



المركز الفلسطيني لحقوق الإنسان PALESTINIAN CENTRE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

State of the Gaza Strip Border Crossings 01 – 30 April 2020

In April, the restrictions on the freedom of movement from and to the Gaza Strip, imposed by the Israeli authorities and the Palestinian Authority since early March 2020, continued for the purpose of combating the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19). These measures negatively affected the living conditions of the Gaza Strip population, who have endured already catastrophic living conditions due to 13 years of Israeli closure and restrictions on the movement of goods and individuals, which caused unprecedented rates in poverty and unemployment in the Gaza Strip.

The extreme measures enforced by the Israeli authorities limited the number of persons and categories allowed to travel via Beit Hanoun crossing, as all categories were banned travel, except for limited humanitarian cases.

Additionally, these measures took a toll on the health of Gaza patients, as April witnessed a significant decrease in the number of patients allowed to travel abroad for medical treatment, as the number of referred patients was reduced except for critically ill patients whose treatment is completely unavailable in the Gaza Strip. Furthermore, the transferred cases to the West Bank and Israel suffered quarantine measures upon their return, despite their necessity to contain COVID-19.

Simultaneously, the Israeli authorities continued to impose closure on the Gaza Strip for the 13th consecutive year and placed tightened restrictions on movement of Gaza Strip residents and continue to ban the Gaza population from travelling abroad or returning home through Beit Hanoun Crossing. The Israeli authorities continued to impose restrictions on the entry of goods classified as “dual-use items”,^[1] which enhanced the deterioration of economic, health and educational situation in addition to the infrastructure. Furthermore, Israeli authorities continued to ban the Gaza Strip exports, except for very limited agricultural products, constituting only 10% of the total monthly Gaza exports before the closure.

Restrictions on the Movement of Persons:

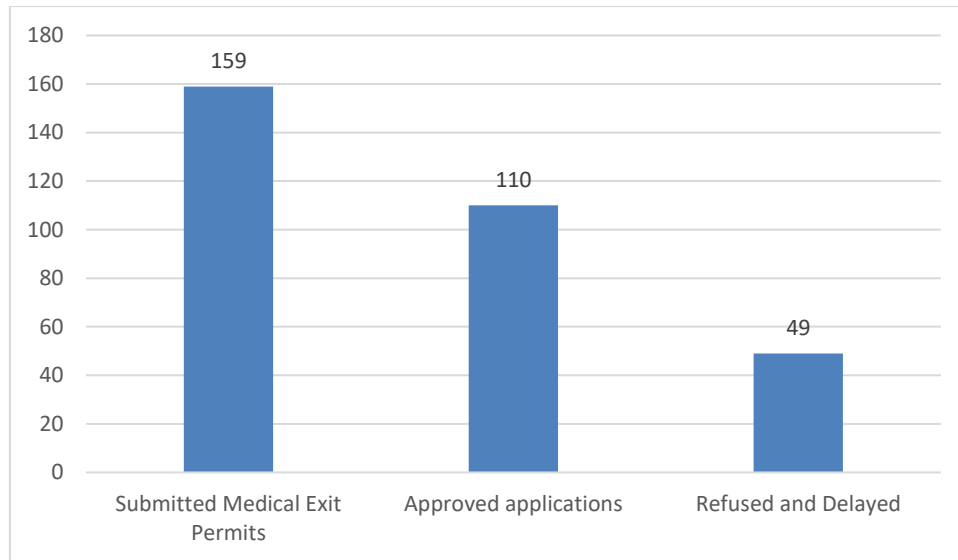
The Israeli authorities tightened its restrictions on the movement of the Gaza Strip population through Beit Hanoun "Erez" Crossing and banned the movement for all, even the limited categories it previously allowed entry in March 2020, which include: patients with serious conditions and their companions, Arabs holding Israeli ID cards, international journalists, workers of international humanitarian organizations, businesspeople, relatives of prisoners in



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the Israeli jails, and persons travelling via the King Hussein Bridge. On the other hand, Israeli authorities allowed the entry of several humanitarian cases within the narrowest scope, mainly critically ill patients whose treatment is unavailable in the Gaza Strip.

