Suffocation and Isolation

15 Years of Israeli Blockade on Gaza
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For 15 years, the Gaza Strip has been witnessing a suffocating blockade imposed by the Israeli authorities that has affected all social, economic and humanitarian sectors. Despite the humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip reaching unprecedented levels, the blockade remains imposed on the enclave in a way that clearly shows how two million people can lead a decent life.

Israel began the Gaza blockade after Hamas won the legislative elections. Greater restrictions and sanctions were imposed after the elections in January 2006. The blockade was further tightened in mid2007.

The long years of blockade Gaza witnessed were accompanied at times
with military attacks, which led to the destruction of large parts of the infrastructure. In addition, thousands of unarmed civilians were killed and wounded or incurred huge material losses.

During the years of the blockade, indicators of the humanitarian crisis in the Gaza Strip surged shockingly. For example, unemployment rate in 2005 (before the imposition of the blockade) was about %23.6, while at the end of 2020 it reached %49, making it among the highest unemployment rates in the world.

Poverty rates jumped from %40 in 2005 to %56 in 2020, meaning that more than half the population of Gaza lives below the poverty line. In addition, the poverty gap increased from %14 to %20, and the cost of lifting the Gazan population out of destitution has quadrupled – from 209$ million to 838$ million.

Gaza's economy incurred tremendous losses as a result of the blockade and the three Israeli military attacks that took place in 2012, 2008 and 2014. The per capita losses are estimated at 9,000$ due to the blockade, with a decline in the per capita GDP by %27. The report said that Gaza Strip's contribution to the Palestinian economy decreased from %31 to %18.

As for the health sector, it remains the most affected, showing a clear indication of the deteriorating humanitarian conditions. In addition to the acute shortage of medicines and medical equipment, hospitals and primary care centers are still operating at low levels of capacity. The situation further exacerbated after the outbreak of the Coronavirus pandemic (COVID19-).
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 residents before and during the 15 years of the blockade. The report examines the harsh humanitarian conditions experienced by the residents of the Gaza Strip by reviewing the health, economic and social aspects, and provides a legal framework through the legitimate rules contained in international law.
Israel has a long history of isolating the Gaza Strip, which has been subjected to numerous closures during the past two decades. However, 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, 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 fishing zone were limited and all border crossings were closed.
Over the years, Israeli authorities worked to broaden and deepen the isolation of the Gaza Strip. 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, preventing university students and professionals from continuing their education outside the West Bank. The policy also had a profound impact in patients receiving healthcare, businessmen from trading and families staying united.

**Israeli military attacks**

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

- **Operation Cast Lead (2009-2008)**

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

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

  Over the course of the three-week operation, Israeli forces dropped an estimate of 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 women and children.

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

- **Operation Protective Edge (2014)**
  The longest and most deadly Israeli attack on Gaza started July 2014, 8 and lasted 51 days—ending August 2014, 26. Euro-Med Monitors 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

- Killed: 1,436
- Wounded: 5,400
- Destroyed Houses: 4,100
- Damaged Houses: 1,700

**Operation Pillar of Defense** | November 14-21, 2012

- Killed: 162
- Wounded: 1,300
- Destroyed Houses: 200
- Damaged Houses: 1,500

**Operation Protective Edge** | July 8-August 26, 2014

- Killed: 2,147
- Wounded: 10,870
- Destroyed Houses: 2,465
- Damaged Houses: 14,658
The consequences of military attacks were not limited to the mass devastation and casualties for their effects continued for years afterward. In the aftermath of the first military attack in 2009-2008, the United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS) began its operations in Gaza to clear mines and explosive remnants of war (ERWs). Search operations revealed that mines and ERWs were in residential areas and agricultural lands, which posed an imminent threat to the lives of civilians, including school students, workers, farmers, etc.

After the 2014 attack, the UNMAS received hundreds of requests to dispose ERWs spread in several areas in the Gaza Strip. The agency responded to 876 requests, removing and destroying 150 large bombs containing about 29,500 Explosive Remnants of War.
kilograms of explosive materials that had been thrown from Warplanes and providing support in clearing around 7,340 ERWs.

Since the end of the 2014 attack until 2020, ERWs have killed about 19 Palestinians and injured 170 others.

After more than five years since the 2014 attack, in November 2019, UNMAS found a large bomb in Deir al-Balah Governorate buried at a great depth. The agency was able to extract and remove it. Although, the UNMAS still has a lot of work inside Gaza, it may not be able to continue its work due to a lack of funding. UNMAS needs about 700,000$ to continue its work in 2021. Failing to provide the necessary funding would cause its activities to cease. This would exacerbate the danger civilians who live or work in areas containing ERWs face.
Closure of border crossings

Restrictions on the movement of both goods and people really are long-standing challenges faced by 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 persons) and Kerem Abu Shalom (for goods).

The average number of trucks allowed to enter Gaza, before 2006, was about 70 per day, in addition to 583 trucks 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 the fuel needed to power Gaza’s sole power station.

The Karni and Sufa crossings closed in 2007 and 2008 respectively. Currently, most of the goods entering the Gaza Strip is through the partially operational Kerem Shalom crossing.

During the two years following the imposition of the siege, the average number of trucks 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.

After that, goods from Gaza were prevented from being exported outside except for small amounts.

As for Erez crossing, which is equipped to handle large numbers of daily travellers, only deals with a small number of foreigners working in international relief institutions or journalists. In addition, a small number of Palestinians are allowed to leave the country in humanitarian grounds.

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• First: freedom of movement

Residents of the Gaza Strip have only two travel ports: Rafah land crossing bordering Egypt, under Egyptian control, and the Erez crossing, located in the northern Gaza Strip under Israeli control.

° Freedom of movement – Erez Crossing

Traveling from the Gaza Strip to Israel, the West Bank or Jerusalem is a real challenge for Palestinians. Only people with permits are allowed to travel through the crossing. Determining who will be granted a permit depends on the criteria, which is stringent and often changes. Even those fortunate few who obtain a permit may be denied travelling when they arrive at the crossing. Moreover, Israeli security may deny permit holders to travel upon their arrival at the crossing, without giving clear reasons.

The Israeli authorities sometimes also sent notifications to Gazan merchants informing them that their permits have been withdrawn for what is known as a «security ban», including old and well-known businessmen who have travelled through the Erez crossing over several years, without explanation.

The Israeli authorities open the Erez crossing for some exceptional cases, which are grouped as follows:

https://features.gisha.org/%d8ba%d8b%2d%91%d8b%9-d%d8b%5d%d8b%8d%8b%1d%8a%9-d%d8b%9-d-86%9%d8a%d8%93%d8%b%6d%8b%5d%d8%9-d%8b%7d%8a%7d%8a%7d%8a%7d%
1. Holders of commercial permits.
2. Patients and their companions.
3. Exceptional humanitarian cases (marriage, death, illness).

