



**Six-Month Report on Israeli settlements in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem,
(Reporting period July - December 2017)**

Summary

In the second half of 2017 (July-December), close to 5,000 housing units in the West Bank including East Jerusalem were advanced in different stages in the planning and implementation process. Almost 2,600 housing units were promoted in the occupied West Bank and close to 2,300 housing units were advanced in East Jerusalem including 1,600 units in a ring of settlements north of East Jerusalem as well as in the Palestinian neighbourhood of Sheikh Jarrah. This development will, over several years, enable potentially more than 23,000¹ Israeli settlers to move to the Occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem.

In total, more than 13,000 housing units were promoted through plans and tenders in 2017 (January-December). Of these, almost 5,000 housing units are new, i.e. they have not been introduced in the planning circuit in the years before 2017. This development accounts for an extraordinary three- to four-fold increase in advancement of housing units in 2017 through plans and tenders compared to 2016.

There are currently approximately 208,000 Israelis living in East Jerusalem while the settler population in Area C in the occupied West Bank, excluding East Jerusalem, is some 399,000. This brings the settler population to approximately 600,000 Israeli settlers in 141 locations in the West Bank (130) including East Jerusalem (11)². According to the Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics 4.6% of the total Israeli population resides today in the Occupied West Bank excluding East Jerusalem.

An important development during the reporting period was the establishment of a new settlement in Hebron, in the occupied West Bank. It is the first plan for settlers in Hebron since 2002. Another worrying development was the approval of construction of large scale road infrastructure projects in the occupied West Bank that improves the connectivity of settlements to Israel.

Continued settlement expansion, illegal under international law as reaffirmed by UN Security Council Resolution 2334 (2016), goes directly against long-standing EU policy and the recommendations of the Quartet Report (2016). Settlements undermine the chances for the establishment of a viable, contiguous, and sovereign Palestinian state.

¹ The estimate is based on the average size of a household in the occupied West Bank of 4,66 persons per family (as defined by Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics, media release 030/2016, February 7, 2016, p.5).

² East Talpiyot, French Hill, Gilo, Har Homa, Jewish Quarter, Maalot Dafna, Neve Ya'akov, Pisgat Ze'ev, Ramat Eshkol, Ramat Shlomo and Ramot.

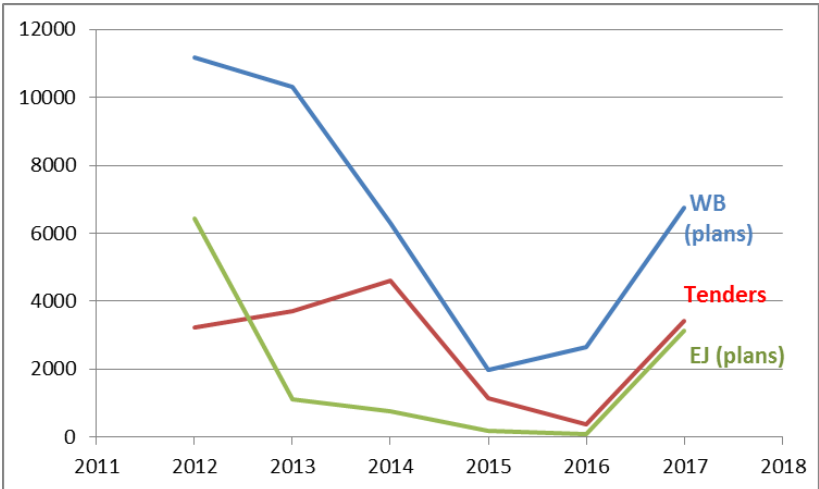
1. TRENDS IN SETTLEMENT PLANS AND TENDERS IN 2017 (July-December)

The advancement of plans and the construction of new housing units continued during the second half of 2017 in the occupied West Bank including East Jerusalem. Approximately 5,000 housing units were advanced in different stages in the planning and implementation process. Of these were around 2,600 housing units promoted in the occupied West Bank and close to 2,300 housing units were advanced in East Jerusalem including 1,600 units in a ring of settlements north of East Jerusalem as well as in the Palestinian neighbourhood of Sheikh Jarrah.³

The total number of housing units promoted through plans and tenders⁴ during the whole year of 2017 in the West Bank including East Jerusalem was approximately 13,000 housing units⁵. Of these are close to 5,000 units new housing units which have not been introduced in the planning circuit in the years before 2017.

