

Gaza

The Dead-Zone

How life in the Gaza Strip changed
over 14 years of Israel's strangling
blockade

January - 2020

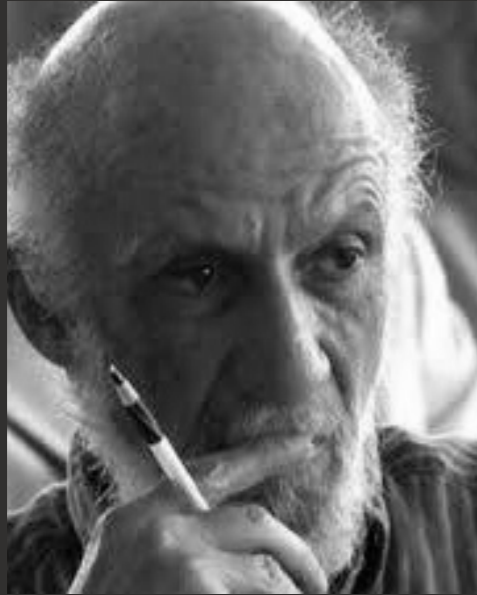


Euro-Med Human
Rights Monitor
الأورو متوسطي لحقوق الإنسان

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Introduction



Gaza: The Dead Zone

In my role as Chair of the Board of Trustees, I take this opportunity to introduce this comprehensive and alarming Euro-Med Annual Report, aptly titled Gaza: The Dead-Zone. The Report presents overwhelming evidence of the prolonged and unlawful victimization of the civilian population of the Gaza Strip, which has intensified greatly since Israel imposed a land, sea, and air blockade in 2007. This unlawful and comprehensive blockade has entrapped the Gazan people ever since it was established is a particularly severe and cruel form of collective punishment, which is a flagrant

and continuing criminal wrong. The focus on the dramatic deterioration of life circumstances for the people of Gaza under the blockade should not lead readers to suppose that Israel's occupation of Gaza in the preceding period, 1967-2007, was other than oppressive and subject to widespread condemnation at the United Nations and elsewhere. This long-lasting humanitarian scandal in the world involves the entire Palestinian population of Gaza, and challenges the conscience of all of humanity. As The Dead-Zone documents, conditions have grown especially harsh since Israel imposed this strict blockade on Gaza in 2007, augmented by a variety of restrictions imposing daily unendurable hardships on the civilian population. The people of Gaza numbering close to 2 million, including its large refugee population (about 70% of the total) has been continuously subjected to various forms of collective punishment, which violates the prohibition of Article 33 of the Fourth Geneva Convention. Article 33 unconditionally prohibits such policies and practices, and is considered a vital norm of international humanitarian law. As this Report persuasively discusses, this overall situation of oppressive conditions, has been further accentuated by Israeli military operations, including large-scale attacks in 2008-09, 2012, and 2014, supplemented by a large number of smaller military incursions and coercive interferences with a normal civilian life. Such Israeli violence has caused

widespread physical causing many deaths and injuries, as well as traumatizing Gazans as a whole. The entire population of Gaza has been forced to exist from birth to death under this regime of Israeli state terror.

These restrictive and punitive arrangements have also caused an alarming decline in the social and economic conditions facing the population. Unemployment, deteriorating mental and physical health, declining standards of living, and restrictions on educational opportunities have all caused immense suffering for the entrapped civilian population of the Gaza Strip. This Report provides overwhelming evidence of how Israeli policies and practices have undermined the economic and social structures of Gaza.

It is a cause of particular concern that this situation of Israel lawlessness with such a dire impact on the civilian population is allowed by the United Nations and its member States to continue for so long without a much more concerted effort to induce Israel to comply with international law, lift the blockade, and cease all forms of collective punishment.

It is a tribute to the courageous work the Euro-Med Monitor staff to have compiled this comprehensive report under difficult internal conditions. The Report relies on the collection of data and the effective presentation of evidence, and places its stress on the worsening of conditions since Hamas has assumed responsibility for the governance of Gaza since winning control of the Legislative Council in 2006 by prevailing in free elections.

It is the fervent hope of the Euro-Med Board that the publication of Gaza: The Dead-Zone, will be widely distributed and have an overdue impact on world public opinion and on the responses of the international community. This report should be read as an urgent cry for help. It is an appeal to both the global solidarity movement that supports the Palestinian struggle for rights and to the organized regional and global community that has institutional responsibilities to address situations in which international human rights, international humanitarian law, and fundamental moral standards are being so grossly violated.

Richard Falk

On behalf of the Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Monitor, Board of Trustees

Executive Summary

In 2012, the United Nations issued a report in which it predicted the collapse of vital sectors in the Gaza Strip, making it “unlivable” by 2020.

The year 2020 now is here and a real-time collapse of all aspects of existence is underway, making it all but impossible for the 2 million Palestinians in Gaza to maintain a decent standard of living. This is the direct result of 14 years of a suffocating Israeli blockade, along with military attacks that periodically target the densely populated Strip.

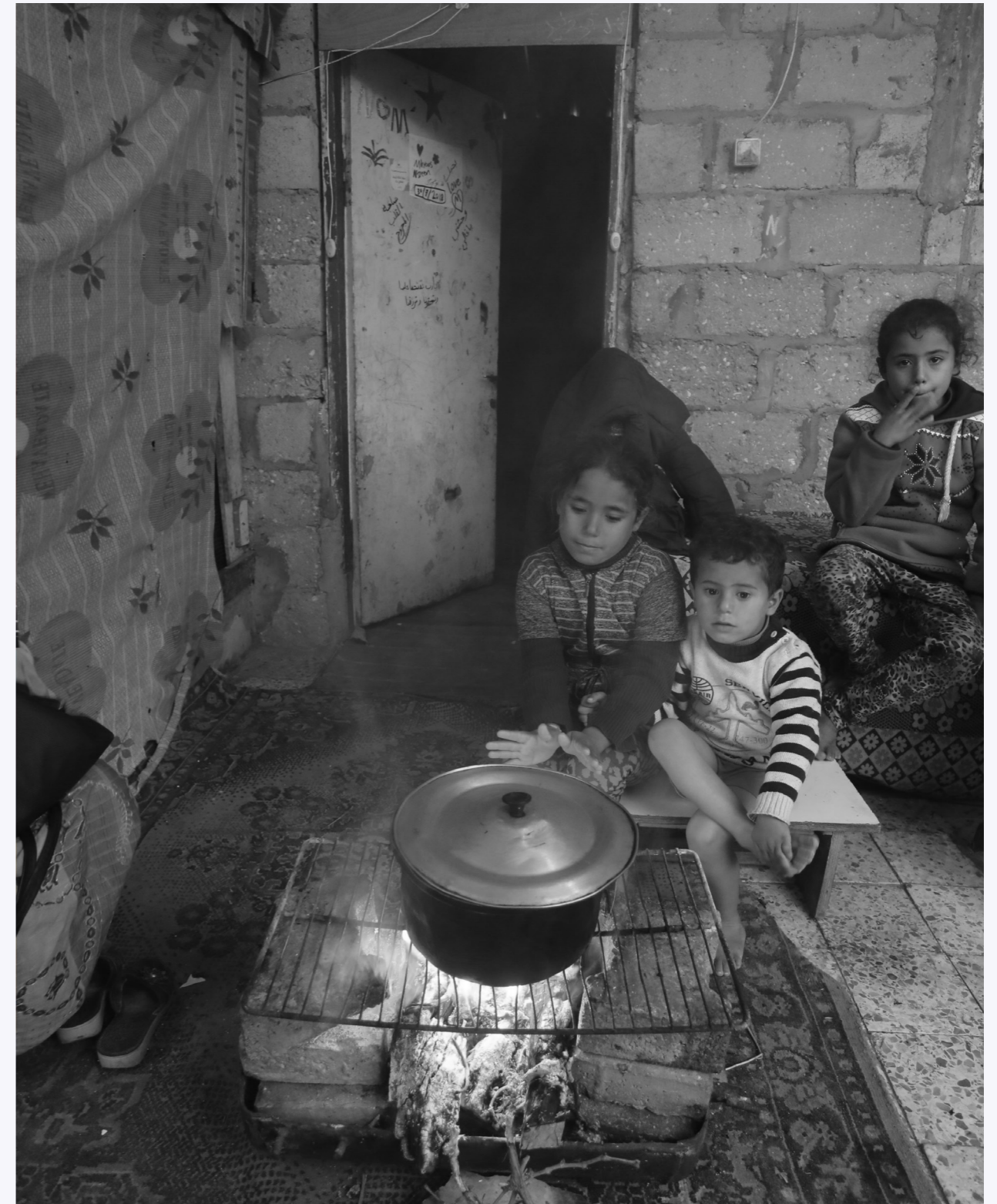
Today, an entire generation was born and has been raised under siege, disconnected from the outside world. Older generations remember life before the Israeli blockade and thus understand the possibilities; today’s youths know only an imprisoned existence and are familiar with Israelis only as oppressors.

During these 14 years, the indicators used to measure the humanitarian crisis in the Gaza Strip have grown exponentially. For example, unemployment was 23.6% in 2005; today it is more than double, reaching 52%—the highest in the world. And more than half (54%) of the population live under the poverty line, compared to 40% in 2005.