• **Patients:** During the reporting period, the Palestinian Ministry of Health reduced the number of patients referred for medical treatment in the hospitals in Israel or the West Bank for the maximum extent possible. They only referred the patients with serious conditions whose treatment is unavailable in the Gaza Strip at all. In spite of that, Israel obstructed the travel of 49 patients out of 159 patients, who applied for permits for treatment (i.e. 42.1% of the total permits.) The Israeli authorities rejected 8 permits for security reasons (5%), did not reply to 26 applications (16.3%); delayed replies (claiming under security check) to 8 permits (5%); asked 2 patients to change their companions (1.2%); and delayed the travel of 5 patients (3.1%) under several pretexts.



- The Israeli authorities also impose restrictions on items that can be carried by travelers via Erez, primarily electronic and electric devices, food, and cosmetics in addition to preventing travelers from using wheeled bags.
- According to the General Authority for Civil Affairs (GACA), in April, 200 Palestinians were allowed to leave the Gaza Strip via “Erez” Crossing, including 4 foreigners, while 422 returned. It should be mentioned that these statistics do not represent the real number of persons allowed to enter as the permit holders are far less than the passing times and can cross via the crossing many times with the same permit in one month. The Israeli authorities



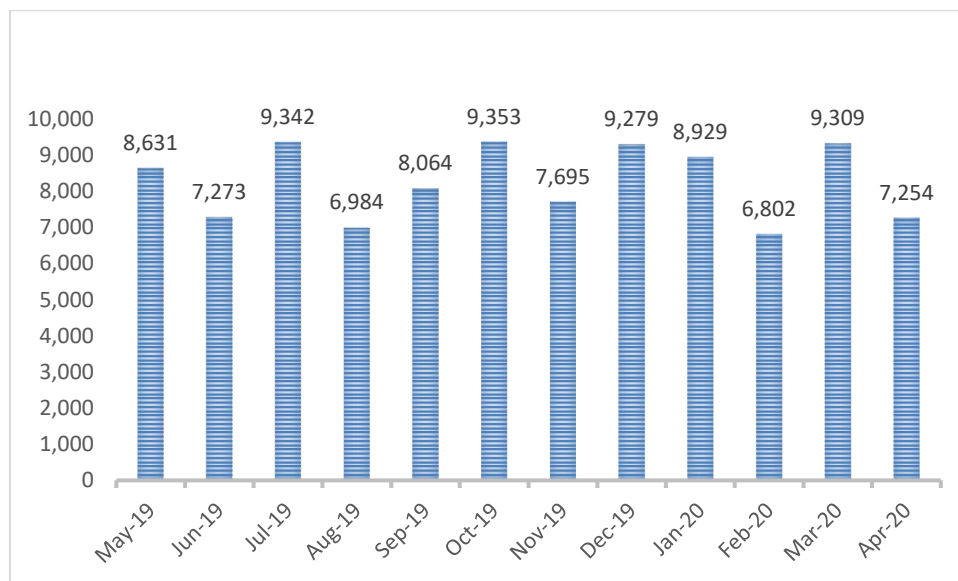
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allow only limited categories: workers of international humanitarian organizations, diplomats, people with special needs, persons travelling via the King Hussein Bridge and Arabs holding Israeli ID cards.

Prisoners' Visits: In April, Israeli authorities did not permit prisoners' visits. Denial of visitation rights is in violation of the agreement reached between prisoners and the Israeli authorities in May 2012. Moreover, the families of prisoners are usually subject to arbitrary practices, obstacles and degrading and immoral searches during their visit. The Israeli blockade coincided with the tightened measures to prevent the spread of the Coronavirus.

Restrictions on Movement of Goods

Despite the ongoing tightened restrictions on imports into the Gaza Strip, the Israeli authorities allowed the entry of 7,254 truckloads. In April, the crossing was closed for 14 days (i.e. 46.6% of the reporting period).

