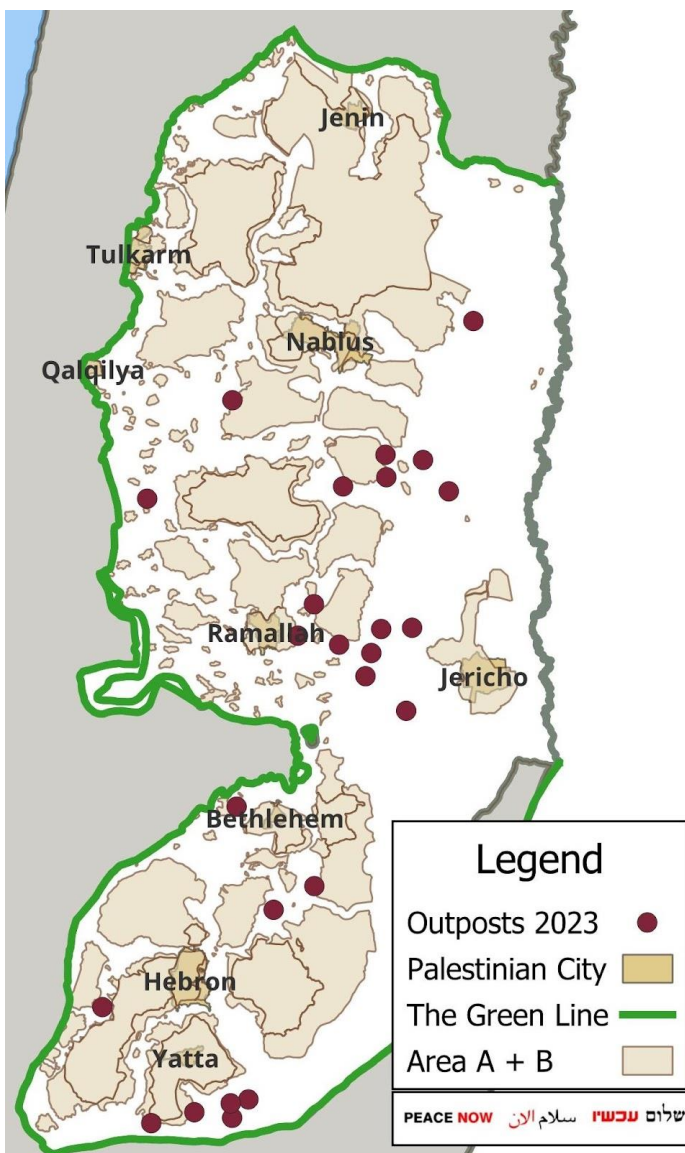
In 2023, settlers established at least 26 new illegal outposts, with at least ten of them established during the war since October 7, 2023, and at least 18 of them being [agricultural farms](#). This marks a record number since the phenomenon of outposts began under the Netanyahu government in 1996. Additionally, settlers established a [new settlement within the city of Hebron](#) by entering and residing in a Palestinian house that they claim to have bought.

It is worth noting that the peak years of outpost establishment until now were during the Second Intifada, suggesting that settlers are adept at exploiting times of conflict when security efforts are focused on defending Israel to create political facts on the ground. Enforcement by the Civil Administration against illegal construction in outposts, already weak, almost did not occur in the past year under the Netanyahu-Smotrich government, allowing settlers to establish outposts unhindered.

Moreover, [settlers paved dozens of new roads during the war](#) throughout the entire West

Bank. These roads enable them to seize additional land and distance Palestinian shepherds and farmers from the surroundings.

In direct relation to the establishment of outposts, **approximately 1,345 Palestinians were forced to flee from their homes** due to violent attacks by settlers, [according to Btselem data](#). Twenty-one Palestinian communities were displaced and uprooted, [16 of them during the war](#) since October 7, and [5 communities](#) prior to that. Additionally, dozens of more families were displaced from communities that remained in their place. In almost all cases, these are areas where farm outposts were recently established, whose residents see themselves as [having a goal to expel Palestinians](#) from the surroundings. They often escalate conflicts, threaten, and attack Palestinian farmers and shepherds.