Although the Israeli authorities allow these categories to cross, it takes a long time to process their requests. In addition, processing a request for visiting a sick relative may take more than 50 working days (the permit is not granted in most cases). A request for a patient who needs treatment, or an urgent surgery may take more than 23 working days.

Before the blockade was imposed on the Gaza Strip, the monthly average of Palestinian travelers from the Erez crossing was about 30,000. In 2019, the number dropped to about 14,960, while in 2020 the number was 4,600 – a decrease of about %69.3.

During 2020, the Erez crossing was closed in March due to the Jewish holiday Purim. The closure continued due to the outbreak of the Coronavirus pandemic. The number of travelers significantly decreased, especially in the months from April to September.
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Traveling through Erez crossing

Jan 2010 - Nov 2020

Source: Gisha

Monthly average of people traveling via Erez crossing
from 2005 - 2020
Freedom of movement – Erez Crossing

Rafah crossing is the main lifeline for Gazans who need or want to travel, since Israel’s Erez is so tightly controlled.

In 2005, before the siege imposed on Gaza, Rafah crossing operated normally. Records show that an average of 40,000 people per month entered or left Gaza via the crossing. However, the political conditions in Egypt changed dramatically after July 2013 and the crossing has been closed most of the time. Since May 2018, the Rafah Crossing began to operate on an almost regular basis. Despite this, travel conditions through the crossing caused great suffering for travelers. For example, a person wishing to travel from the Gaza Strip via the Rafah crossing, are put on a waiting list with tens of thousands of other people. These periods sometimes extend to six months or more, which causes many losses to travelers, and affects their medical, educational, or professional opportunities. Added to this is the complications of travel through the Sinai, which is often very dangerous.

In 2019, the monthly rate of Palestinian travelers through the Rafah crossing was about 12,172 cases per month. In 2020, the numbers dropped to 4,245 cases. The work of the crossing was mainly affected by the outbreak of the Coronavirus pandemic. It was closed for many days, while hundreds of thousands, including patients, students and business owners, remained waiting to travel through the crossing.
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Traveling through the Rafah Crossing

Jan 2010 - Nov 2020

Source: Gisha

Monthly average of people traveling via Rafah crossing from 2005 - 2020
Euro-Med Monitor interviewed Palestinian citizens who were affected by the closure of border crossings, which caused them great suffering and affected their work and health.

**Hoda Baroud** suffered from the closure of the Rafah Crossing. In her testimony, she told our team: “My husband traveled more than four years ago to Europe. After several years of trying to obtain a travel visa for me and my children to reach my husband, we could not travel because of the frequent closure of the Rafah Crossing and at other times, due to the difficulty of registering for travel due to the huge numbers of travelers. In the end, after more than a year of attempts, we had to travel through 'special coordination' that included paying a large sum of money that we struggled to collect for fear that our visa would expire and the suffering would start over”.
Hussam Salem, a photographer who is currently residing outside the Gaza Strip, said: “My struggle to get out of the Gaza Strip began in 2015, when I got a visa to travel abroad to study photography. However, the crossing was closed at that time for six months. Since then, over the course of the next three years, as a photojournalist, I used to get a lot of opportunities to travel, I tried to travel more than 30 times for various reasons such as receiving awards, participating in photo exhibitions, attending workshops, or work contracts, but all [those attempts] failed because the crossing remained closed for long periods of time. By then the travel visa expired or the exhibition or workshop I wanted to participate in ends. The Egyptian authorities returned me to the Gaza Strip and prevented me from traveling for ‘security reasons’ many times. The same pretext is used to return most young men who want to travel from the Gaza Strip even though they have a visa and a clear reason to travel.”
Sally Mohammed (a pseudonym) said: “I left the Gaza Strip for an Arab country to participate in a four-day conference through the Rafah land crossing. I had to stay in the host country illegally because I was unable to return to the Gaza Strip because the crossing was closed. On my return, I spent more than three days on the way back from Cairo Airport to the Rafah crossing due to the large number of checkpoints and the closure of the crossing early in the day. This forced passengers to stay in cars and buses for more than three days. There was no place to sleep or to buy food and water, or bathrooms. It was a journey full of torment that I will never repeat again.”
Nadia Al-Shaer, a Palestinian woman with breast cancer, said: “I have breast cancer, and I had a mastectomy. I had to travel through the Erez Crossing to the West Bank to receive treatment there. Within three years of my sickness, I was returned many times and prevented from traveling, despite the fact that I submitted all the papers required to receive treatment and their knowledge of my health condition. My physical health and psychological condition was very bad, especially, since the delay in cancer treatment sessions would increase the possibility of complications and deterioration of my health condition. I was feeling very afraid and anxious. I see my female friends who were prevented from traveling through the Erez Crossing die after their health deteriorated.”
• Second: Transportation of goods

Since the Israeli authorities started its blockade, it has banned many civilian goods from entering the Gaza Strip. The authorities prepared a list – that was not announced – of the goods allowed into Gaza. All goods not on the list are prohibited.

During 2020, Israel allowed most goods into Gaza but exercised tight restrictions in their entry by banning all «dual use» goods, which the Israeli authorities believe may be utilized for military uses. Israel placed these types of commodities in a long list that included medical equipment, agricultural and fishing supplies, communications equipment, among other goods. Although the Israeli authorities consider these goods to be dual use, many of them are necessary for Gaza's economic development.

As for the basic building materials such as cement and iron, which Gaza needs to rebuild what was mainly destroyed during the military attacks, to implement internationally funded projects, build homes and housing units for the growing number of residents, are subject to great conditions and restrictions.

• Truck entry rate

In 2005, about a year before imposing the blockade, the monthly average of trucks entering the Gaza Strip through the Israeli crossings was about 10,400 trucks. After the imposed blockade, the Israeli authorities closed the
Karni crossing in June 2007, the Sufa Crossing in 2008, and Nahal Oz in 2010. In 2008, a document released by Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories of the Israeli army called “the Red Lines» revealed that Israel made a calculation of the number of calories that a Palestinian can have in Gaza based on age, sex, and the basic types of food allowed into Gaza. This accordingly limits the number of food trucks allowed into the sector.

Based on information Euro-Med Monitor obtained from Palestinian merchants and businessmen during the first five years of the blockade, the Israeli authorities prevented the entry of several foodstuffs. There is no clear reason to indicate why certain foods and other materials were banned from entering Gaza. These goods included chocolate, potato chips, biscuits, sage, ginger, and jam, along with other non-food items such as cement, iron, construction wood and fishing equipment.

Since then, specifically from 2010-2007, the number dropped to about 2,400 trucks per month (%23 of the rate before the blockade). Kerem Shalom crossing became the only crossing designated for transporting goods to and from the Gaza Strip. In 2020, the number dropped to 7,000 due to many closures and restrictions on the entry of fuel and basic building materials into the Strip.
The movement of goods entering from Egypt through the Salah al-Din Gate adjacent to the Rafah crossing, remains vital for Gazans who need goods to enter through it continuously. Such goods include fuel and building materials, but they are not allowed to enter through the Israeli Kerem Shalom crossing.