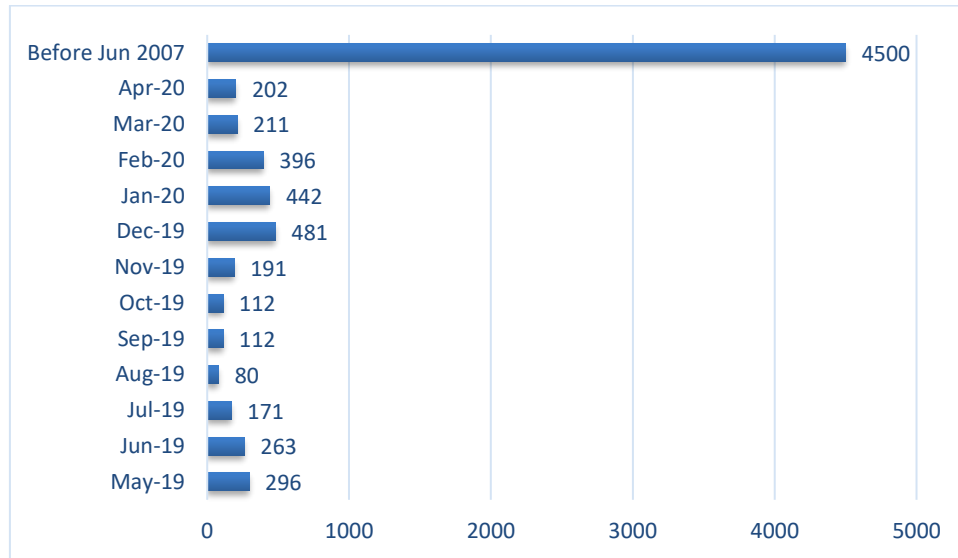


Ongoing ban on Gaza Strip exports: The Israeli authorities continued to ban the Gaza Strip exports. However, in a limited exception, they allowed the exportation of very limited types of goods; most of which are exported to the West Bank and the rest are exported to Israel and other countries. In April, the Israeli authorities allowed the exportation of 202 truckloads (148 to the West Bank, 23 to Israel and 31 abroad). Those truckloads included agricultural products, fish, furniture, animal skin, aluminum scrap, and clothes. The exports during the reporting



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period only constitute 4.4% of the total monthly exports before the closure was imposed in June 2007 when 4500 truckloads used to be exported.



- The Israeli authorities continued to impose tightened restrictions on the list of items classified as “dual-use.” The dual-use items include 62 types and hundreds of goods and commodities that are essential to the life of the population. Imposing these restrictions caused infrastructure, economy, healthcare, and education to deteriorate severely. These items include communications equipment, pumps, big generators, iron bars, iron pipes in all diameters, welding equipment and welding rods used in welding, various types of wood, UPS devices that protect the electric devices from breaking down when the electricity suddenly cuts off, X-ray machines, cranes and heavy vehicles, elevators, types of batteries and several types of fertilizers.

- The process of submitting applications by the Gaza Strip residents to enter goods classified by the Israeli authorities as dual-use items is very complex and ambiguous. Any person from the Gaza Strip should send a request to the Palestinian Coordination Committee for the Entry of Goods, which refers the request to the Israeli Coordination and Liaison Office at “Erez” Crossing. After that, the goods will be classified and sent to the relevant Israeli officer to check it. Moreover, the Palestinian trader should close the transaction with the Israeli seller or broker and pay for it to be able to submit the request. If the response was positive, the coordination for the entry of goods will be allowed through the Karm Abu Salem (*Kerem Shaloum*) crossing. A number of traders and contractors said to PCHR that the abovementioned measures are very complicated as the Israeli authorities deliberately delay responses to applications for months.

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Additionally, in many cases, the Israeli forces stationed at (*Kerem Shaloum*) crossing return the goods that had been already approved on to enter. This inflicts heavy losses on traders who pay large amount of money for the storage and demurrage charges and to contractors who undertake to deliver their projects on time.

Movement at Rafah Border Crossing:

Gaza authorities, in agreement with the Egyptian authorities, decided to shut Rafah Border Crossing, under the state of emergency declared for the purpose of combating the spread of coronavirus. The Crossing was opened exceptionally for 4 days for arrivals only. During the reporting period, 1,639 persons were allowed to return to the Gaza Strip, including 5 deaths. Furthermore, thousands of Palestinians registering for travel at the Ministry of Interior are unable to travel according to the Crossing and Borders Authority in Gaza.

The Gaza Strip travelers via Rafah Crossing suffer from prolonged, recurrent and unjustified searches, extending the return journey from Cairo to Rafah Crossing several days where travelers sleep in cars and restaurants after the journey could only take 6 hours.

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