



المركز الفلسطيني لحقوق الإنسان PALESTINIAN CENTRE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

State of the Gaza Strip Border Crossings 01 – 31 March 2020

This issue of the “State of the Gaza Strip Border Crossings” is released under the coronavirus pandemic, where various countries across the world have adopted measures to combat the spread of the virus, that entail severe restrictions on the freedom of movement. Both the Israeli authorities and the Palestinian National Authority have enforced restrictions on movement to and from the Gaza Strip since early March 2020, which have negatively impacted the Gaza Strip population who are already suffering catastrophic living conditions due to the 13-year long Israeli closure and restrictions on the freedom of movement of goods and individuals which have led to skyrocketing rates of poverty and unemployment.

The heightened Israeli restrictions included denying all categories, including those previously permitted, from travelling via Beit Hanoun Crossing, except for a limited number of humanitarian cases. Additionally, March witnessed a sharp decline in the number of patients who were allowed to travel abroad for medical treatment.

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 continues 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:

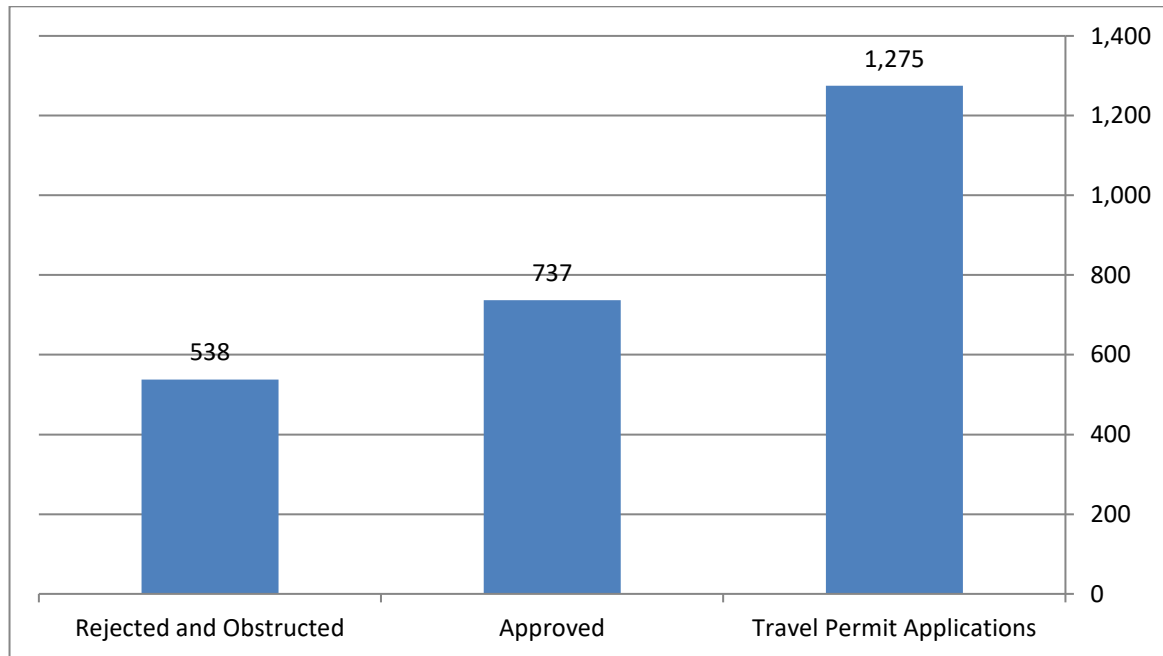
- The Israeli authorities tightened its restrictions on the movement of the Gaza Strip population through Beit Hanoun “Erez” Crossing and banned the movement for all, even the limited categories it previously allowed entry, which include: patients with serious conditions and their companions, Arabs holding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

¹ Israeli authorities claim that despite the fact that these items are normally used for civilian purposes, it is possible to use them in developing the Palestinian armed groups’ military capacity.