In 2020, about 27% of the cement needed for construction and about 77% of cooking gas entered the Gaza Strip through the Salah al-Din Gate. However, despite the variety of the goods coming from Egypt and their importance to the population, their quantities are still small compared to Gaza’s needs. This means that this portal cannot be an alternative to the Kerem Shalom crossing.

As for Gaza’s exports to Israel, the West Bank and the outside world,
according to the crossing's agreement signed in 2005, Israel agreed to allow 400 trucks to exit the Gaza Strip daily, based on estimates of Gaza’s exporting capabilities.

In 2005, nearly 10,000 trucks exited the Gaza Strip in an average of 833 trucks per month. However, since the imposed blockade, specifically from June 2007 to October 2014, the number of trucks exiting the Gaza Strip per month amounted to about 14.7 trucks – this is %1.5 of the trucks leaving Gaza before the blockade was imposed. In the first half of 2020, only 316 trucks exited Gaza every month – this is %38 of the trucks leaving before the imposed blockade.
Suffocation and Isolation

Freedom of movement to and from the Gaza Strip (2020)

**Erez Crossing**

- The crossing is **open only** for:
  - Commercial permit holders
  - Patients and their companions
- **from 30,000 to 4,620** monthly exit rate drop between 2005-2020
- **50-23** working days to process patient exit requests

**Rafah Crossing**

- **60 - 90+ Days** waiting periods to exit through the crossing
- **from 40,000 to 4,245** monthly exit rate drop between 2005-2020
- **frequent closures** hundreds of thousands of people are prevented from leaving or entering Gaza
- **134** arrests at the crossing
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 largely by the destruction of production facilities and offices, as well as the loss of job, lingered long after ceasefires were declared.
According a UNCTAD\(^1\) report issued on November 2020, the economic cost of the Israeli occupation on the Gaza Strip during the past decade was estimated at 16.7\$ billion. This is due to long-term closures and the military operations that Gaza was subjected to during the siege period. Unemployment rates in the Gaza Strip remained among the highest in the world. After it reached around %23.6 in 2005, it increased to approximately %49 in 2020, while the regional economy in the Gaza Strip grew by less than %5.

These economic crises are accompanied by a %27 contraction in per capita GDP. In addition, poverty rates jumped from %40 in 2005 to %56 in 2020, as well as an increase in the poverty gap from %14 to %20.

The annual cost of lifting people out of poverty quadrupled from 209\$ million to 838\$ million.

- **Coronavirus crisis**

The outbreak of the Coronavirus pandemic crisis has multiplied the pressure afflicting Gaza’s economy. The lockdowns caused an increase in the suffering of workers who work for daily wages.

According to the Palestinian General Federation of Trade Unions, %90 of workers (that is about 160,000 workers) who work on a day-to-day basis were affected by the economic crises in the Gaza Strip. Most of them either

lost their jobs or stopped working temporarily due to closures faced during the COVID-19 outbreak. In addition, the daily wages these workers obtain make them unable to cope with these closures, especially since the average daily wage for every worker does not exceed 35 Israeli shekels (3 dollars). This is not commensurate with the difficult conditions and the high costs of living².

According to local and international reports, the total direct losses of the construction industries sector in Gaza during 2020 amounted to about 1.56 million per month, while the indirect losses exceeded 3 million per month. As for food insecurity, about %73 of the population of the Gaza Strip suffers from food shortages. This percentage has increased dramatically compared to 2005, when the food security rate was about %44.

According to information released by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), the years of blockade, as well as the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, have made about %80³ of the population of the Gaza Strip dependent on international aid. Four out of five people require financial aid.

Euro-Med Monitor’s field team interviewed Palestinian citizens in Gaza, whose work were affected by the poor economic conditions as a result of the blockade.

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² https://www.alaraby.co.uk/economy/
³ https://www.unrwa.org/ar/where-we-work/
Nasser El-Helou, a businessman, told Euro-Med Monitor: “The private sector has been negatively affected due to the economic situation in the Gaza Strip. We had to close one of our most important factories. The plant was used to make all kinds of doors. It was established in 1986 and closed in 2014 due to bad economic conditions. Over the years before closing the factory, we reduced the staff from 60 full-time employees to 12 part-time employees, and the production of doors were decreased from 500 to 60.”

Musa Khaswan, Director of the World Dental Center, said: “Our work has been greatly affected by the economic recession in the Gaza Strip. The percentage of people who perform dental restoration has decreased dramatically, and the number of our patients is limited to those who need immediate treatment. The patient does not resort to treatment unless he experiences severe pain that is intolerable. This is because of the high cost of dental treatment.”
I met many patients who needed dental nerve repairs, but instead, they extracted the tooth themselves to save money as they cannot afford to pay for it professionally. Also, during the years of the siege, many dentists who were renting clinics in our center closed due to the lack of patients.”

Kamal Obeid, a construction worker, said: “I have been working in construction for many years. Before the blockade I worked in construction every day of the week. I worked even on Friday [which is the holiday] because of work pressure. My daily wage was about 60 shekels (17 dollars), but after the blockade the construction work fell drastically to the point where I can only work one day a week. My daily wage also fell by more than half. I know many brick manufacturing plants that have been closed. Several companies that specialized in construction work have also stopped. Before the blockade, we used to work in constructing buildings, mosques, universities and recreational places, but now our work is mainly building simple apartments. Our wages are barely sufficient to meet our basic needs and necessities.”
Suffocation and Isolation

Gaza’s economy collapse during 15 years of blockade

- $9,000 economic losses per capita due to the blockade
- 49% of the workforce is unemployed
- 56% of the population is below poverty line
- $838 million: the annual cost of lifting Gazans from poverty
- 7,000 trucks per month enter Gaza—about 50% of what Gaza needs compared to 2005
- Only 27% of the cement needed for construction entered Gaza during 2020
The Israeli authorities control extends to agricultural lands in the Gaza Strip. It imposes a 300-meter-wide buffer zone along the separation fence. Although the Israeli authorities claim they allow farmers to reach 100 meters from the fence on condition of prior coordination, its practices on the ground prove the opposite. Farmers are exposed to grave dangers when approaching that area and are therefore unable to conduct their business normally.

Application of this policy remained in effect until September 2005, when the Israeli authorities declared that Palestinians should stay at least 150 meters away from the buffer zone.
away from the fence. In November 2008, this distance was expanded to 300 meters.

However, the Israeli military attack on the Strip in December 2008 led to imposing a new buffer zone of 1,500 - 1,000 meters wide along the separation fence. This area constituted about %17 of Gaza and %35 of its agricultural land.

Moreover, during the years of the siege and military attacks, the Israeli forces destroyed large areas of agricultural lands, which led to heavy losses incurred by farmers and landowners.

After the 2012 military attack, Israel allowed the residents 100 meters near the fence, but in 2013, however, the number rose to 300 meters.