Freedom of movement is another indicator of economic and social health. In 2005, seven crossings leading in and out of Gaza were available for individuals or goods; today, there are only three—two controlled by Israel and one under Egypt’s control. Consequently, the number of travelers and cargo trucks has been cut by more than half. For instance, the average monthly number of travelers through Israel’s Erez border crossing was 65,000 before the imposition of the siege. In 2019, the monthly average was only about 14,000.

Among social sectors, health was the most affected and has had the most significant impact on the humanitarian situation in Gaza. As a result of the border closures and other restrictions, only 48% of essential medicines are available today, compared to 85% in 2005. Likewise, patients requiring surgery must wait around 16 months today, compared to three months in 2005.

In this annual report, the Euro-Mediterranean Monitor for Human Rights assesses each indicator of the collapse of vital sectors.



Background

For 28 years, the Gaza Strip was governed as part of Palestine by the United Kingdom. This “British Mandate” (which included the region known then as Transjordan) was set up at the direction of the League of Nations (precursor to the United Nations). Established in the aftermath of World War I, the mission of the League of Nations was to preserve world peace. Thus, when the Ottoman Empire was forced by the war to relinquish control over Palestine and Transjordan, the League gave administrative authority to the United Kingdom, beginning on April 25, 1920, and extending until May 14, 1948.

The mandatory authority was expected to comply with Article 22 of the League of Nations mission, which called for facilitating the eventual independence of peoples who have not yet reached the degree of political maturity needed to administer their own territory. The Article 22 defined “mandate” status as interim administration by a major country that is stable or politically mature, which then guides the mandated territory toward independence.

However, in 1917, in a letter to Lord Rothschild, UK Foreign Secretary Arthur Balfour stated that, “His Majesty’s government views with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use its best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object.” (The letter also went on to note that it should be “clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine...”).

What came to be known as the “Balfour Declaration” greatly increased popular support for a Jewish homeland and became a core component of the documents used by the British government to guide its administration of Palestine following the war. It also set up a conflict between the central objective of the mandate agreement to establish an independent Palestine and the Balfour Declaration. In 1937, following a six-month-long strike and armed rebellion by the Arabs living in the mandate territory, the Peel

Commission, appointed by the British government, concluded that British administration had become unworkable and recommended partition of the territory into an Arab state linked to Transjordan and a small Jewish nation. The proposal caused heated debate and many more meetings, until World War II broke out and deliberations came to an end.

After World War II ended, President Truman supported the admission of 100,000 Holocaust survivors into Palestine, which brought back the partition solution. Violent opposition ensued, and in February 1947, Britain announced its intent to terminate its mandate for Palestine, entrusting the future of Palestine to the United Nations (which had replaced the League) with respect to the disposition of non-self-governing territories.

After the UN voted to partition Palestine in General Assembly Resolution 181 in 1947 in a divided vote and outcome opposed by the Arab member states of the UN, The Arab-Israeli war of 1948 broke out, culminating in the creation of a sovereign state of Israel, and the transfer of authority for the Gaza Strip to Egypt. The West Bank came under Jordanian rule.

During the 1948 War, hundreds of thousands of Palestinians were forced from their land or fled in fear, with about 250,000 taking refuge in the Gaza Strip. In 1967, Israel expanded its control to Gaza during its Six-Day War, which also resulted in the occupation of the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and the Sinai Peninsula.

Today, an estimated 13 million Palestinian refugees are scattered around the world, six million of whom are registered with the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA). About 1.4 million Palestinian refugees account for nearly 70% of the population of the Gaza Strip.

Since then, the Gaza Strip has been under Israeli control. During the early years, Israel built settlements in the strip in violation of Article 49(6) of the Fourth Geneva Convention. Israel confiscated land and other property from Palestinians and restrict their freedom of movement. It also discriminated against the Palestinian people through a myriad of laws.

In September 2005, the Israeli government withdrew its 8,000 settlers and the military forces protecting them. Although such basics of life as who and what is allowed in and out of Gaza remained under Israeli control, the Israeli government claimed it no longer occupied Gaza and thus had no further responsibility under international humanitarian law for the wellbeing of its residents.

A few months later, Israel imposed a blockade on the Strip after Hamas won the legislative elections, winning control of the Palestinian legislative council. Restrictions and sanctions were announced following the elections in January 2006 and then tightened in mid-2007.

In this report, the Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Monitor documents the effects of the Israeli blockade on the Gaza Strip, and compares the living conditions of its population prior to blockade to the situation that exists 14 years later. We examine the health, economic and social aspects of life, as well as the international legal framework that should guide any assessment.

Insulated enclave

Israel has a long history of isolating the Gaza Strip, which has been subjected to numerous closures during the past two decades. But the punitive blockade imposed following the victory of the Hamas movement in the 2006 Palestinian Legislative Council elections was unprecedented. Israel declared the Gaza Strip a closed area and imposed penalties on the Hamas-led government, including restrictions on imports of fuel and other goods and the movement of people in and out of Gaza.

The blockade was further tightened in 2007, when fuel of all kinds, including gasoline and diesel, as well as goods such as meat and biscuits, were restricted. In addition, the limits were placed on the area of the sea in which fishing could take place and all border crossings were closed.

Over the years, Israeli authorities worked to broaden and deepen the isolation of the Gaza Strip, although the restrictions on imports were eased after Israeli forces killed 11 Turkish activists trying to sail into Gaza with humanitarian aid and international outrage ensued. One of the most draconian restrictions in its impact was Israel's separation of Gaza from the West Bank. This separation policy restricted the entry into and exit out of Gaza by Palestinians, preventing university students in Gaza from receiving education in West Bank universities, professionals from participating in continuing education, patients from receiving healthcare, businessmen from trading and families from staying united.



Israeli military attacks

During the past 14 years, Israeli forces launched three major attacks on the Gaza Strip: in 2008-2009, 2012 and 2014. In addition, periodic air and ground attacks occurred during the entire period of occupation..



Operation Cast Lead (2008-2009)

The first of the major attacks started on December 27, 2008, and lasted for 21 days—ending January 18, 2009.

On the first day of the attack, around 80 Israeli warplanes launched a series of raids on the Hamas government buildings and security facilities. The airstrikes continued for eight days, after which Israel launched a massive ground operation, which included a large number of tanks, infantry soldiers, and special military units.

Over the course three week operation, Israeli forces dropped an estimatd 1 million kilograms of explosives on Gaza, causing the destruction of nearly 4,100 houses and damaging 17,500 others. 1,436 Palestinians were killed and approximately 5,400 others were injured, including many children and women.

This attack started on November 14, 2012, and lasted for eight days, ending November 21, 2012. Israeli warplanes killed 162 Palestinians, wounded nearly 1,300, and destroyed 200 houses. Another 1,500 homes were damaged.

Operation Pillar of Defense (2012)

Operation Protective Edge (2014)

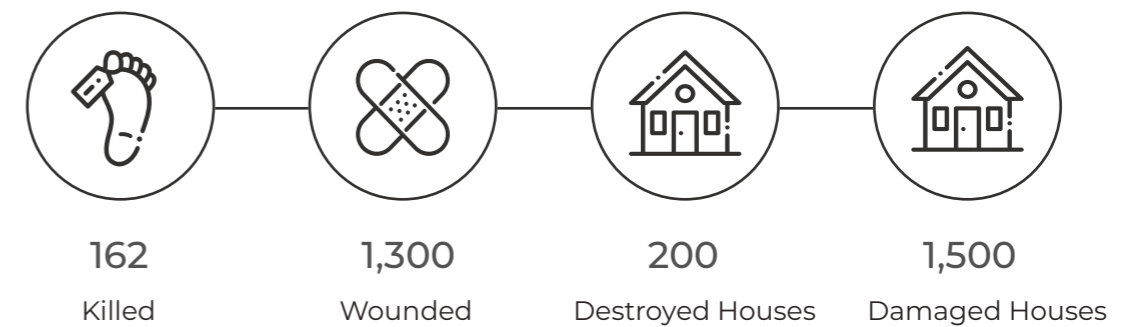
The longest and most deadly Israeli attack on Gaza started July 8, 2014, and lasted 51 days—ending August 26, 2014. Euro-Med Monitor's field team documented 60,664 Israeli land, sea and air raids, which killed 2,147 Palestinians (in many cases, involving multiple deaths in a single family) and wounded 10,870 others. 17,123 homes were damaged, of which 2,465 were destroyed.

