



[About B'Tselem](#) [Publications](#) [Press Releases](#) [Statistics](#) [Testimonies](#) [Make a Difference](#) [Human Rights Links](#) [Contact Us](#)



List of Topics

[E-mail Update](#)

[Photo Archive](#)

[Video](#)

[Maps](#)

Search

Go ▶

[עברית](#)

[عربي](#)

[Русский](#)



Restrictions on Movement

Checkpoints and Forbidden Roads

Israel enforces severe restrictions on the freedom of movement of Palestinians in the West Bank through a system of staffed checkpoints and physical roadblocks. There are now some forty checkpoints that are permanently staffed and fifteen that are staffed intermittently. These numbers do not include the checkpoints along the Green Line or the last control point between the West Bank and Israeli sovereign territory. In addition, Israel blocks access to main roads with various physical obstacles such as dirt piles, concrete blocks, iron gates, and trenches. The number of staffed checkpoints is fairly constant, while the number of physical obstacles often changes depending on the political and security situation. In the beginning of 2006, there were about 470 physical obstacles blocking roads.

The physical obstacles, which completely prevent vehicles from passing, divide the West Bank into separate areas. In order to travel from one area to another, Palestinians must cross a staffed checkpoint. The severity of the restrictions on persons wanting to cross differs from checkpoint to checkpoint and from time to time:

- At almost all the checkpoints, people have to show their identity cards, and soldiers often search the vehicles and the passengers' belongings;
- At some checkpoints, Israel prevents men of a certain age group, usually 16-35, from crossing. This restriction is especially common at the checkpoints in Nablus District;
- From time to time, Israel places a sweeping restriction prohibiting residents of a particular district from crossing staffed checkpoints by foot, or, alternatively, from crossing by vehicle. Restrictions of this kind are common in the Jenin and Nablus districts;
- At certain checkpoints, vehicles are allowed to cross only if they have special permits which are generally given only to public-transportation and commercial vehicles;
- At some checkpoints, Israel has a fixed practice of completely prohibiting the crossing of Palestinian vehicles, regardless of the circumstances.

The checkpoints divide the West Bank into five areas with movement from one to another severely restricted and sometimes impossible. The five areas in the West Bank are the North (Jenin, Nablus, and Tulkarm districts), the Center (Salfit, Qalqiliya, and Ramallah districts, and the Jericho enclave), the South (Bethlehem and Hebron districts), the Jordan Valley and the northern part of the Dead Sea (except for the Jericho enclave), and East Jerusalem.

This system enables Israel to designate some of the roads in the West Bank for primary or exclusive use by Israelis, mainly settlers living in the West Bank. Israel prohibits Palestinian vehicles from even crossing certain roads. This results in restricted access to roads that Palestinians are not prohibited from using. Travelers in Palestinian vehicles must exit their vehicles, cross the road by foot,

- [Background](#)
- [Closure](#)
- [Figures on closure days](#)
- [Forbidden Checkpoints and Roads](#)
- [Curfew](#)
- [Effect on the Palestinian economy](#)
- [Data on checkpoints](#)
- [Medical treatment](#)
- [Related testimonies](#)
- [Related publications](#)
- [Related photographs](#)

and then find alternate transportation on the other side.

Prolonged checks and searches carried out by soldiers at the staffed checkpoints, and the accompanying degradation and long lines that result, deter Palestinians from using even some roads that are open to them. Consequently, there is light Palestinian travel on some of the main West Bank roads, and these roads are essentially used only by Israeli settlers.

Israel 's policy greatly affects all areas of life for Palestinians in the West Bank and makes it impossible for them to live normal lives. Simple actions such as shopping, visiting relatives, and attending university classes have become complicated and, at times, impossible. This policy also impedes Palestinians' access to medical care. Village residents, who constitute about one half of the population of the Occupied Territories, suffer the most from this lack of access because most medical services are provided at hospitals and clinics in the cities. The restrictions on movement also make it difficult to market goods inside the West Bank and thus harm the Palestinian economy (the marketing of Palestinian goods in Israel has also sharply declined since the outbreak of the second intifada).

The restrictions on movement are not set forth in military legislation or in any official document. In response to B'Tselem's inquiry on this point, the IDF Spokesperson's Office stated that the restrictions are based on "oral orders" issued by soldiers. This lack of transparency adds a dimension of uncertainty to this policy. The result is that it is difficult to criticize such a policy and challenge its legality.

One of the main purposes of the policy to restrict Palestinian movement is to protect Israeli settlers. Given that the settlements are illegal, the policy only aggravates the situation: it comprehensively and disproportionately impedes the freedom of movement of an entire population in order to perpetuate the settlement enterprise. If the restrictions were intended to prevent attacks inside Israel, and not in the settlements, the policy would still be illegal because it is sweeping and disproportionate, giving it a semblance of collective punishment which is forbidden.

Furthermore, Israel 's policy is based on the assumption that every single Palestinian is a security threat, thereby justifying restrictions on his or her freedom of movement. This assumption is racist and leads to the sweeping violation of the human rights of an entire population on the basis of national origin. As such, the policy flagrantly violates international law.