



The Gaza Strip: Access Report April 2006

This report monitors access in and out of the Gaza Strip which is controlled through:¹

- Erez crossing for Palestinian workers and merchants and medical referrals who have permits to enter Israel;
- Erez crossing for international organisations;
- Rafah crossing, between the Gaza Strip and Egypt, for access to other countries, including for overseas medical referrals; and
- Four commercial crossings, of which Karni crossing is the largest.

1. Erez crossing

a. Access for Palestinian workers and traders into Israel (Figure 1)

The IDF imposed a comprehensive closure on the oPt, effective from 12 March due to the Jewish Purim holidays. The closure has been in place in the Gaza Strip since. As a result, no Palestinian workers or merchants have crossed into Israel in April. **As of 30 April, Erez crossing has been closed 73 days in 2006 (68% of the year).**²

Erez crossing is the only access point for Gazan workers and traders with valid permits to enter Israel. Men are eligible for working permits if aged 35 years and above, and if married with children. Criteria for trade permits are the same, except the age restrictions on men is set at 30 years and above.

Figure 1: Erez Crossing - average daily labour movement

	00	April 04	05	Jan 06	Feb 06	Mar 06	Apr 06
Workers to Israel	22,795	26	3,200	707	3,698	1,161	0
Traders to Israel	N/A	N/A	224	34	155	56	0

Source: Palestinian National Security Forces; 2000 and 2004 data obtained from UNSCO.

Key Events at Erez Crossing - 2006:

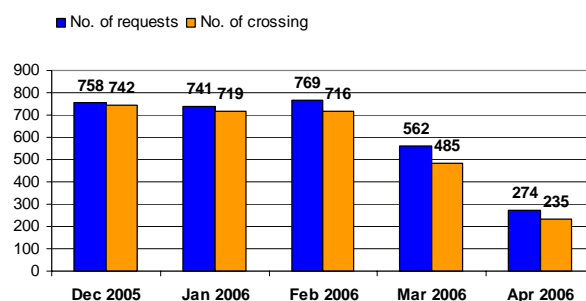
- 12 March – ongoing: Closed for Palestinian workers and traders following a comprehensive closure imposed on the oPt.
- 16 December 2005 – 21 January: Closed for Palestinian workers and traders following an escalation of Palestinian militants' firing of rockets into Israel. Only humanitarian cases were allowed access with prior coordination.

b. Access for medical referrals (Figure 2)

Palestinian medical referrals require passage through Erez crossing for treatment in Israel. **In April, 86% of**

all referrals crossed, the same percentage as in March. Since February, there has been a significant decrease of medical referrals (65% less in April compared to February). This follows the financial crisis in the PA due to the lack of funding, after which the Palestinian Ministry of Health (MoH) has had to cut spending.

Figure 2: Erez Crossing – Medical referrals crossing



Source: World Health Organization (WHO).

c. Access for humanitarian organisations

International humanitarian organisations require prior coordination with Israeli authorities to enter and leave the Gaza Strip through Erez crossing.

On 14 February, the IDF introduced new procedures at Erez crossing for internationals leaving the Gaza Strip. The vehicles of international staff members with ID cards issued by the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs are subject to an external search by a private security company with a 'sniffer dog'. While this has accelerated the actual checking process, the waiting time on the Palestinian side has significantly increased – often two hours or more – due to the delay in receiving the Israeli instruction to proceed through checking.³

Since 23 February 2006, UN national staff members have been unable to cross in vehicles driven by international staff. UN national staff members are instead instructed to pass through the workers tunnels. This distinction is not accepted by the UN and national staff members have been instructed not to cross Erez.