The Three Israeli Attacks on the Gaza Strip, in Numbers

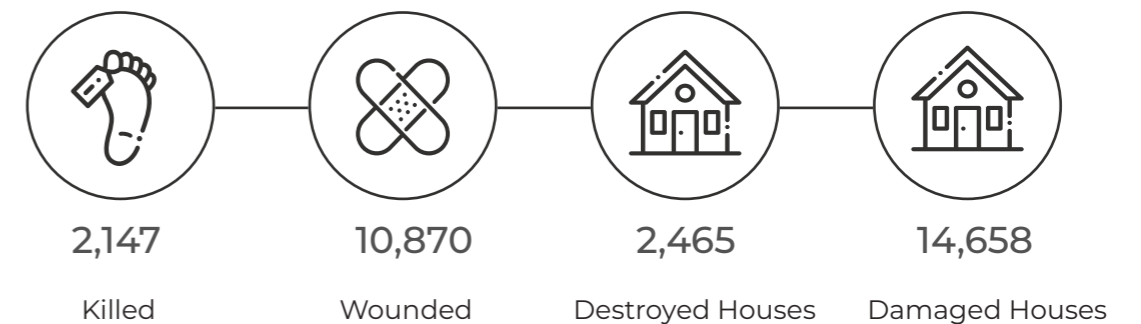
Operation Cast Lead: December 27, 2008-January 18, 2009



Operation Pillar of Defense: November 14-21, 2012



Operation Protective Edge: July 8-August 26, 2014



Closure of Border Crossings

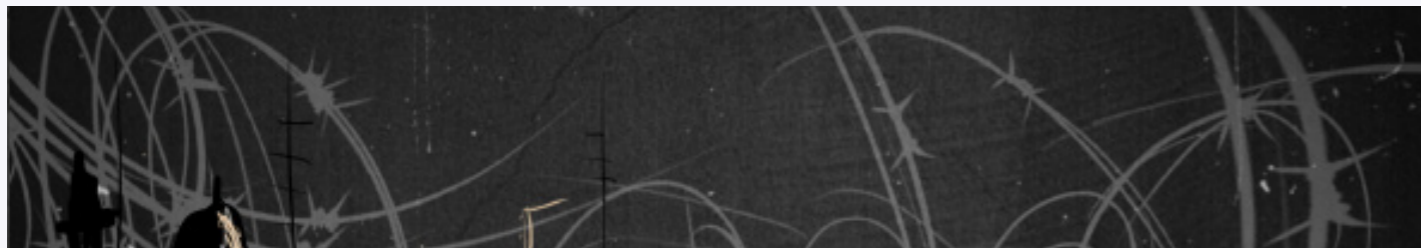
Restrictions on movement of both goods and people are long-standing challenges facing Palestinians living in Gaza.

Before Israel imposed its blockade on Gaza, individuals and goods moved in and out through six crossings: Erez, Karni, Nahal Oz, Kerem Shalom and Sufa via Israel and Rafah via Egypt. Once the blockade was enforced, all of the crossings were closed except for Egypt's Rafah crossing and Israel's Erez (for people) and Kerem Abu Shalom (for goods).

Although the Rafah crossing is open most days (unlike the recent past), the number and type of people allowed to exit per day is strictly limited. As a result, many Palestinians must pay high "coordination fees" to be able to leave Gaza. In addition, the treatment of Palestinians by Egyptian security personnel is notoriously harsh. In view of this, the importance of Israel's Erez crossing has grown.

As for imports and exports, Karem Abu Shalom now is the only option. Before the blockade was imposed in 2006, the average number of trucks allowed to enter Gaza was about 70 per day, in addition to 583 vehicles loaded with humanitarian supplies. The majority of those goods entered through Karni crossing in the northeast; Nahal Oz crossing, east of Gaza City, was the main entrance for fuel.

During the two years following the imposition of the siege, the average number of vehicles entering Gaza per day dropped to 112 in total per day—about a fifth of the number that previously entered on a daily basis. As for exports, most were prohibited.

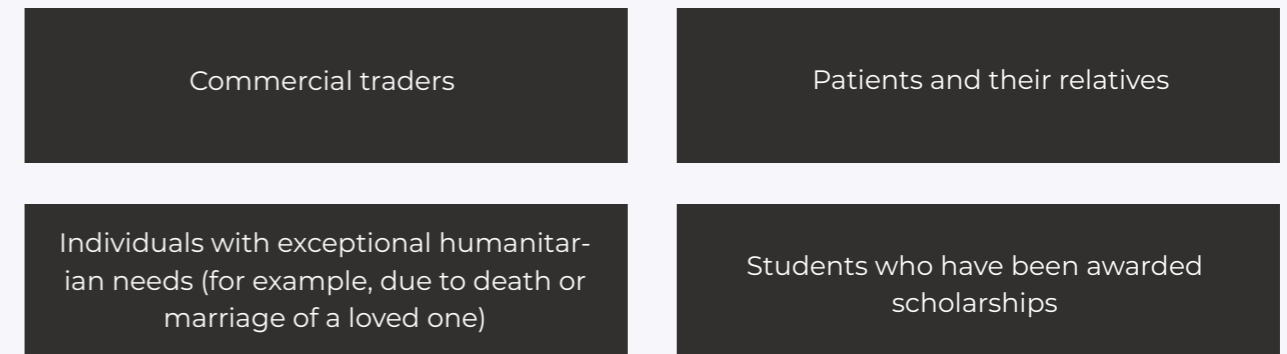


Erez Crossing

An Israeli permit is required to enter or leave Gaza via Erez Crossing, and the criteria used to determine who receives one changes frequently. Moreover, even those fortunate few who obtain a permit may be refused when they arrive at the crossing itself. Likewise, Palestinian businessmen may have their crossing permits cancelled with no explanation given except for the notation of "security reasons."

According to data published by the Israeli Government Coordinator in the Palestinian Territories (COGAT), the percentage of permit requests that are approved dropped from 80% in 2014 to 46% in 2018.

Requests for travel permits are considered only for:



Even if persons are in one of those "privileged" categories, requests to travel require a long time to process. For example, applications for visits by persons with sick relatives require more than 50 working days to process. The majority are refused. Requests by individuals who are ill often take more than 23 working days to review.

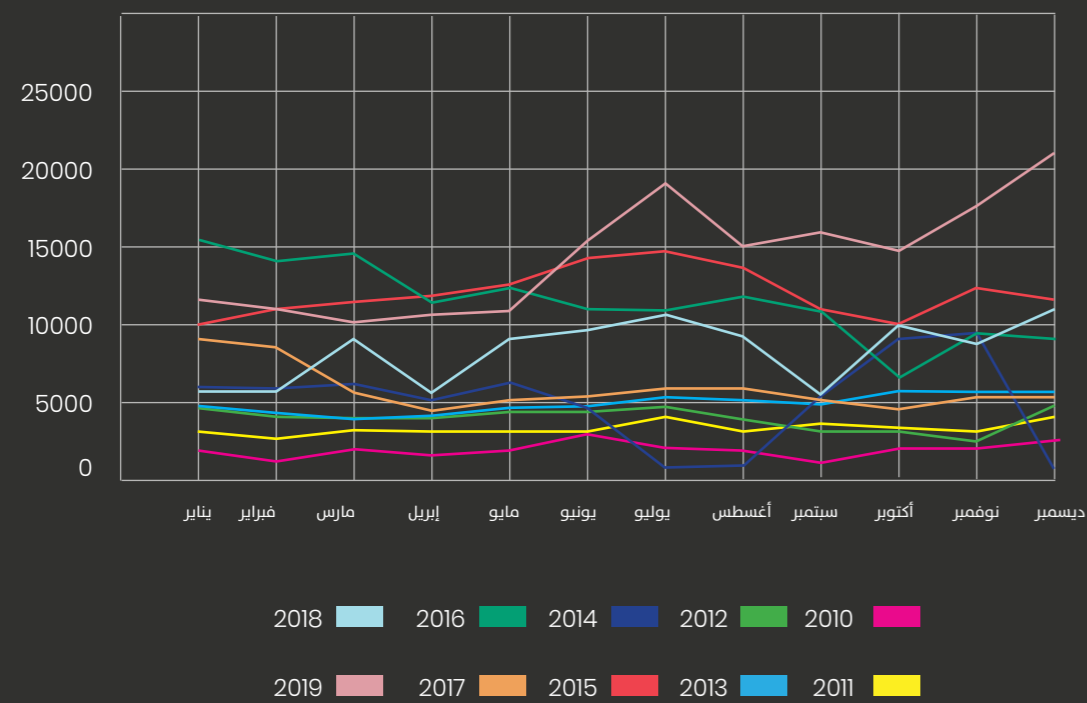
In addition, in response to the weekly "Great Return March" protests, Israeli authorities closed Erez crossing six times between August 2018 and June 2019 as a form of collective punishment. The cumulative result: The number of people permitted to travel through Erez crossing dropped from 30,000 monthly in 2005 to 14,000 in 2019.

Erez traveling statistics from January 2010 to December 2019

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
January	2119	3027	4464	4514	6372	10159	15388	8669	6150	12617
February	1818	2924	3855	3935	6032	11909	14155	7301	6367	11282
March	2239	3293	3659	3591	6304	13280	14823	6078	8710	10187
April	1791	3008	3661	3687	5641	13300	13137	4677	6466	11863
May	1997	-	4088	4531	6704	15888	14605	5324	8525	12361
June	2413	-	4053	4650	4503	18418	12493	5761	9506	15471
July	2197	3501	4372	5337	1133	19100	11949	6683	11522	18732
August	2183	2799	3581	5150	1582	17800	13447	6173	9671	15627
September	1608	3493	3132	4979	5939	11804	11050	5126	5263	16609
October	2354	3076	3000	5908	8666	10745	7101	4812	10187	14993
November	2211	2876	2541	5502	8835	14990	9239	5716	8556	17442
December	2949	3538	4619	5410	12927	13880	8409	5241	12402	22330

Source: Gisha: Legal Center for Freedom of Movement

Travel (in and out) through Erez crossing from January 2010 to December 2019



Kerem Shalom crossing

Following the closure of all other commercial crossings between the Strip and Israel, Kerem Shalom remains the only gateway still open through which goods can be imported and exported by Palestinians in Gaza. However, Israel prevents entry of a broad list of what it considers “dual-use” items. Israel defines these as materials that can be used for both military and civilian purposes, but in actuality they are essential items for the daily functioning of an economy.

As a consequence, the movement of imports and exports has declined significantly since 2005. Since then, the average number of trucks entering the Strip with imports totaled about 7,517 per month in 2019, compared to the earlier 10,400. Similarly, the average number of trucks leaving Gaza dropped from 833 per month to 262.