This development accounts for an extraordinary three- to four-fold increase in advancement of housing units through plans and the issuance of tenders compared to 2016 (see figure 1).

Figure 1: Overview of numbers of housing units promoted through plans and tenders in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem (2012-2017)



Source: Peace Now (Plans WB and Tenders) and Ir Amim (Plans EJ). Tenders show data for the West Bank, including East Jerusalem.

In the second half of 2017 the expansion of settlement units took place in two waves.

The first wave of plans was advancements by the Israeli Civil Administration (ICA) in July of plans for over 2,300 housing units. This includes plans for some 1,600 units expanding a ring of settlements north of East Jerusalem as well as in the Palestinian neighbourhood of Sheikh Jarrah, adjacent to the Old City.

The second wave took place in October where plans were advanced for over 2,600 housing units in the settlements in the West Bank. The list of plans included the final approval of the settlements of Amihai and Migron and approval of building permits for the construction of 31 housing units for a

³ All the data on settlements are based on publicly available information from the Civil Administration’s High Planning Committee, where Peace Now is present at the meetings. For detailed information about the plans see this link: peacenow.org.il. The plans for East Jerusalem were discussed at the Jerusalem Regional Planning Committee.

⁴ Tenders are counted when they are published as an official ad in a newspaper or on the homepage of The Israeli Land Authority. The process of tenders takes time but a decision to build was taken when it was published.

⁵ In sum: WB plans (+6700), WB tenders issued (+3100), EJ plans (+3100), EJ tenders issued (+100).

new settlement in Hebron. The new settlement in Hebron will increase the settler population in the most controversial area of Hebron by 20 %.

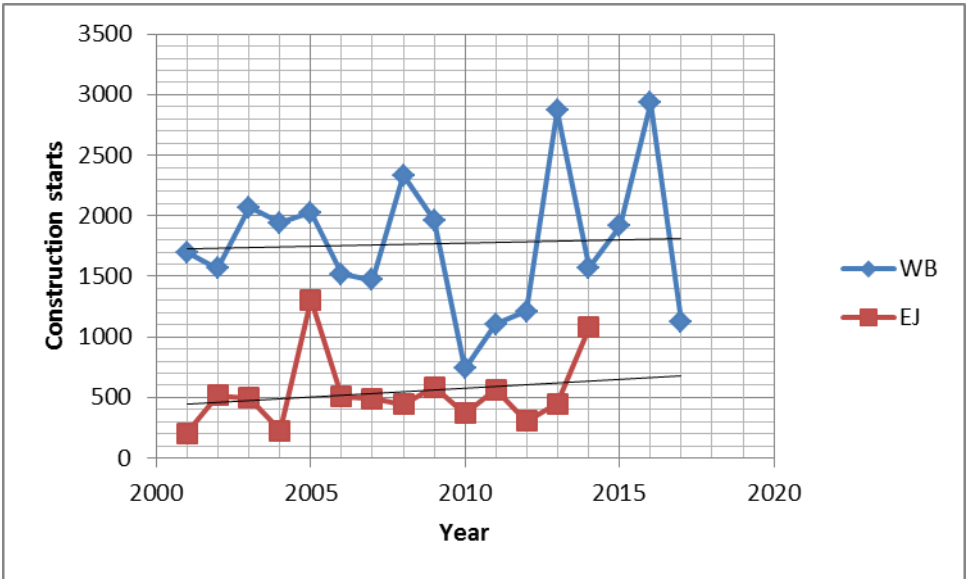
During the reporting period Israeli planning authorities also issued a conditional approval of 178 housing units in the settlement of Nof Zion located in the East Jerusalem neighbourhood of Jabel Mukaber. Work also began to prepare for the construction of infrastructure in Givat Hamatos, a settlement that, if built, would further disconnect East Jerusalem from the rest of the West Bank.