Israel determines these permissible distances that Palestinian farmers are obligated to abide to, fearing that the authorities will target them if these rules are breached. Israeli forces often target farmers in the permitted areas if rules are violated without any justification. In addition, Israeli forces carry out periodic incursions of agricultural lands where farmers work in safe areas.

In December 2015, Israel decided to spray pesticides by aircraft to expose agricultural lands adjacent to the separation fence, which caused the burning of approximately 13,723 dunums of agricultural crops from – 2014 2018. This also damaged the livestock in Gaza, as more than %70 of which is located on the borderline of Israel.
According to human rights reports, in recent years there were about 1,300 incidents of shooting at people for approaching the areas near the fence. Among those targeted were shepherds, farmers, and collectors of Iron “scrap”. These shootings killed about 161 Palestinians and injured more than 3,000.

These numbers have increased after the protests began on 30 March 2018 along the border fence, which was called “The March of Return”. At least 214 Palestinians were killed in the demonstrations and more than 36,100 were injured. It is believed that 46 children were amongst those killed and 8,800\(^1\) of those injured.

In addition, residents of neighborhoods near the border areas suffered from various harassments including spraying agricultural pesticides during several time periods, in an apparent attempt to destroy them. The Israeli authorities admitted that they carried out about 30 spraying operations from the air on agricultural areas along Gaza’s fence, in the years 2014 to 2018. This led to more damage to agricultural crops, even in areas that are located more than 300 meters away from the fence, threatening the sole source of livelihood for farmers\(^2\).

Spraying operations continued during 2020 several times during the year. For example, in January 2020, Israeli drones sprayed agricultural pesticides

\(^1\) Ibid
\(^2\) Ibid
on crops along the separation fence, exposing large agricultural fields to danger. A similar operation occurred again in April and this continued for the rest of the year there along with sporadic harassments. Euro-Med Monitor field team interviewed farmers from the Gaza Strip, who suffered great losses as a result of the blockade and the restrictions imposed on them. This made them lose the ability to provide for their families and secure their basic and essential needs.
Rafiq Jamal Obeid, a farmer of Shejaiya, neighbouring eastern Gaza, said: “I own about three dunums of agricultural land in the eastern Gaza Strip, in which I grow vegetables throughout the year. The Israeli violations against us as farmers have never stopped and have only increased since 2005. During the 2009 attack, the Israeli bulldozers leveled all my dunums without warning after I had planted them, fertilized them and waited to harvest them. The attack caused me a material loss of nearly 1,000 shekels (about 290$).”

To tighten the blockade on us, the occupation annually and deliberately sprayed crops and lands with a toxic chemical that caused the death of all plants. During 2020 they sprayed my land, which turned them into barren lands that are not suitable for agriculture for the coming years. In addition, they extended the buffer zone in some areas to 500 meters. All these harassments caused me to lose my family’s only source of livelihood. We can no longer sell or export the crops that we planted because they have been destroyed and perished.”
Kamal Suleiman, a farmer in the east of the Zaytoun neighborhood in Gaza City, said: “I own about six dunams of land, all of which are near the Israeli border. The lands are all filled with vegetables and olive plants. Before 2005, we used to grow on every inch of our land, but after the blockade, we have become cautious to approach the border as they have placed a supposed automatic machine gun. It is a machine gun loaded with bullets which shoots any thermal object that gets near the buffer zone. Last year, the occupation sprayed a toxic substance on 15 dunums, my land being among them. This caused me to lose about 3,000 shekels (about 880$). This situation affected me financially as my land is the only source of my daily income. I became unable to provide the basic requirements for my family due to the weak financial capabilities and the continuation of the blockade that still prevents us from working freely in our farms.”
Fishing crisis

The Oslo Accords, signed by the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and Israel in 1994, stipulates that Palestinians are allowed to sail up to 20 nautical miles (37 kilometers) off the shores of the Gaza Strip. However, Palestinians have always been prevented from reaching that distance while only allowed less than 12 nautical miles.

Israel routinely reduces the fishing zone in Gaza. In 2006, Israel reduced the fishing zone to ten nautical miles, then to six nautical miles, and then to three nautical miles in 2009 following Operation Cast Lead. At the beginning of 2019, Israel announced the expansion of the fishing area to 12 nautical miles, and then allowed fishing at 15 nautical miles. However, during 2019 the fishing zone was reduced nine times as collective punishment measures, including four times when they closed the sea completely. In 2020, Israel again reduced the fishing zone five different times, including one time it...
closed the sea completely¹.

At the same time, the Fishermen’s Committees in Gaza reported that fishermen and their boats are constantly under fire by the Israeli navy. During the first half of 2020 alone, there were 171 shootings by the Israeli navy at fishermen and their boats. As well as three fishermen were arrested including minors in the first third of 2020².

In addition to restricting fishing zones, shootings and arrests of fishermen and their equipment; the Israeli authorities restrict importing equipment needed to rehabilitate boats damaged by the Israeli naval fire. Due to the restrictions in importing this equipment is necessary for fishermen to continue their work. The number of workers in the fishing field decreased from about 10,000 in 2000 to 3,600 in 2020. These fishermen provide for 18,250 people, which means that the impact on the livelihood of these fishermen would threaten the lives of thousands of Gazan citizen.

¹ https://features.gisha.org/%D8%BA%D8%BD%95%D8%A9&D8%BD%89&D8%AF%DD%89&D8%A7&D7%9C%9A/

² Ibid
A Euro-Med Monitor interviewed a group of Gazan fishermen, who spoke about the ongoing Israeli violations against them, and how they affect their only source of income.

Osama Hassan (a pseudonym), a fisherman from northern Gaza, said: “On May 2020, at around 8:30 a.m., while I was heading to fish on my boat, an Israeli vessel started to chase and open fire at me. I was shot with a rubber-coated bullet which caused bruises and damaged the boat’s engine. When the vessel came near me, they [the soldiers] ordered me to take off my cloths then sprayed me with wastewater. I stayed like this for three hours, until a group of fishermen managed to reach me and took me to the port.”
Samir Karam (a pseudonym), a fisherman whose boat and fishing equipment were damaged after the Israeli forces attacked him. He said: “On May 2020, 15 at 5:30 a.m., while my brother and I were doing our work within three miles at the northwest of Beit Lahia sea town, the Israeli vessels opened heavy fire from their rubber-coated metal bullet machine guns at our boat. The bullets hit the engine and was completely damaged, as well as 11 pieces of our fishing nets were ruined.”