Rafah crossing



Rafah crossing is considered as the main lifeline Gaza residents who need or want to travel, since Israel's Erez gateway is so tightly controlled.

In 2005, before the imposition of the siege on Gaza, Rafah crossing operated regularly. Records show that an average of 40,000 people per month entered or left Gaza via Rafah. However, the political conditions in Egypt changed dramatically; in July 2013, a new era began. The crossing was closed much of the time.

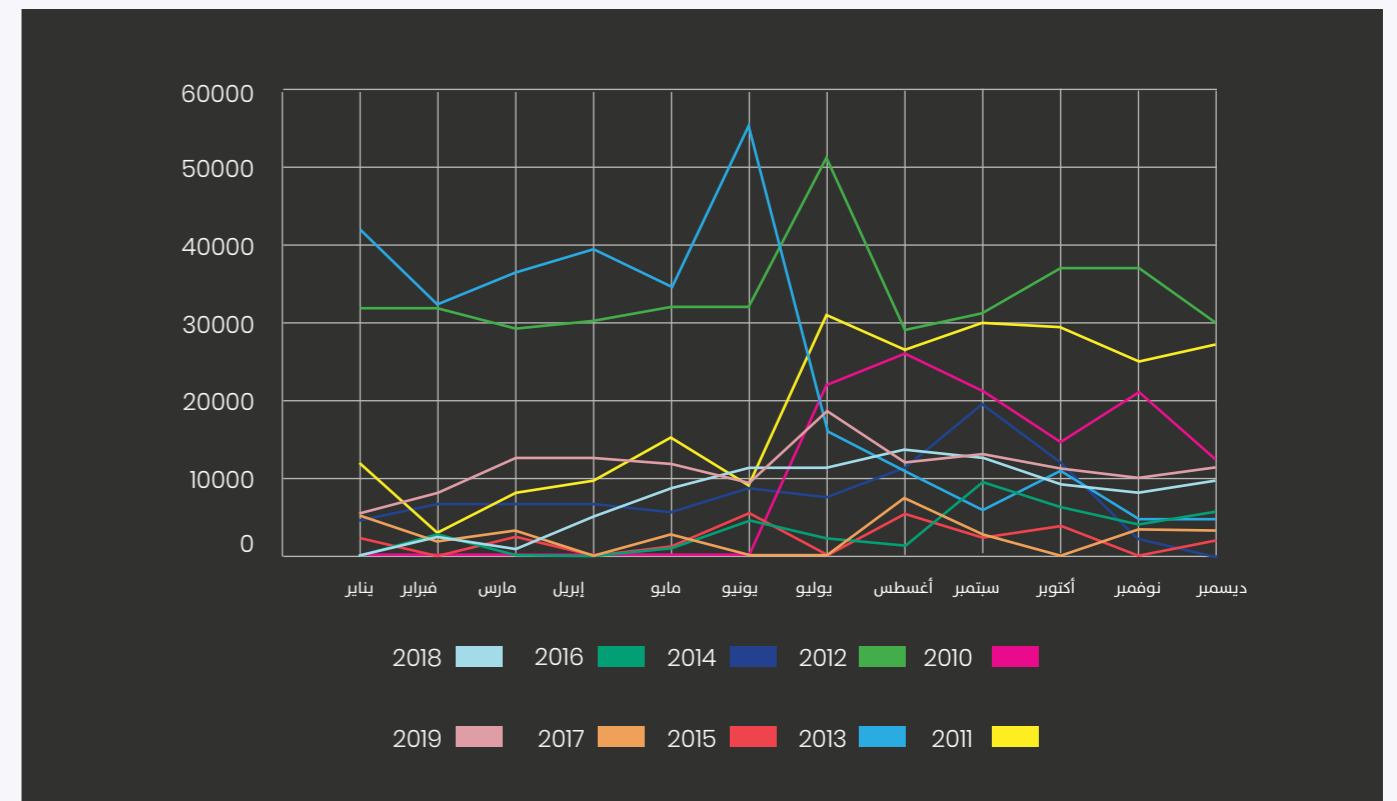
During the Israeli attack on Gaza during the summer of 2014, Egypt closed the crossing entire for security reasons. It was partially opened after the signing of a ceasefire agreement—but not for long. During 2018, the average number of travelers passing through Rafah crossing was just 8,163 per month.

Fortunately, 2019 saw marked improvement, bringing the average number of people traveling via Rafah to about 12,000 per month—however, still dramatically below the level of 200. Since Egypt restricts the number of travelers per day, and the roster of people desiring to do so numbers in the tens of thousands, applicants must register in advance and wait for months to be called—that is, unless they pay an often exorbitant “coordination fee.” Many Gazans have lost scholarships, suffered ill health (or even died) or missed important family events as a result.

Entrance and exit through Rafah crossing (January 2010 - December 2019)

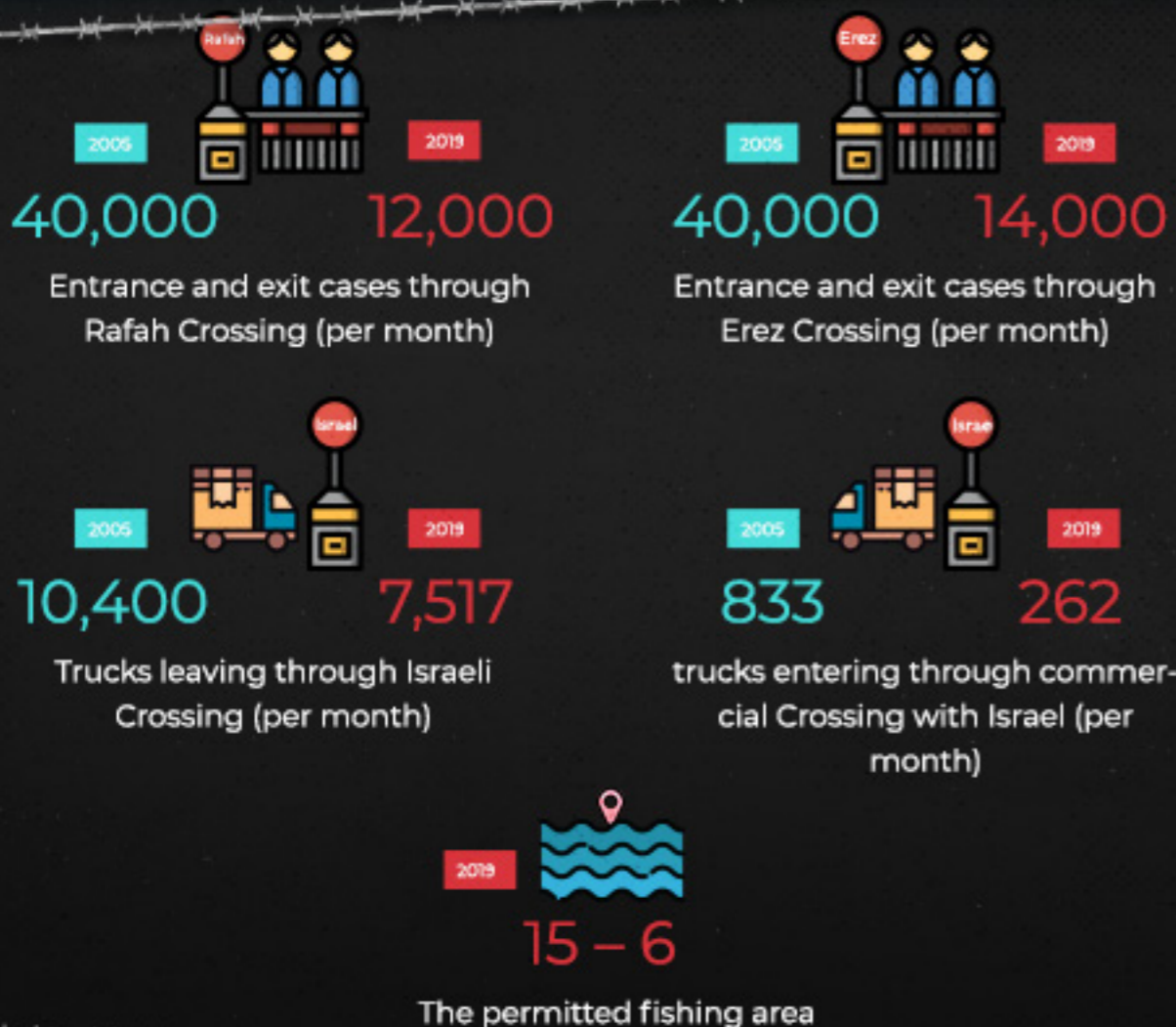
Month	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
January	-	12361	32834	42897	4316	2727	-	5719	-	5715
February	-	3363	32037	33596	6993	-	3561	2900	3581	8548
March	-	8666	29925	37918	6607	2443	-	4191	1520	13296
April	-	9935	30500	39247	6479	-	-	-	4876	13699
May	-	15243	32573	35244	4949	1629	1959	3068	8765	12988
June	-	8767	32573	55995	9325	6446	5856	-	12137	9817
July	22171	31681	51665	16295	7292	-	2761	-	12294	18378
August	26301	27466	29380	11242	12149	5757	1565	8416	14228	13769
September	21538	30617	42916	6503	19991	3307	9595	3361	13321	14928
October	15091	29939	37009	11641	13728	4055	6661	-	9731	12127
November	21418	25761	37479	5952	2688	-	4413	4011	8176	10249
December	12480	27561	30489	5238	-	2386	5866	3493	9327	12547