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- **Patients:** During the reporting period, the Israeli authorities at Beit Hanoun "Erez" Crossing obstructed the travel of hundreds of patients referred for medical treatment in the hospitals in Israel or the West Bank under various pretexts, including security reasons, changing the companions, delaying responses to the permits, asking for a new hospital appointment and summoning the patient for a security interview. In March, Israel obstructed the travel of 538 patients out of 1,275 patients, who applied for permits for treatment (i.e. 42.1% of the total permits.) The Israeli authorities rejected 44 permits for security reasons (3.4%), did not reply to 153 applications (12%); delayed replies (claiming under security check) to 108 permits (8.4%); asked 22 patients to change their companions (1.7%); and delayed the travel of 211 patients (16.5%) 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 March, 6,352 Palestinians were allowed to leave the Gaza Strip via "Erez" Crossing while 7,469 returned. During the same period, 158 internationals were allowed to enter the Gaza Strip while 180 left. 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 allow only limited categories



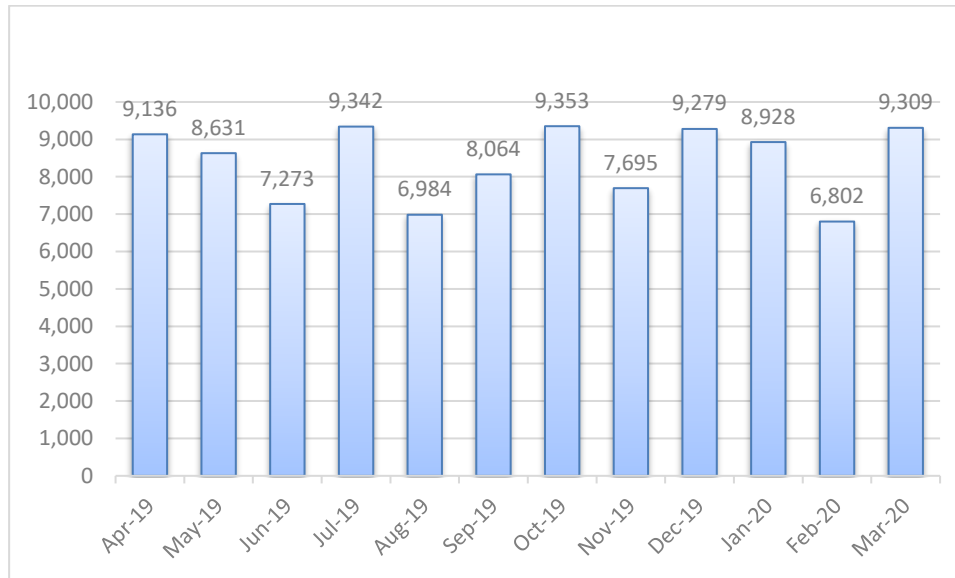
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to travel: workers of international humanitarian organizations, diplomats, people with special needs, persons travelling via the King Hussein Bridge and Arabs holding Israeli ID cards.

- **Prisoners' Visits:** In March, 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.