Saed Hassan (a pseudonym), a fisherman from Al-Shati refugee camp, west of Gaza City, said: “On February 2020, 3, at 3:30 p.m., while I was working with three of my relatives in Khan Yunis sea, southern Gaza, we came under heavy fire from an Israeli vessel, despite fishing at only ten nautical miles away [it was allowed at the time]. When the boat approached us, the soldiers asked us to take off our clothes and jump into the sea and move towards their vessel. When we did, they arrested us and confiscated our boat. They took us to the Israeli Ashdod port and interrogated us until 11:30 p.m. Then they released us, and the boat remained there.”
Collapsing health sector

Due to the long Israeli blockade, Gazans suffer difficult conditions at various levels, especially in terms of health care. The blockade has caused permanent shortages of medicines, supplies and basic medical equipment. The health sector is one of the most affected sectors by the Israeli prevention policies. It is almost completely collapsed, especially with the outbreak of the Coronavirus pandemic since late August 2020.

During the past 15 years, the health sector has witnessed many setbacks and challenges that have had severe impact on the health services provided.
to the citizens of the Gaza Strip. During the Israeli military attacks, the Israeli forces directly and indirectly targeted hospitals, health centers and medical personnel. In addition, the restrictions imposed on the entry of medicines, medical supplies, and maintenance parts for medical devices has a tremendous impact on the health sector.

The health sector in the Gaza Strip is dependent on three supporters. First, external transfers for treating diseases that Gaza hospitals cannot deal with. The hospitals patients are transferred to are in West Bank, Israel, or other countries abroad. The second is related to foreign medical delegations, which are often specialized in specific health fields such as bones or nerves. These delegations contribute to some extent in treating many medical conditions, especially those who cannot travel due to the Israeli ban, who constitute 50 % of the total number of patients who obtained permits for treatment abroad. The third is the medical aid provided by the World Health Organization, UNRWA, and the Palestinian Authority.

According to the Ministry of Health in Gaza, figures show that there is a severe shortage of basic medicines and medical supplies, in addition to health services for basic sectors such as cancer patients and maternal and childcare. Deficit in pharmaceutical stocks reached about %47, while it reached about %33 in medical consumables. Statistics indicate that the number of drug items that Gaza ran out of reached 232 medicinal items, and the number of medical equipment that Gaza ran out of reached 261 items.
The Israeli blockade has caused a decline in specialized health services such as those provided to people with blood diseases, as well as cancer patients, whose number reached about 8,000 patients in the Gaza Strip. Deficit rate in services provided to them reached %68, which necessarily affected the survival rate of cancer patients, especially breast cancer patients. The survival rate for breast cancer patients declined to %42. After years of Israeli blockade, health care services in the Gaza Strip declined by %66, emergency and operations services by %21, kidney and dialysis services by %41, cardiac catheterization and open-heart services by %66, and orthopedic services by %11. Statistics show that maternal and child health service sector is one of the most affected sectors by the drug deficit, with a deficit rate of %69, which threatens the lives of more than 450 newborns per month. In addition, there is an acute shortage of blood supplements for pregnant women and children. This has led to an increase in anemia rates among these groups, with the incidence rate exceeding %55 in 2020. Data published by the Gaza Ministry of Health shows that there is a major defect in the medical system. There are 32 hospitals in the Gaza Strip in which only 13 of them are for the Ministry of Health. The number of beds in these hospitals are 2,943 beds with occupancy rate of %95. As for the number of operating rooms, it reached 89 rooms. The operating rooms in non-governmental hospitals are not used except in cases of extreme emergency,
due to lack of staff. This means that patients who need to undergo surgery have to wait for periods of up to 16 months.

Data from the Ministry of Health showed a remarkable decline in the work of health laboratories in Gaza, which also suffer from major crises. The financial deficit of these laboratories reached about 26.9%. In terms of the lack of stability in the supply of the necessary items to laboratory stores and blood banks, 69% of the necessary items are unavailable. This led to frequent interruptions in the services provided by these laboratories.

The increase in the number of patients and injured in emergency cases had the greatest impact on the inability of hospitals and medical centers to receive them on a regular basis, despite the opening of new health departments and centers from time to time. However, what these departments need in terms of medicines, materials, medical supplies, and medical personnel remains largely missing. Therefore, hospitals in Gaza usually refer serious cases to hospitals abroad, either in hospitals in the West Bank, Israel or Jordan through the Erez crossing, or in Egypt through the Rafah crossing. Hence, the fate of the vast majority of patients transferred abroad remain in the hands of the Israeli authorities, and whether it will allow them to travel for treatment after receiving the medical referral that is covered by the Ministry of Health in Ramallah in the West Bank. The Israeli authorities practices discriminatory measures against Gazans, where the health of hundreds of them have deteriorated for not being able to obtain financial coverage or were denied passage.
Data indicates that the number of patients referred to hospitals abroad through the Erez crossing declined during the last three years. The approval rate for such requests in 2017 was about %54, while in 2018 and 2019 there was a slight increase in the number of those who were allowed to receive treatment outside the Gaza Strip. The percentage of those accepted reached %65. The number declined again in 2020, to reach its lowest level with an approval rate no more than %28, after the Palestinian Authority announced the suspension of the Oslo Accords with Israel in June 2020. This decision made it difficult to obtain permits, given that the Civil Affairs and Health Coordination Department in Gaza stopped cooperating with the Israeli authorities – which, in normal conditions, are intransigent in granting passage permits to patients. During that period (June-November 2020) dozens of patients were denied receiving treatment abroad, and four patients who were in urgent need of treatment abroad died because they were denied travel due to suspension of the coordination.

During the protests of the Great March of Return which began in March 2018, the number of injured were estimated at about 35,000, including 19,464 cases treated in hospitals in Gaza. The Israeli authorities refused %26 of the transfer requests.

As the Israeli forces continued to target these protesters directly and in a way that left long-lasting effects, the number of people with disabilities in the Gaza Strip increased to 48,210 individuals, at a rate of %2.4 of the total population.
In addition to the above, other inputs contributed to the deterioration of the health sector, such as power cuts and constant fuel shortages, affecting the work of these hospitals for several hours or sometimes days causing real threat to the lives of hundreds of patients in intensive care departments, nurseries, and kidney patients who need electricity constantly.

On the other hand, lack of financial support directed to the health sector has affected the sector’s ability to absorb new employees. This greatly reduced medical staff and pushed a number of doctors to emigrate due to the successive financial crises, and the limited employment opportunities that, if available, would be with low salaries. For example, the laboratory sector, which is one of the most important sectors of the ministry of health, needs up to 800 employees to meet the needs of citizens. However, the sector has only 260 employees working under temporary contracts.

In March 2020, the health authorities in the Gaza Strip recorded the first cases of the Coronavirus from persons who arrived through the Rafah crossing. The infections increased slightly, and all of them were discovered at the border crossings and were quarantined before entering the Gaza Strip in centers specially prepared for this purpose. The authorities of Gaza have established more than 30 quarantine centers with about 1,500 rooms prepared to quarantine all arrivals from outside Gaza, in an attempt to prevent the spread of the virus.