Source: Maslk



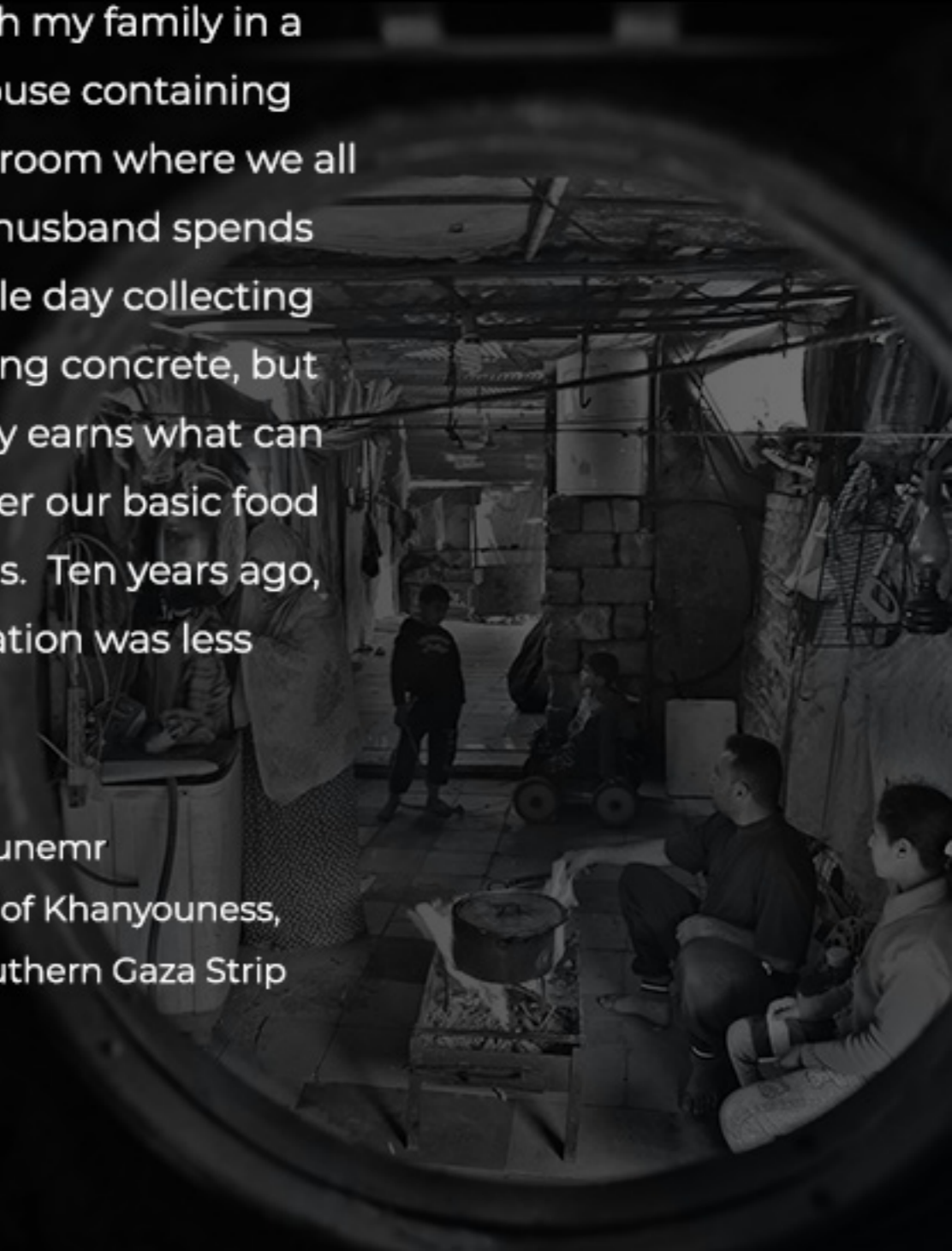
Gaza: Dead Zone

Right to freedom of movement



I live with my family in a small house containing one bedroom where we all live. My husband spends the whole day collecting and selling concrete, but he barely earns what can only cover our basic food expenses. Ten years ago, the situation was less harsh.

Aisha Abunemr
Resident of Khanyouness,
in the southern Gaza Strip



Collapsing Economy

The Gaza Strip's economy has wallowed in a general recession ever since the Israeli blockade was imposed, resulting in the near-total closure of commercial crossings and severe restrictions on the movement of traders and other businesspeople. The three major military attacks on Gaza further exacerbated the crisis, paralyzing all economic activity during the assaults. The effects—caused in large part by the destruction of production facilities and offices, as well as the loss of jobs—lingered long after ceasefires were declared.

On the macroeconomic level, the contribution of the Gaza Strip to the gross domestic product (GDP) of Palestine hovered at less than 20% by the end of 2019. Average per capita annual income dropped to \$800, compared to \$3,600 for the Palestinian territories overall.

Likewise, investment in Gaza declined to about 3% of Palestinian GDP, causing the strip's productive sector (agriculture, industry and services) to contribute less than 13% (compared to 28% in 1994) to the overall Palestinian economy. Gazan agriculture, long a mainstay of the Palestinian economy, now accounts for less than 5% of its GDP.

Since the imposition of the blockade, the number of businesses in Gaza has decreased from 3,500 to 250. More than 600 manufacturing plants have closed. Due also to the three major military attacks, the productive capacity of the remaining facilities does not exceed 16% of what it had been previously. It is estimated that Gaza's private sector has suffered losses of about \$11 billion during this period.

A consequence of the closure and downsizing of businesses and factories, as well as tens of nonprofit organizations, is for the unemployment rate in Gaza now to keep rising until now it is among the highest in the world—increasing from about 23% in 2005 to nearly 52% at the beginning of 2020. Among youth, unemployment has soared to 67.5%.

More than 71% of Gaza families are food-insecure, leaving four out of every five people reliant on financial aid. The poverty rate now stands at about 54%—more than double than the West Bank.

Meanwhile, the successive Israeli attacks have destroyed Gaza's sewage infrastructure and impeded the rehabilitation of roads and water and sanitation systems. In the 2014 Israeli attack, more than 40 kilometers of roads were destroyed or damaged, along with dozens of service

buildings. This intensified environmental risks, with more than 100 million liters of contaminated (untreated) wastewater pumped daily into the Mediterranean, polluting the beaches. Despite these confirmation of an economic crisis, Palestinians were prohibited from exploiting their offshore oil and gas resources, such as the "Gaza Marine" field in the Mediterranean.



Movement of goods

Most imports used to enter Gaza through the Karni crossing in northeast Gaza. However, fuel for power plants, entered through Nahel Oz (Sofa), located to the east.

However, Karni was closed in 2007, followed by Sofa in 2008. The Kerem Shalom border crossing became the only entry/exit for goods.

According to Gisha, The average number of export trucks leaving Gaza through the Kerem Shalom crossing was 833 trucks per month in 2005. By 2019, that number had plummeted by 69%, reaching about 262 trucks per month. As for cargo trucks entering Gaza, the average was 10,400 per month in 2005. By 2019, it was roughly 7,517. ²

Exports

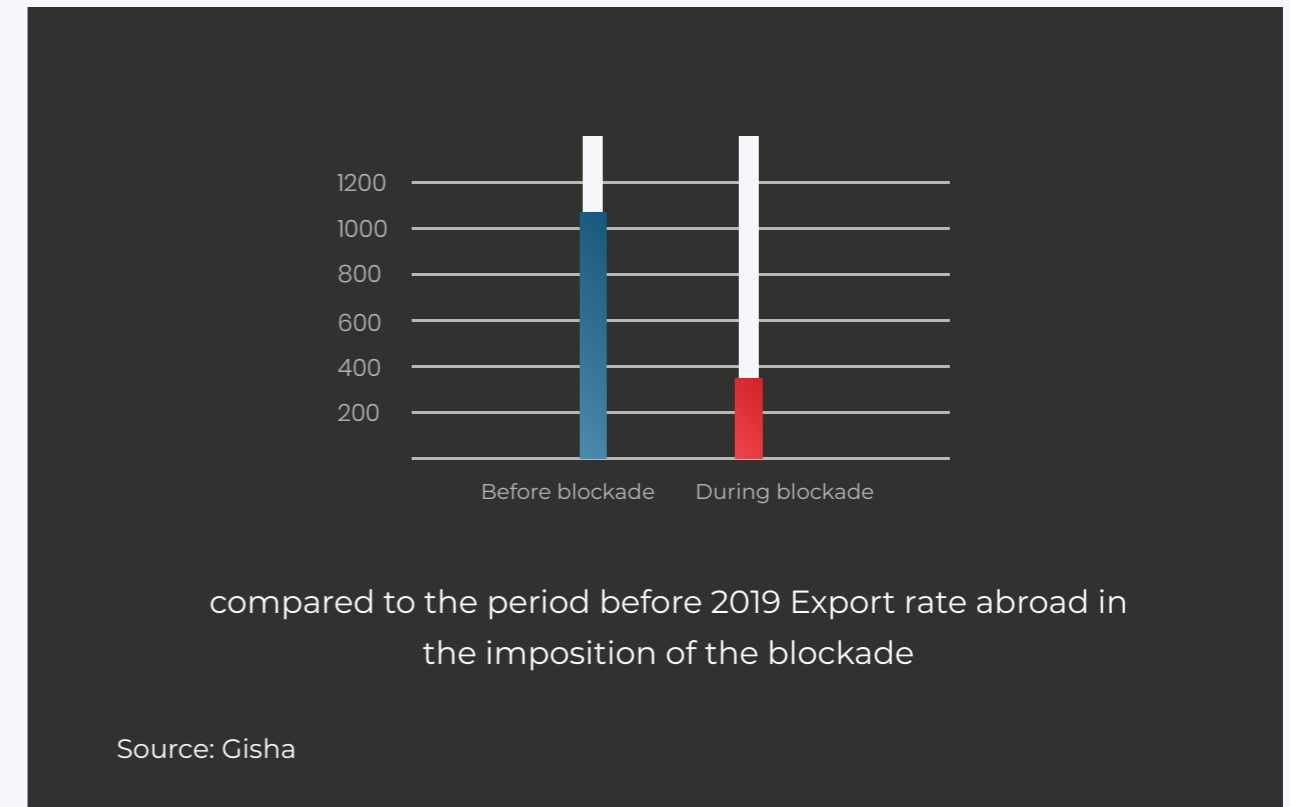
Since the Israeli blockade was imposed in 2006 and tightened in 2007, various methods have been relied upon to disrupt Gazan exports. Initially, there was an outright ban on exports, with the exception of a limited number of agricultural products destined for Europe (due to EU intervention).