Restrictions on Movement of Goods

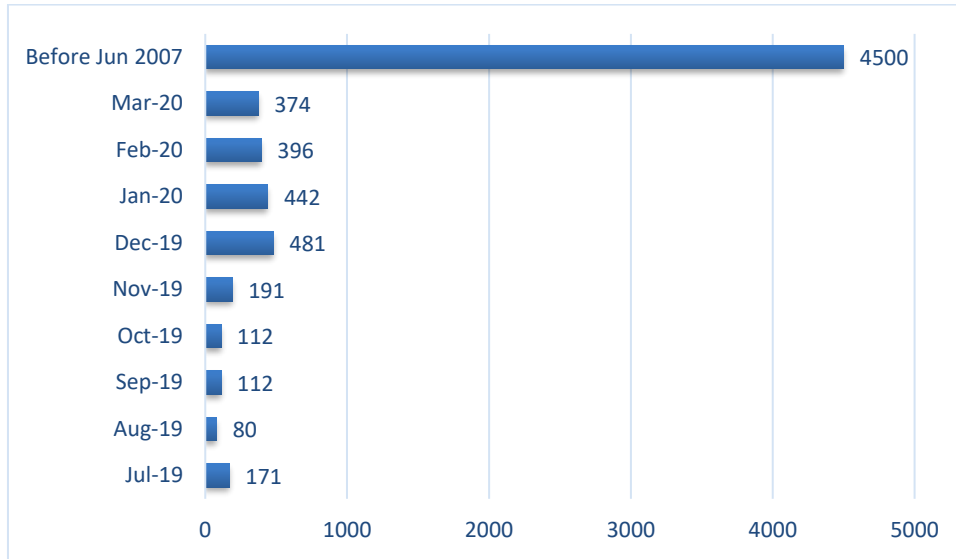
Despite the ongoing tightened restrictions on imports into the Gaza Strip, the Israeli authorities allowed the entry of 9,309 truckloads. In March, the crossing was closed for 10 days (i.e. 32.2% of the reporting period).



- **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 March, the Israeli authorities allowed the exportation of 374 truckloads (211 to the West Bank, 40 to Israel and 23 abroad). Those truckloads included agricultural products, fish, furniture, animal skin, aluminum scrap, and clothes. The exports during the reporting period only constitute 6% of the total monthly exports before the closure was imposed in June 2007 when 4500 truckloads used to be exported.



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- The Israeli closure policy and the Palestinian internal division caused the weakness and fragility of the Gaza Strip's health care system. According to PCHR follow up and Ministry of Health (MOH) press releases, the health system would be unable to handle coronavirus patients if they exceed a couple dozens due to the inadequate capacities necessary to treat such patients, especially that such treatment requires medical and laboratory equipment, as well as, medicine and medical consumables that are all unavailable in the Gaza Strip's hospitals and medical centers.
- MOH officials confirmed PCHR that the Ministry suffers acute shortage in its needs to respond to coronavirus. According to Head of Information Systems Unit in the Ministry of Health, Mr. Hani al-Wahidi, the Gaza Strip's health sector has only 110 intensive care beds for adults, including 78 at MOH hospitals (Shifa 36, European Gaza 17, al-Aqsa 10, Indonesian 9, Naser 6) while the NGOs has 12 beds (al-Quds 7, Public Services 5, and Military Medical Services 7 at Kamal Odwan Hospital). Moreover, the Private Sector has 13 beds: al-Hayah hospital (8) and al-Helo Hospital (5). According to the hospitals' report, 72% of the intensive care beds are occupied at the MOH hospitals, i.e. if the coronavirus breaks out, only 22 out of 78 intensive care beds will be available in the MOH hospitals.
- Ninety-three ventilators are available at intensive care units in the Gaza Strip, including 63 at MOH hospitals (al-Shifa 23; European 15; al-Aqsa 9; Indonesian 10; and Nasser 6) 9 at private hospitals (al-Quds 5; Public Aid 4). Additionally, blood gas analyzers are only available at 7 hospitals: al-Shifa, Nasser, al-Quds, Kamal Odwan, Public Aid, al-Helou and al-Hayat; and it is unavailable at 3 hospitals: Indonesian, European and al-Aqsa.
- Accordingly, MOH – Gaza requires urgent supplies and equipment for extra intensive care beds, ventilators and COVID-19 testing tools; as well as, protective gear to protect personnel, medications and medical disposables to combat coronavirus.
- 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

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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. 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 7 days for arrivals into the Gaza Strip and departure of humanitarian cases; and for another 7 days for arrivals only.

During the reporting period, 2,697 persons were allowed to leave the Gaza Strip, while 4115 persons returned to the Gaza Strip, including 10 deaths. Moreover, the Egyptian authorities returned 398 persons and banned their travel without clarifying the reason. 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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