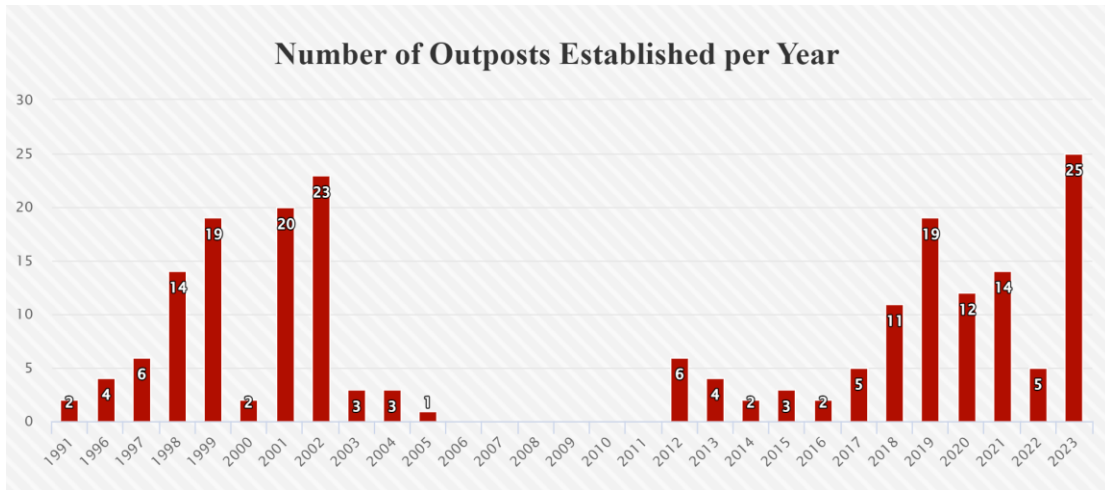
Map of Outposts Established in 2023



The Tko'a F Outpost



The Avigail East Outpost

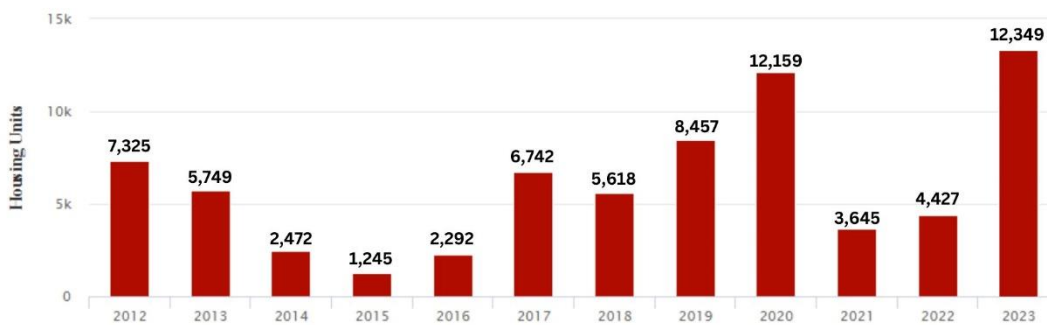


b. Advancement of Construction Plans

In 2023, the Israeli government promoted plans for [the construction of 12,349 housing units](#) in settlements in the West Bank. These plans were either approved for depositing or validation. According to Peace Now's estimation, this marks an annual record since the Oslo Accords. Additionally, the Ministry of Housing published tenders for 1,289 housing units in the West Bank.

In June, a plan for a 2,700 dunams new industrial zone south of Qalqilya, named [Sha'ar Shomron](#) was deposited for public review.