Even when some exports technically have been allowed, however, there has been a virtual “lid” on trade. The irregularity of commerce between the Gaza Strip and the outside world, the difficulty of movement by merchants and the high cost of transportation have had effects similar to an outright ban.

According to the Gisha, about 1,000 trucks per month left Gaza per month before the blockade. However, between March 2007 and October 2014, total dropped to about 13.5 trucks per month (mostly agricultural goods)—in other words, only slightly more than 1% of the pre-blockade monthly average.

In 2014, Israeli authorities allowed periodic exports from Gaza to the West Bank—mostly agricultural products, furniture and clothing. In addition, export of some agricultural products was allowed to be sent to the Israeli market. By the end of 2015, the number of trucks leaving Gaza per month had risen to an average of 178.

In 2019, the export volume had reached an average 320 truckloads monthly, yet still way below the pre-blockade total.



Imports

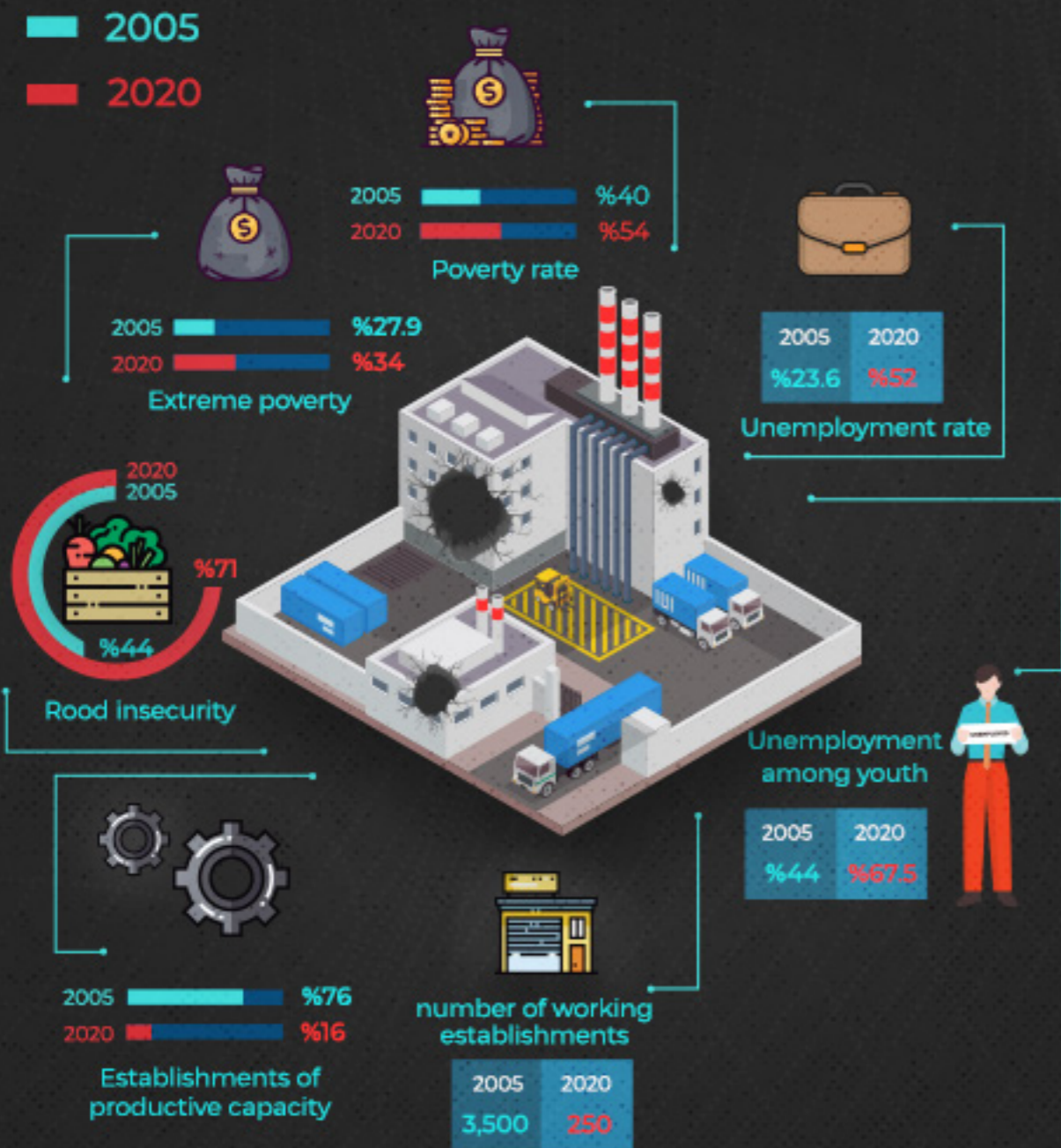
The closure of the border crossings also acted as a form of collective punishment in other ways—including placing limits on the import of vital supplies. In 2008, Israel closed Sufa crossing, which had been designated for construction materials. That was followed two years later by the closure of the fuel-focused Al Shujaiya/Nahal Oz crossing. The Al-Mintar/Karni crossing, designated for the import of other goods, gradually closed until it was permanently shut down in March 2011.

A document called “Red Lines,” prepared by the Israeli army’s Office of the Coordinator of Business in the Palestinian Territories (COGAT), laid out the minimum number of calories a Palestinian can eat according to age, gender and food type. This was used to calculate the number of food trucks permitted to enter the Strip.

In 2005, the number of filled cargo trucks entering the Gaza Strip was an average of 10,400 per month. By 2010, it had dropped to about 2,400 trucks and by the end of 2019 it hit a low of 7,517. Some goods could be brought in from Egypt (via the Salahuddin crossing adjacent to the Rafah border crossing), such as fuel and building materials. Between May 2018 and the end of 2019, about 15% of Gaza’s cement and 80% of its cooking gas came from Egypt. However, these quantities were insufficient to meet the needs of the Palestinian population.

Gaza: Dead Zone

Collapsing Economy



800\$

average of per capita income (3500 in the Palestinian territory)



3%

only is the rate of investment to GDP

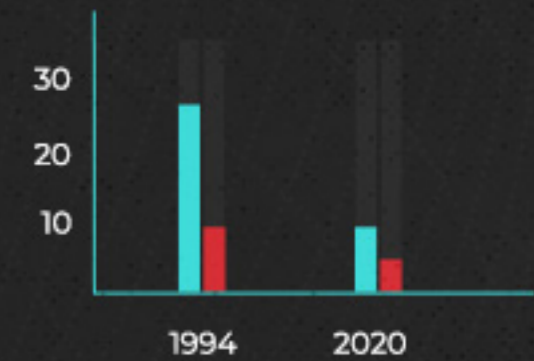


4 out of 5

persons receive humanitarian assistance

The share of productive sectors of GDP declined from **28%** to **13%**.

The share of agriculture of GDP declined from **9%** to **5%**.



The sea

The Oslo Agreement, signed by the Palestine Liberation Organization and Israel in 1993, permits the Palestinians to sail up to 20 nautical miles (about 37 km) off the Gaza coast. However, Israel has never been permitted Palestinians to go nearly this far offshore. Instead, Israel has arbitrarily limited fishing to an ever-changing zone that never has exceeded 12 nautical miles.

Shortly before Hamas took over the Gaza government in 2007, fishermen were allowed to sail out 10 nautical miles. However, in October 2006, that distance was reduced to 6 nautical miles and then to 3 nautical miles in 2009 after Operation Cast Lead. Since then, the allowed fishing zone has fluctuated between 3 and 9 miles, often tightening before military attacks and loosening a little af-

ter a ceasefire has been established. During 2016 and 2017, Israel allowed the expansion of the permitted fishing area to 9 nautical miles, resulting in a noticeable increase in the quantity and size of fish caught. In January 2019, Israel announced the expansion of the fishing zone in one narrow area to 15 nautical miles, while other areas were limited to 6.

Throughout this period of the blockade fishermen are frequently targeted by the Israeli navy, even when operating in permissible areas.

According to the Department of Fish Resources in the Ministry of Agriculture, an estimated 3,700 Gaza fishermen (down from a high of 10,000) support about 18,250 people. However, only an estimated 2,000 are able to work regularly, according to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).