The efforts succeeded to delay the spread of the virus, but of course, they did
not prevent it. On August 2020, the Ministry of Health announced the first infection with the Coronavirus outside the quarantine facilities. Since then, Gaza has entered into a complex crisis. The Coronavirus pandemic came to add an additional burden on the already dilapidated health system in Gaza. With the outbreak of the Coronavirus pandemic in the Gaza Strip, serious challenges have emerged for the health authorities, most notably the shortage of equipment and medical supplies needed to fight the Coronavirus. The Ministry of Health in the Gaza Strip allocated 110 intensive care beds (the number rose in late December to 200) for COVID-19 patients. More than 80% of them were filled. There are only 100 ventilators in the Gaza Strip serving more than two million people. They are occupied by 79%.

At the beginning of December 2020, the depletion of the Coronavirus test kits caused the laboratory to stop conducting the tests completely. However, it resumed its work after two days when the World Health Organization provided 195 test packages, enough for about 10,000 tests. Thus, the process of testing remains subject to the availability of laboratory materials. Unlike other medical supplies, the ministry of Health has no strategic funds of Coronavirus tests in its warehouses as a result of the Israeli blockade measures.

Euro-Med Monitor field team conducted a series of interviews with some Palestinian patients who faced difficulties in obtaining health care as a result of the Israeli blockade.
Aya Yaghi, a Gazan woman, said: “My son, Omar, was born with a heart problem as a result of a congenital defect. Two weeks after his birth he needed a heart surgery. He had undergone two surgeries leading to this major operation. At the time (July 2020) coordination between the [Palestinian] Authority and Israel was severed. My son entered a danger phase. He was in dire need of the major operation to ensure his survival. We directed an appeal at the time to all parties to look into my son’s case and help us obtain a permit to travel to conduct the operation outside Gaza. The response from the Israeli side was always rejection due to the cessation of coordination with the Palestinian Authority. As a result, my son Omar died. It was the first death due to the cessation of coordination between Israel and the Palestinian Authority.”
In another testimony, Gazan woman Heba Abu Nadi told Euro-Med Monitor: “My daughter, Zina, was born with heart problems. She needs four consecutive surgeries to preserve her life. Although, she is a child who needs a companion when traveling, every time I apply for a permit to accompany her, I get rejected as her escort for fake reasons. I tried several times to go with her, but the Israeli authorities accepted my daughter’s permit and refused to give me a permit to accompany her. The suffering continued and my daughter’s health condition worsened. In the end, the occupation agreed to allow my mother (Zina’s grandmother) to be with her, but the Israeli authorities refused to allow me. Until a few days ago, the Israeli authorities agreed for me to accompany her in the fourth operation.”
Suffocation and Isolation

Health Sector Deficit

- **drugs deficit**
  - 2005: %16
  - 2020: %47

- **breast cancer survival rate**
  - 2005: %60
  - 2020: %42

- **cancer drugs deficit**
  - 2005: %16
  - 2020: %63

- **anemia among children**
  - 2005: %45
  - 2020: %55

- **children suffering depression and anxiety**
  - 2005: %25
  - 2020: %62

- **accepted patient permits to exit through Erez crossing**
  - 2005: %97
  - 2020: %28

- **drug stocks deficit** %47
- **deficit in specialized health services, such as cancer and blood diseases** %68
- **deficit in cardiac catheterization and open-heart operations** %66
- **financial deficit of health intelligence** %26.9
- **medicinal disposables deficit** %33
- **emergency services and operations deficit** %21
- **orthopedic services deficit** %11
- **shortage of health and child services** %69
- **health care services deficit** %66
- **kidney and dialysis services deficit** %41
- **medical supplies items that ran out** 261
- **drugs that ran out** 232
The education sector in Gaza is witnessing one of the biggest crises due to the large deficit in budgets and lack of staff. At the same time the number of students in government schools affiliated with the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) have increased unprecedentedly.

The increase in the number of students over the past two decades and the lack of schools led to the adoption of a two-shifts system (morning and afternoon). This system is adopted in %66.5 of the total number of
government and UNRWA schools in 2020. The problem of overcrowding in classrooms exacerbated the problems of the educational sector. The average number of students per classroom in 2020 reached more than 42 students, compared to about 36.5 students in 2005.

In order to overcome the problem of overcrowding, the educational sector needs 86 additional schools with a capacity of 1,081 classrooms. Gaza also needs about 850 teachers in government and UNRWA schools. The Palestinian political division has prevented Gaza from employing more teachers. The financial crisis that UNRWA is going through affected recruitment process as well.

Although %50 of students in the age group (17-5) are greatly affected by the great psychological effects of the years of blockade and the repeated Israeli military attacks in addition to the continuous power outages, the rate of educated people in Gaza is considered one of the highest in the world. It reached %97.8 in 2020 compared to 2005, which was about %92.5.

The COVID19- outbreak in Gaza affected the educational sector. The Ministry of Education announced the closure of all educational institutions after discovering the first cases to prevent the spread of the virus before the end of the first month of the school year, which began in August 2020. Because of the difficult financial conditions, in addition to the constant power outages, online education constituted a challenge for many students. Students found great difficulties in joining and receiving lessons regularly due to the lack of
financial resources or because of long periods of power outage. Repercussions of the crisis affected university students because of the continuous power cuts and some of them do not have computers due to their poor financial conditions. Adding fuel to the fire, the lack of experience of some lecturers who sometimes provide lessons late or have trouble uploading them on the Internet. The lectures online are also considered weak. This created multilayered problems and challenges for students to complete their university education.

Educational facilities in Gaza lack experience in terms of online education. The power crisis is one of the main obstacles facing educational process in Gaza, as electricity reaches the homes of Gazans at best for only 8 hours a day.

“I suffered a lot to get a job, but in vain. I hold a master’s in private law from Al-Azhar University, and I was one of the best students throughout my academic years. But it is unfortunate to say that I couldn't get a single job due to the scarcity of opportunities. Originally, even my superiority did not intercede for me to get a job.”

Doaa Barham | Master of Private Law
• Graduates Crisis

Local economists indicate that nearly two out of three unemployed Palestinians in Gaza are fresh university graduates. While Palestinian universities in the Gaza Strip graduate tens of thousands of students annually, the labor market hardly offers hundreds of jobs due to the blockade. Thus, the unemployment rate among graduates necessarily increases annually. This complex reality has pushed hundreds of young people over the past years to leave Gaza and search for opportunities abroad, especially in light of the accumulation of internal crises, and the absence of near future plans to provide employment or training opportunities within the sector.
**Suffocation and Isolation**

**Education Challenges**

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<th>2020</th>
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<td>average number of students per classroom</td>
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<td>educated rate</td>
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<td>shortage in teachers</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
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- %50 students in the age group (5-17) who are greatly affected by the blockade
- %66.5 schools operating in two shifts
- 86 schools must be built
- 1,081 classrooms needed
Refugee crisis: UNRWA unable to fulfill needs

More than two million people live in the Gaza Strip. Of whom 1,386,455 are registered refugees, including 271,900 students distributed in 275 schools run by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA).