PLANS PROMOTED IN WEST BANK SETTLEMENT PER YEAR (2012-2023)



PEACENOW

*Excluding East Jerusalem.

c. Legalization of Outposts

15 illegal outposts underwent the process of legalization. On February 12, 2023, the security cabinet decided to establish 9 new settlements, constituting the legalization of 10 illegal outposts ([see details here](#)). Additionally, the government advanced plans to legalize five outposts as "neighborhoods" of existing settlements ([more information here](#)). It is important

to note that all settlements are considered illegal under international law, but Israel has established criteria by which settlements can be deemed legal according to Israeli standards.

For a list of outposts legalized in 2023, see appendix A.

d. Structural and Administrative Changes Towards Annexation of the Occupied Territories:

- **Appointment of "Minister of Settlements" in the Ministry of Defense** – Bezael Smotrich was appointed as a Minister within the Ministry of Defense. He established a new governmental body, "[the Settlement Administration](#)," which is designed to manage all aspects of life in the settlements. According to the international law, the management of the occupied territory is supposed to be carried out by the military which is supposed to serve the interests of the occupied population. Thus far, the Civil Administration in the IDF was responsible for civilian life in the West Bank. **The establishment of the Settlements Administration signals the virtual annexation of the territories** because the Administration, as opposed to the Army, is a civil governmental body that is obligated, by definition and according to the law, to promote the interests of the State of Israel and its citizens and is not the interests of the Palestinian population. [see more here](#).
- **Elimination of the Political Echelon Involvement in Promoting Settlements** – The government of Israel [decided on June 18, 2023](#), on a significant change in the planning procedures in the West Bank. It was decided that planning procedures would no longer require approval from the political echelon and the Minister of Defense (except for the stage of the allocation of the land for planning, which is in the hands of Minister Smotrich). This means that the government leaves the power in the hands of settlers and the civil servants to determine Israel's settlement policy, and to promote plans when and where they wish, disregarding security and political considerations. For more details, [see here](#).
- **Repeal of the Disengagement Law** – One of the first laws approved by the Knesset after the formation of the government was [an amendment to the Disengagement Law](#). The implication is the cancellation of the prohibition on Israeli citizens from staying in areas from which Israel withdrew as part of the 2005 disengagement. The meaning is that Israelis are now allowed to enter freely the evicted settlement areas like any other area in Area C. The law marks a significant milestone in changing the northern West Bank region from a contiguous Palestinian territory to a space with settlers, outposts, and settlements. The law enables the legalization of the illegal outpost of Homesh. The repeal of the law enabled the government to allow settlers [to remain in an illegal outpost](#) where they had unlawfully lived for years, using violence to prevent Palestinian landowners from accessing their properties. During the war, the government initiated the formal process of [approving the outpost of Homesh](#) and establishing a settlement in the area. For more details, [see here](#).

f. Development and Promotion of Roads

In April 2023, the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Transportation signed a [budget plan for the years 2023-2024 for the Ministry of Transportation](#). Out of the approximately 16.5 billion shekels allocated for road development, close to 4 billion shekels (3.898 billion) were designated for roads for settlements in the West Bank. This means that around 24% of Israel's road budget was allocated to the development of settlement roads.

[Roads are key to the development and expansion of settlements](#), and the extensive construction of highways could lead to a doubling of the number of settlers in the coming years. For example, the opening of the “[Lieberman Road](#)” east of Bethlehem resulted in the doubling of the number of settlers along its route in less than a decade. It is worth noting that in January 2024, the government approved a budget cut for the year 2024, and according to the draft of the cut in roads, the intention was to cut approximately 1 billion shekels in roads for settlements. However, even after the cut, close to 3 billion shekels still remain for roads in settlements, constituting around 20% of Israel's total road budget. In the end, the government approved an overall sum for the road cut without specifying which roads would be affected.

For a detailed list of road developments in 2023, see appendix b.