Farming and the impact of the ‘buffer zone’

Israel has imposed a “buffer zone” inside the Gaza Strip that extends well beyond the border fence. In this area, any movement by Palestinians is prohibited.

The actual boundaries of this security zone are not clear and, like area of the sea in which fishing may take place, the line always seems to be shifting. Until 2008, pedestrian traffic was generally allowed up to 300 meters from the fence, and farmers could go as close as 100 meters in the course of their work.

However, with the launch the first major Israeli assault in December 2008, Palestinians were ordered to stay out of a much broader swath of land—reaching 1,000-1,500 meters from the separation fence. This is not a minor restriction. The “off-limits” land represented about 35% of the Gaza’s land suitable for agriculture. Israeli forces destroyed or contaminated much of this arable land.



After the 2012 military attack, Israel eased these restrictions, only to tighten them again later. Regardless of the official limits, however, Israeli forces often target farmers who are working in permitted areas and carry out periodic ground clearing assaults.

In addition, in December 2015, Israel sprayed pesticides from airplanes on Palestinian land along the border. By 2018, approximately 13,723 dunums of agricultural crops had been damaged and the health of the 70% of total Palestinian livestock that graze in the buffer zone was impaired.



The sever lack of medical equipment rendered the largest hospitals in Gaza unable to provide the minimum and necessary treatment to hundreds of thousands of patients.

Abdullah Qishawi
Head of the Dialysis Department
of al-Shifa hospital

Deteriorating health



Palestinians living in the Gaza Strip must wait for weeks, months or even years to get basic medical treatment.

During the three major assaults on Gaza, hospitals, clinics and medical personnel have been directly and indirectly targeted. In addition, Israel's border closures forced the rationing of medicines and supplies, and malfunctioning equipment could not be replaced or repaired. During the first half of 2019, for example, the Gaza Strip received just one shipment of medicine in mid-May from Ramallah, which amounted to only 3% of what the population needed.³

While the shortage of essential medicines was only about 16% in Gaza in 2005, the blockade that followed pushed up shortages dramatically, reaching more than 52% by January 2020. And 71% of the needed medications that are vital for children and their mothers are not available. Cancer drugs also are in drastically limited supply, with the shortfall soaring from 16% in 2005 to 60% by the beginning of 2020. As a consequence, the survival rate for women with breast cancer dropped from 60% in 2005 to 42% in 2020.⁴

Likewise, the number of beds available per 1,000 persons declined from three in 2005 to only 1.4 at the beginning of 2020. Patients who need elective surgery must wait for up to 16 months, compared to three months in 2005.

Women and children experience unique and particularly severe challenges. The fertility rate decreased from 4.6 births per woman in 2005 to 3.6 at the end of 2019, and the maternal mortality rate now is 19.1 per 100,000 live births. Twenty-three percent of births require Caesarean sections, mostly due to poor maternal health.

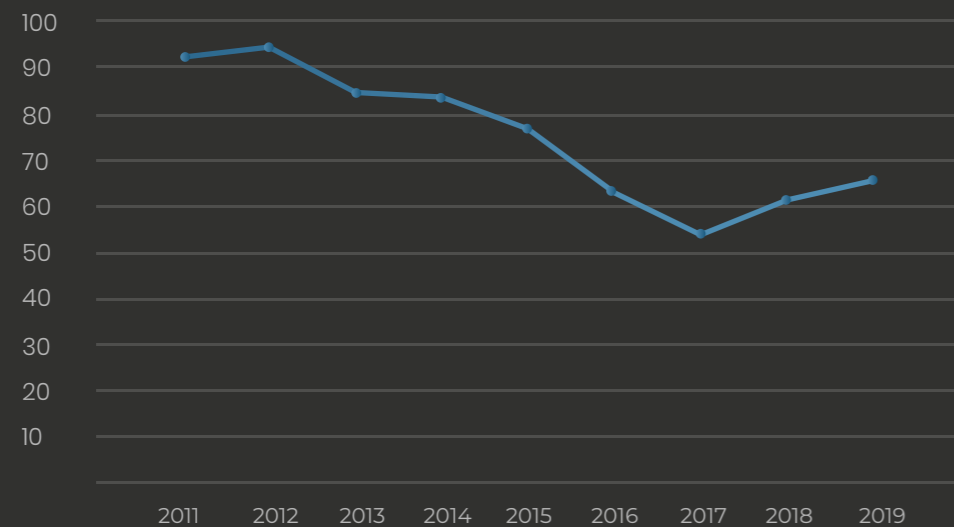
These adverse effects of these health deficiencies are passed on to children. More than half (55%) of children were found to be suffering from anemia at the beginning of 2020, compared to 45% in 2005.

Their mental/emotional health also suffers. A high percentage of Gaza children are depressed or feel chronic anxiety and fear—62% at the beginning of 2020, compared to 25% in 2005.

Due to the poor conditions in Gaza, patients with serious illnesses or injuries of any type typically must be treated outside the Strip. However, permission to leave must be obtained first, making sick persons hostage to the whims of Israeli authorities. The percentage of approved exit requests dropped from 97% in 2005 to 54% in 2017 (its lowest level). Approvals increased slightly in 2019, reaching 65% at the beginning of 2020. ⁶⁷

Protesters injured during the weekly “Great Return March” demonstrations find that their requests for treatment outside are mostly rejected. Israeli authorities received 550 such requests between 30 March 2018 and 30 April 2019, but only 17% were accepted on a timely basis (26% were rejected and 56% were delayed). In part, as a consequence, the number of people with serious disabilities in the Strip has increased to 48,210—2.4% of the total population.

Percentage of medical permit requests approved



the percentage of approvals of medical permits (2020 - 2011)

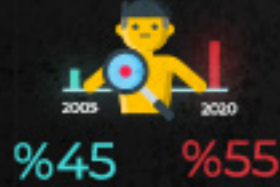
Gaza: Dead Zone

Deteriorating Health

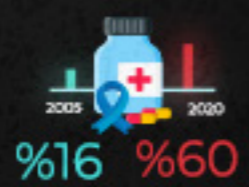
2005 2020



Survival rate of breast cancer



Anaemia among children



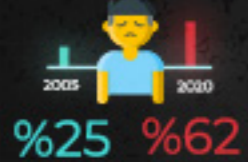
Shortage of cancer medicines



Shortage of medicines



Annual foreign assistance funds



Of children suffer from depression and anxiety



Waiting period of elective surgery



Approved patient travel permits through Erez Crossing



Number of persons with disabilities (2.4% of the population)



Undrinkable water



Fertility rate among women



Average number of beds per 1,000 persons

23% Cesarean delivery rate

Maternal mortality rate.. 19.1 per 100 thousand births



Attempting to manage a classroom of 50 students is one of the hardest challenges I have faced. The situation wasn't this hard before. Today, I cannot give the same attention to 50 students in one class.

Bassema Basous

Teacher of Islamic studies at al-Abbas elementary school, in the Shijaiyya neighbourhood eastern Gaza

Education

As the Gaza population continues to grow, and along with it the number of students, a chronic shortage of money and teachers has become severe. Likewise, each major military assault destroys some schools and damages others. Eighty-six new schools need to be built, and 1,081 more classrooms are needed by 2021.

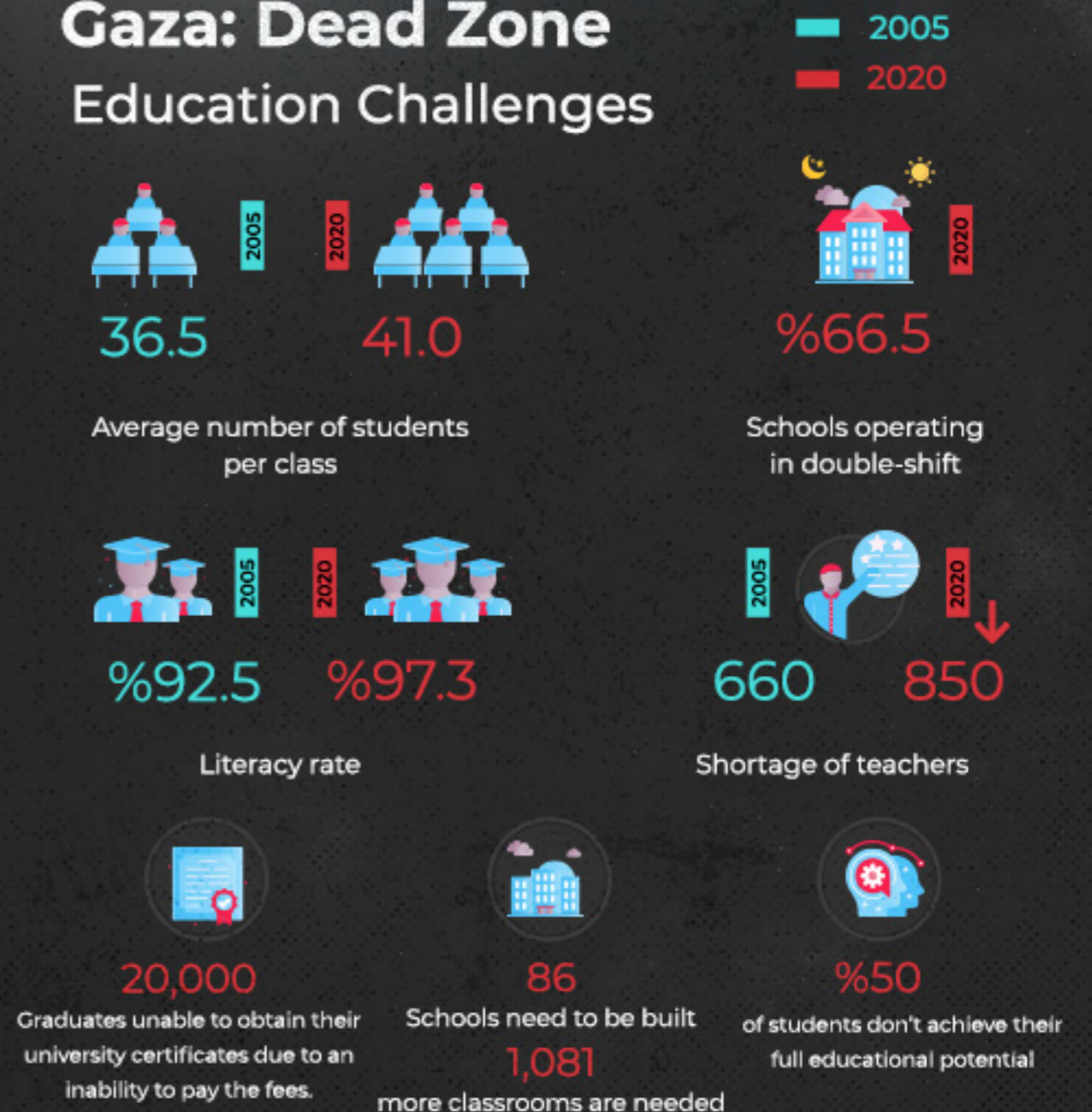
Most Gaza schools (66.5%) now must operate in two shifts (morning and evening). Still, overcrowding is the norm; the average number of students per class now exceeds 41, compared to 36.5 pupils in 2005. Yet, since 2005, the number of teachers staffing UNRWA schools has dropped by 850.