UNRWA was established as a United Nations agency by a decision of the General Assembly in December 1949, following the Arab-Israeli conflict in 1948. Its mission entails providing assistance to Palestine refugees in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, the West Bank and Gaza Strip. UNRWA enables Palestinian
refugees to enjoy their rights and basic needs until a just and lasting solution is found to their case.

UNRWA works to provide basic services, relief, education, health, small projects and loans to 1.4 million refugees, of whom 600,000 are distributed in eight camps in Gaza, which is the most densely populated place on earth. UNRWA depends on grants and financial aid provided by the member states of the United Nations, in addition to the European Union, as these grants accounted for %92 of its financial imports.

Until the end of 2017, the United States was the largest contributor to the UNRWA budget, followed by the European Union, and the rest of the other countries contributing varying amounts to support the UNRWA budget, which amounts to about 1.4$ billion annually.

In the aftermath of the Israeli attack on the Gaza Strip in 2014, UNRWA reduced the number of beneficiaries of the food aid program and other aid it provides due to its budget deficit, which exceeded %65. UNRWA excluded from its relief program 43,000 families from the lists of recipients of food aid, in addition to announcing a reduction in material aid programs, which provided about 40$ to 21,000 refugee families.

On January 2018, the United States, the largest donor to UNRWA, decided to reduce its financial support to the agency from 360$ million (%30 of its total budget) to 125$ million. However, UNRWA received only 60$ million in 2018. Moreover, the US government decided on August 2018 to
to completely end its financial support for UNRWA, which deepened the agency’s financial crisis in an unprecedented way.

The crisis continued until 2020, when UNRWA announced in March 2020 that it collected only 10% of its annual budget.

The crisis caused UNRWA to cancel the employment contracts of more than 100 engineers who had been working on various projects for nearly ten years. Contracts for another 68 emergency-assistance employees were not renewed, and 540 workers were reduced from full to part-time status. In December 2019, UNRWA terminated temporary work contracts of more than 70 workers, then at the end of June 2020 it ended temporary work contracts of about 106 of its workers in community organizations, including institutions dealing with persons with disabilities.

As a result of these crises (the blockade and UNRWA’s financial crisis), the rate of poverty and unemployment increased unprecedently in Gaza. Most refugees are unable to secure their daily needs of food, water, electricity, health care and education.

Despite the fact that UNRWA schools provide their services to refugees free of charge, most families are unable to secure school supplies for their children. In addition, classrooms have become overcrowded, as the average number of students is more than 42 students per classroom, reaching 50 in some cases.
In the context of the UNRWA crisis, the agency’s Commissioner-General, Philippe Lazzarini, said that the financial crisis that afflicts his organization is still ongoing, and warned that the refugee situation is on the verge of collapse due to the crisis. He added that the conditions of refugees in Gaza are getting more desperate and miserable than it was 30 years ago, pointing out that the level of risk also increases due to the high rates of poverty and unemployment and also because of the risks of the Coronavirus pandemic. Euro-Med Monitor interviewed a group of Gazans affected by UNRWA’s financial crisis. Their statements included the impact of the UNRWA financial crisis on their living conditions, especially in light of the blockade and the deteriorating economic situation in the Gaza Strip.
Muhammad Subhi al-Hafi, 42, a citizen benefiting from UNRAW services, said: “I have been receiving food aid from UNRWA for seven years. It used to be about 800 shekels [246$] worth a month containing flour, rice, lentils, milk, oil, and chickpeas. In 2016, they were reduced to less than half. Their worth became nearly 300 shekels [92$] only. At the beginning of December 2020, we were surprised to know that we won’t be receiving the aid without any warning. I suffer poor financial condition now, especially given that I am a breadwinner father of ten people and I work as a civil servant with a salary of 646$2,100 shekels, of which only 1,100 shekels [339$] remain for me as the bank cuts part of the salary as I had taken a loan. What remains is barely enough to meet my family’s basic needs.”
Rawan Al-Shobaki, 25, is a worker whose contract were terminated by UNRWA, said: “I was working under a contract within a system of work projects that aims to integrate graduates in the labor market. I was selected among the best students of my class graduates to work in one of these projects. They told me that it will be a six-month contract. However, when I signed the contract in June 2020, I was surprised that the contract stipulated a two-month work period only. When I inquired about that, the supervisor promised me that she would work to renew my contract after the two months. After the two-month period ended in August, my contract was renewed for an additional four months, and I was contacted to return to work. However, after the Coronavirus crisis began, specifically last September, they contacted me and told me that my work contract had been cancelled without any prior warning or compensation. When I asked them about the reason, they told me because of lack of funding and that the projects will be shut down. It was a great shock for me because I needed this work to help supporting my family along with my father. In addition, I was committed to personal financial obligations, as my dismissal from work has doubled the crises that my family and I live in.”
Yasmine Fouad (a pseudonym), 22, was one of the dismissed employees. She told Euro-Med Monitor team: “I was selected among the best graduates to work in a project under a contract. It was agreed with me that I will be signing a six-month contract in early June 2020 to work as a secretary in a UNRWA school. After three months, they informed me that I was suspended. When I contacted the UNRWA’s administration to look into my suspension, they said that it was due to lack of funding and that projects will be shut down.

As a university student studying a public relations diploma, I was depending on my job to pay the university fees which used to be 130$ every month and a half. My father has no job, and we suffer from difficult living conditions as we are a family of 11 and we live in a rented house. My sudden suspension made me completely unable to fulfill my university tuitions. This caused me to postpone the semester. In addition, I can no longer help my father support my family.”
Power crisis

Power crisis in the Gaza Strip goes back to June 2006, when the Israeli army bombed the sole power station in the Gaza Strip during one of its military operations. This resulted in the destruction of six main transformers in the station. Since then, Gaza suffers a large energy deficit. The crisis reached various peaks, during which electricity was cut off for periods of up to 20 hours per day.

The station remained in a near-complete suspension due to Israeli bombardment until it was repaired and returned to work partially in 2009.
After the station was repaired, the European Union financed the costs of the fuel needed to operate the plant. This situation continued until the European Union decided to transfer what it used to pay to the Palestinian Ministry of Finance in Ramallah, provided that the ministry would assume the task of paying for the fuel itself. However, the quantity decreased from that moment to 4,500 cubic meters per month, sufficient to produce only 30 megawatts, which it can only power one generator at the plant. This caused further cuts in power supply hours during 2010.

In 2011, the power plant in Gaza began using Egyptian fuel, and became powered by three generators, producing about 80 megawatts of power. However, at the beginning of 2012, the Egyptian fuel shortage crisis began to emerge after reducing the quantities supplied to Gaza. The plant started to draw on its reserves until they completely depleted, and the station stopped working on February 2012.

Since then, the Gaza Strip has been witnessing a worsening electricity crisis, one of the causes of which was the attacks launched by the Israeli army on the Gaza Strip in the years 2011, 2008 and 2014, resulting in significant material damage to its facilities, seriously affected the process of generating and distributing electricity.

In March 2014, the Palestinian Authority issued a tax on the power plant fuel, which exacerbated the crisis and the suffering of the population.