The Huwara Bypass Road



The Qalandiya Underpass

Appendix A: List of Outposts whose Legalization was advanced in 2023:

Outpost	Legalization Stage
Avigayil	Government decision to establish as independent settlement; In August, a Military order setting the settlement's jurisdiction was issued.
Beit Hogla	Government decision to establish as independent settlement
Haroeh	Government decision to establish as independent settlement (together with Givat Harel)
Givat Harel	Government decision to establish as independent settlement (together with Haroeh)
Givat Arnon (Hill 777)	Government decision to establish as independent settlement
Mitzpe Yehuda (Keidar East)	Government decision to establish as independent settlement
Malachei Hashalom	Government decision to establish as independent settlement
Asael	Government decision to establish as independent settlement; In August, a Military order setting the settlement's jurisdiction was issued.
Sde Boaz	Government decision to establish as independent settlement
Shaharit	Government decision to establish as independent settlement
Mevo'ot Yericho	The plan to legalize the outpost as a settlement was published as valid
Nofei Nehemiya	The plan to legalize the outpost as "a neighborhood" of the settlement of Rehelim was approved for deposit.
Pnei Kedem	The plan to legalize the outpost as "a neighborhood" of the settlement of Meizad was approved for deposit.
Zayit Raanan	The plan to legalize the outpost as "a neighborhood" of the settlement of Talmon was approved for deposit.
Nativ Haavot	The plan to legalize the outpost as "a neighborhood" of the settlement of Elazar was approved for deposit.

List of outposts established in the year 2023:

Or Meir; Seorim Farm - Immanuel South; Tko'a F; Nahal Machoch Farm; Mevo'ot Yericho West; Negohot North; Sde Yonatan; Givat Haktoret; Asa'el North; Gitit South; Avihai Farm; Ohana Farm; Beqa'ot South; Bar Farm; Old Maon Farm; Shabo Family Farm; Ma'ale Efraim South East; Yahish Tzion; Susya South; Mitzpe Danny Farm; Battir West; Migdalim North; Neve Erez South; Avigayil East; Har Kanub North, Masua West.

Appendix B: Main Developments on Roads in 2023:

- [The Huwara bypass road was opened](#) - despite claims that it is a security necessity, many settlers avoid using the bypass and continue to travel through the village of Huwara to assert control and authority.
- [A military seizure order was issued](#) for 216 dunams for the construction of a bypass road around Funduk (East of Nablus).
- Work on the [Qalandiya Underpass](#) is nearing completion.
- Work has begun on the expansion of Road 437 between Hizma and the Adam settlement, and work continues on [doubling the tunnels road](#) and other roads.
- In April 2023, the Civil Administration announced the commencement of inspection work for the "[Sovereignty Road](#)" between el-Azariya and a-Za'im.
- The Higher Planning Council approved plans for the following roads:
 - Road 367 bypassing Jaba, from the Green Line through the Gvaot settlement to the Kfar Etzion settlement (Plan No. 941/3 was approved for validation).
 - [Gvaot-Beitar Illit road](#) - Plan No. 840 was initially approved, but due to objections from the "Bimkom" organization that pointed out flaws in the plan approval process, it was decided to allow the public to submit objections for an additional 30 days.
 - Road 45 between Migron and Qalandiya (the "[Quarries Road](#)") - Plan No. 926/1 – was approved for validation.
 - Upgrade and expansion of Road 55 - Plans 927/6 and 927/7 were approved for deposit, aimed at approving the expansion and upgrade of extensive sections of the road from the Alfei Menashe settlement towards the Kdumim settlement.
 - Building permits were approved for the construction of an interchange under the Hashayarot junction (the northern entrance to Efrat) and for the upgrade of "the Knee Bend" at the northern entrance to Efrat. Permits were also granted for the construction of the connection of the planned Eastern Ring Road from East Jerusalem to the a-Za'im area, as well as a permit for the construction of an additional ramp road to Ma'ale Adumim.