Only 30% of children ages 3-6 are able to attend licensed kindergartens. Overall, 50 percent of students ages 5-17 do not achieve their full educational potential due to psychological trauma. In addition, 20,000 graduates are not able to obtain their university certificates due to an inability to pay the fees.

Still, in spite of these deficits, the percentage of educated people in the Gaza Strip remains one of the highest in the world, even compared to the West Bank—reaching 97.3% in 2020, compared to 92.5% in 2005.



Gaza: Dead Zone Education Challenges



Refugee Crisis: UNRWA Unable to Fulfill Needs



Two million Palestinians live in the Gaza Strip, an area of 365 square meters. Of those, 1.4 million are registered refugees, including 271,900 students.

UNRWA was founded in the wake of the Arab-Israeli 1948 war to provide aid to these refugees until a permanent solution was found—one that never came. The agency provides education, health services, microcredit loans and other urgent assistance, depending on the financial support of UN member states to do so. The United States was historically the largest donor, followed by the European Union.

However, after the Israeli attack on the Gaza Strip in 2014, UNRWA found itself increasingly stretched beyond its capabilities, and reduced the number of aid recipients. For example, it excluded 43,000 families from the approved list for food aid. UNRWA also announced a reduction in financial aid, in which the agency had provided 40 USD to 21,000 refugee families.

Then, on January 16, 2018, the crisis worsened. The American government announced a freeze of \$125 million in its funding of UNRWA. After just one month, UNRWA cancelled employment contracts for more than 100 engineers who had been working on various Gaza projects for nearly 10 years. Contracts for another 68 emergency-assistance employees were not renewed, and 540 workers were reduced from full- to part-time status.

Electricity



The electricity crisis in the Gaza Strip dates to the start of the blockade in 2006, when Israeli forces bombed the six main transformers at the only power plant. Although the station was later partially repaired, a shortage of fuel persists. As a result, the Strip suffers from a large deficit in electrical energy, with power outages for up to 16 hours per day.

In November 2009, the European Union approved a mechanism for transferring funds for fuel to the Palestinian Ministry of Finance. However, even when those funds were received, the quantity purchased was limited to 4,500 cubic meters, which is enough to produce only 30 megawatts.

Thus, in 2011, the Strip became dependent on Egypt for fuel to run the power plant, producing 80 megawatts per month. A year later, however, the supply of Egyptian fuel came to a halt.

Since then, residents have suffered from a chronic, daily interruption of electricity. Gaza's power plant needs 650,000 liters of diesel to operate at full capacity, but the amount available is less than half of that amount. In addition, the station is in dire need of maintenance and development.

In 2017, the crisis reached its climax, with residents of the Strip receiving just four to six hours a day of electricity at best, greatly and adversely affecting their daily lives.

In 2018, an infusion of Qatari government donations allowed the power plant to operate using three generators, and a routine of eight hours of electricity, followed by eight hours off, was enabled. However, while helpful this was far from enough to meet the daily needs of the population.

Israeli officials curtailed fuel entry in June 2019, and at the beginning of 2020, residents of the Gaza Strip were receiving approximately six hours of electricity, followed by eight hours off.

Legal relief

As outlined in this report, the residents of the Gaza Strip have suffered from a suffocating siege imposed by Israel for 14 years. Most exits are closed, and Israel or Egypt has imposed absolute control over the others. Israel also prevents farmers from working on agricultural land adjacent to the border due to alleged “security” concerns and prevents fishermen from safely practicing their trade of fishing where the fish are to be most abundantly found.

Furthermore, the vast majority of the population is prevented from leaving Gaza for medical treatment, study or work, and there is a severe lack of sufficient food, building materials and medicines, which has exacerbated the humanitarian crisis and made the Strip inhospitable for any healthy economy.

Israeli authorities attempted to abandon their obligations as an occupying power by withdrawing their settlers and military forces in 2005. However, Israel continues to exert control over nearly every vital aspect of Palestinian life. Israel’s attempts to avoid responsibility contravenes the provisions of international law, specifically the Hague Agreement of 1907, in which Article 42 (of the section titled “Military authority over the territory of the hostile state”) states: “Territory is considered occupied when it is actually placed under the authority of the hostile army. The occupation extends only to the territory where such authority has been established and can be exercised.”

This means a land is to be considered occupied when effective control is achieved, which Israel has exerted over Gaza’s land, sea and air, and Israel’s claim that its ‘disengagement’ from Gaza in 2005 relieved of further responsibility under international humanitarian law is false and misleading.

According to international human rights law, Israeli authorities are obligated to respect the rights of the Palestinian population in the Gaza Strip, including their right to movement, education and work, without arbitrary restrictions or conditions.

The right to movement is fundamental and cannot be restricted. Article 12 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights of 1966 states that, “Everyone shall be free to leave any country, including his own.” In addition, it says, “No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of the right to enter his own country.”

Israeli authorities have prohibited the entry of many goods, including food and medical supplies, to the Strip, which is considered an absolute violation of the provisions of international humanitarian law, which prohibits the starvation of civilians. The Fourth Geneva Convention states in Article 55 that, “To the fullest extent of the means available to it, the Occupying Power has the duty of ensuring the food and medical supplies of the population; it should, in particular, bring in the necessary foodstuffs, medical stores and other articles if the resources of the occupied territory are inadequate.”

Article 56 of the same agreement states that, “To the fullest extent of the means available to it, the Occupying Power has the duty of ensuring and maintaining, with the cooperation of national and local authorities, the medical and hospital establishments and services, public health and hygiene in the occupied territory, with particular reference to the adoption and application of the prophylactic and preventive measures necessary to combat the spread of contagious diseases and epidemics. Medical personnel of all categories shall be allowed to carry out their duties.”

During military attacks on the Gaza Strip, Israeli authorities were found by independent international inquiry to order their forces to target civilian objects, agricultural areas and other vital installations, which are essential for the survival of the population. That is as an explicit violation of the Additional Protocol I to the Geneva Conventions. As Article 54 states:

1. Starvation of civilians as a method of warfare is prohibited.
2. It is prohibited to attack, destroy, transfer or disable objects and materials indispensable to the survival of the civilian population, such as foodstuffs, agricultural areas it produces, crops, livestock, drinking water facilities, networks, and irrigation works, if it is intended to prevent them from the civilian population or discounting their vital value, whatever the motive was whether it was with the intent to starve civilians, to force them to flee, or for any other motive.

Recommendations

Based on the information documented by the Euro-Mediterranean Monitor for Human Rights in this report, it recommends:

- 1- The international community must fulfill its responsibility to protect Palestinian civilians by working hard to end the long-term Israeli occupation of Palestinian lands and lift the unlawful blockade of the Gaza Strip, and to stop the war crimes against and collective punishment of the civilian population.
- 2- It also must urge Israeli authorities to honour their responsibility for the occupied population in accordance with the provisions of international conventions, treaties and norms.
- 3- All necessary measures must be taken to deny Israel impunity for its war crimes against Palestinian civilians. These actions should include sanctions on Israel to force it to comply with the provisions of international law.
- 4- The high-contracting parties to the Geneva Conventions must fulfill the obligations set out in Article 1 to ensure Israel's compliance. In addition, the contracting parties must fulfill their legal obligations under Article 146 of the Fourth Agreement, which allows the countries to prosecute those accused of committing grave violations.
- 5- Individuals implicated in war crimes, including Israeli leaders and soldiers, must be referred to competent courts, including those of state parties to the Geneva Conventions, in accordance with the principle of universal jurisdiction. We must ensure no one escapes accountability.

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