In 2017, the electricity crisis reached its climax after the Palestinian Authority's
decision on April 27 to stop paying for the electricity that Israel supplies to Gaza through ten electricity lines carrying 125 megawatts (about %30 of Gaza's electricity). As a result of this decision, Gazans had no power for more than six hours a day, which affected the daily life of the residents significantly. In 2018, there was a noticeable improvement in the quantities of electricity delivered to the homes of residents in the Gaza Strip as a result of donations and funds provided by the Qatari government to solve the crisis. At the time, the power plant operated with three generators, and residents had electricity about half of the day. However, this rate is not enough to meet the residents’ daily needs of electricity.

The power crisis surfaced again in June 2019 and continued during 2020 as the Israeli authorities prevented fuel into Gaza. The amount of electricity the citizens received ranges between 6-4 hours per day. Such low rate affected several major important sectors such as the health sector. The repeated power cuts threaten the lives of hundreds of patients on ventilators, as well as infant incubators and operating rooms.

The impact of power cuts has been reflected in the work of municipalities. Due to power cuts, sewage stations stop working for long hours forcing municipalities to drain wastewater into the sea, which threatens the lives of citizens and pollutes sea water. The crisis also had the greatest impact on the commercial and industrial sector. More than %80 of the sector’s factories stopped working due to lack of energy, which exacerbated the living crisis.
and increased the unemployment rate\(^1\).

It is worth noting that the Gaza Strip needs nearly 640 megawatts a month, but the amount that has reached the sector since the beginning of the crisis (during the years of the blockade) has not met even half its needs of electricity. The Israeli lines provide 125-120 megawatts, and the power plant provides (by Qatari fuel) from 70-60 megawatts only, while the Egyptian lines, which used to provide power with a capacity of 23 megawatts, they have been suspended since March 2018\(^2\).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Unit</th>
<th>Average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Average hours of electricity delivered to citizens per month</td>
<td>Hour/day</td>
<td>12.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Gaza Strip needs of electricity every month</td>
<td>Megawatts</td>
<td>450-600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maximum load</td>
<td>Megawatts</td>
<td>642.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Available electrical capacity</td>
<td>Megawatts</td>
<td>203-150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electrical capacity deficit</td>
<td>Megawatts</td>
<td>250-450</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average monthly energy imported in the Gaza Strip</td>
<td>Gigawatt/hour</td>
<td>132.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average monthly energy produced from the Gaza power plant</td>
<td>Gigawatt/hour</td>
<td>48.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average monthly energy imported from the Israel Electric Corporation</td>
<td>Gigawatt/hour</td>
<td>84.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average amount of fuel supplied to the station per month</td>
<td>Million liters</td>
<td>11.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Palestinian Energy and Natural Resources Authority

\(^1\) https://www.aa.com.tr/ar/%D8%A7%D8%B4%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%B3%D9%8A%D8%A9/15-Years-of-Israelis-Blockade-on-Gaza/

\(^2\) Palestinian energy and natural resources authority report, 2020
Euro-Med Monitor field team interviewed a group of citizens whose projects and livelihoods were affected by the power cuts.

Ahmed Al-Jadili, the owner of a chicken farm project, said: “Because of the scarcity of job opportunities in Gaza, I decided to start my own business by borrowing money from acquaintances and friends. I established a chicken farm containing about 1000 chickens. I started my business in January 2020. One of the most important things to guarantee the success of such business is to preserve the lives of the chickens in the winter season. It is inevitable that the chickens will be in the cold. This requires the owner of the project to provide continuous heating for the chickens. But I couldn’t do that due to the continuous power cuts. I tried alternative ways of heating such as heating via gas, but it was too expensive. In the end, about 900 chickens died due to the cold. I had to sell the remaining 100 at a very low price. I lost everything I put in this project and did not make any profits, in addition to the new burden of paying the money I borrowed back.”
Maha Osama, the owner of a cake business, said: “I ended a job as an agricultural engineer. Due to the lack of job opportunities, I opened my own cake-making business. However, the electricity situation in Gaza does not help much to achieve the desired profits and income. For example, on days when there is no electricity during the day, I have to work all night so that I can finish all the baking and kneading tasks to prepare orders for the next day on time. In many cases, I had to apologize to some customers after not being able to deliver their orders due to the lack of electricity, which greatly affected my income. I tried to resort to alternative solutions such as solar energy, but it cannot power an electric furnace. Also, the idea of acquiring a generator will cost me too much as I would have to spend much of the profit on the generator and its fuel and maintenance.”
Jamila Boudhakite, a freelance translator, said: “The power cuts affect my work as a freelance translator greatly, especially in winter. Because I have no power most of the day, I have to leave my children and my home and go to a restaurant or cafe to use electricity and the Internet available there. Of course, this costs some money. There are alternative solutions, for example you can rent a small office in a business incubator or a dedicated company or buy solar panels to generate electricity at home, but all of them are too expensive, especially since the profits of the freelancing work is not that high.”
Legal relief

As outlined in this report, the residents of the Gaza Strip have suffered from a suffocating siege imposed by Israel for 15 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, medicines and international aid to fight COVID19-. All of this have exacerbated the humanitarian crisis and made the Gaza Strip “uninhabitable”.

Many of the relevant international agreements show that the Israeli authorities are responsible for its practices that violates international law in the Gaza Strip, most prominently: the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Covenant on Economic and Social Rights, the Hague Convention and the Geneva Conventions. All these conventions affirmed a number of basic rights that Israel must adhere to, such as the right to life, physical integrity, movement, health, the right to an adequate standard of living, and other rights.
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 after its ‘disengagement’ from Gaza in 2005.

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, as these rights were guaranteed in the related international conventions.

Israeli authorities have prohibited the entry of many goods, including food and medical supplies – including COVID-19 vaccines – to the Gaza 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 contents of this report, the Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Monitor recommends the following:

1. Israel must end its blockade against the Gaza Strip immediately and unconditionally and allow the Palestinians to exercise all their rights, foremost among which is freedom of movement, and to stop its policy of collective punishment against civilians.

2. The international community must assume its responsibilities to protect Palestinian civilians in the Gaza Strip, by working to end the long-term Israeli occupation of the Palestinian lands, and to stop all forms of the suffocating blockade on more than two million Palestinian citizens living in a deteriorating economic, living and humanitarian situation.

3. The international community must oblige Israel to guarantee all the rights of the residents of the Gaza Strip as an occupying power, in accordance with the relevant international norms.

4. Relevant international institutions must take all necessary measures to put an end to the occupation authorities’ impunity for the crimes they commit against the citizens of the Gaza Strip, which may amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity, whether in the form of military attacks or the form of siege and restriction.
5. 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.

6. The International Criminal Court should open investigations against Israeli commanders and soldiers involved in the policy of collective punishment and military attacks against the Gaza Strip, and impose appropriate penalties on them in accordance with international justice standards.
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