2. TRENDS IN ACTUAL CONSTRUCTION (first three quarters of 2017)

While plans and tenders indicate expected future construction activity, data from the Israeli Central Bureau Statistics show that from January to September 2017 actual construction of 1,120 housing units began in the West Bank, excluding East Jerusalem⁶. This represent a decrease of about 50 % compared to the same period of 2016. In the first three quarters of 2017 1,307 units were completed compared to 1,456 completed constructions in the same period of 2016.

For reference, according to data from the Israeli Bureau of Statistics the average number of construction starts in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem over the past 15 years has been above 2,000 units per year with a slowly rising trend (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: Overview of construction starts in the period 2001-2017 (first 3 quarters)



Source: ICBS. Note: Data on construction starts in East Jerusalem 2015 and 2016 is not available. Data on construction starts in the WB in 2017 is covering the first three quarters.

3. TRENDS CONTRIBUTING TO THE SETTLEMENT EXPANSION

The following factors are seen as contributing to the settlement expansion and the consolidation of Israel's presence and control of the West Bank, including East Jerusalem:

⁶ Data from ICBS shows construction starts of 1,922 housing units the settlements in 2015 compared to 3,027 construction starts in 2016.

Hebron

In addition to the 31 new housing units in a new settlement on the Shuhada Street in Hebron, a military order was issued in August establishing an independent administration of the Hebron settlers that upgrades the status of settlements in the H2 area of Hebron, further consolidating Israeli presence in the area⁷. In addition, in July 15 Israeli families illegally occupied the Abu Rajab/Machpelah House despite ongoing legal proceedings over its ownership. The settlers have since been allowed to remain in the building by the Israeli authorities.

Expansion of roads and infrastructure projects

In November Prime Minister Netanyahu approved a budget of 800 million shekels for the promotion of a plan to construct roads throughout the West Bank. This development will improve the connectivity of settlements to Israel potentially facilitating their future expansion. Construction of roads involves expropriation of Palestinian land but the roads will primarily serve settlers and not the local Palestinian population. One of the new roads planned are the Qalandiya Underpass which is meant to bypass the Qalandiya checkpoint and connect the settlements East of Ramallah to the center of Israel without having to pass through the traffic of Jerusalem. According to Israeli NGOs this will require the establishment of another checkpoint in order to prevent the movement of Palestinians into Israel.

Construction on the northernmost section of the Eastern Ring Road has now started. The road (when finished) will facilitate access to Jerusalem for settlers northeast of the city while carrying Palestinians from Ramallah to Bethlehem without entry into Jerusalem.

During the reporting period the construction of the separation barrier around Al-Wallajeh (near Bethlehem) was also completed.

Touristic settlement expansion

During the reporting period the preparations continued for a cable car project that is intended to run from Abu Tur in West Jerusalem, over the East Jerusalem neighbourhoods of Abu Tur and Silwan, to the not yet constructed settler promoted Kedem Compound near the a stop in the vicinity of the Dung Gate entrance to the Western Wall Plaza in the Old City. The cable car will facilitate access to a growing number of tourist sites and national parks around the Old City that the state has privatized to settler organizations.

⁷ In 1997 the Hebron Agreement was signed and Hebron was divided into two sectors: H1 and H2. H1 is controlled by the Palestinian Authority and comparable to Area A. H2 is controlled by Israel and is comparable to a mix of Area B and Area C. The Hebron Protocol states that the Hebron municipality will be responsible for service delivery (e.g. garbage collection, maintenance) for the entire city, including the H2 area.

3. EU ACTION DURING THE REPORTING PERIOD

During the reporting period the EU issued the following statements related to settlement expansion:

- On 7 July 2017 an EU Spokesperson's statement was issued on plans and building permits for over 1,500 settlement units in East Jerusalem
- On 18 October 2017 an EU Spokesperson's statement was issued on the Israeli decisions to promote thousands of settlement units