2. Karni crossing

Most goods imported into the Gaza Strip and all exported goods pass through Karni crossing. This month the crossing was closed 11 days (excluding Saturdays). **As of 30 April, Karni crossing has been closed 58 days in 2006 (53% of the year).**⁴

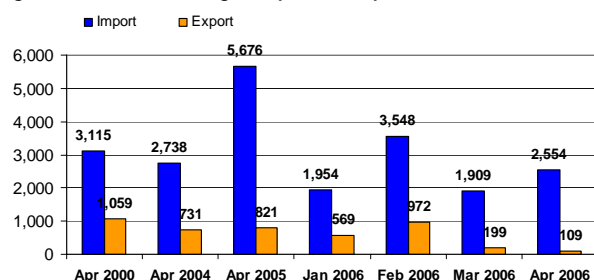
a. Commercial goods (Figure 3)

The average volume of exported goods in April was the lowest so far in 2006, with **less than 4.5 daily truckloads exiting the Gaza Strip**.⁵ The 15 November Agreement on Movement and Access set a goal of 150 daily exported truckloads by end 2005 and 400 by end 2006. However, due to the closure of Karni this year, the Gaza export market has been largely paralysed.

The Palestine Economic Development Company (PEDC), established prior to the Israeli disengagement from the Gaza Strip to utilise the former greenhouses in the evacuated settlements, has only been able to export less than 20% of its produce since 1 January. Total losses incurred by the PEDC exceed US\$ 8.5 million.

The total number of imported truckloads to the Gaza Strip in April was 2,554 (**daily average of 102**). This is an increase compared to last month, but remains lower than the monthly average in 2005 of 4,561 total truckloads. These imports cover immediate needs and have not significantly altered stock levels.⁶

Figure 3: Karni crossing – Imported/Exported Truckloads 2006



Source: Palestinian Ministry of National Economy. 2000/2004 data obtained from UNSCO.

b. Humanitarian supplies⁷

International humanitarian relief supplies, of which the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) handle most, also enter the Gaza Strip through Karni crossing. UNRWA has fuel stocks to last until mid June.

The WFP brought in 3,334 MT of food commodities in April into the Gaza Strip. The frequent closures at Karni this year have resulted in an outstanding WFP order of more than 6,000 MT in undelivered wheat flour to the Gazan mills. The WFP is importing some of its wheat supplies through Kerem Shalom crossing due to difficulties in processing goods through Karni.

An additional concern for humanitarian relief agencies is to return the empty containers out from the Gaza Strip through Karni crossing. The IDF claims security concerns behind the delay in the returning of containers. Containers stuck inside the Gaza Strip cost the agencies around US\$20 per container per day. As of 30 April, UNRWA and WFP had 104 and 20 empty containers respectively stuck in the Gaza Strip. The

cost for the delay of the 104 empty UNRWA containers has by end of April reached US\$ 70,000.

This month, UNICEF was not able to get in essential medical and educational supplies, including refrigerators for vaccines, laboratory and office equipment for use in the Gaza Strip.

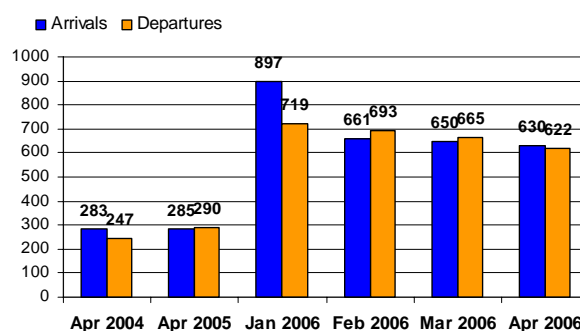
3. Rafah crossing

Rafah passenger crossing is the point of access for Gazans travelling overseas and is located on the Gazan border with Egypt. The border is controlled jointly by the PA and Egypt.

a. Palestinians' access internationally from the Gaza Strip (Figure 4)

Since the PA and Egypt started to jointly operate the crossing on 25 November 2005, the flow of people crossing has increased. Since 26 March, the crossing has been operating for 11 hours; from 8am to 7pm.

Figure 4: Rafah Passenger Crossing - average daily crossing



Source: Palestinian Passport and Border police. 2004 data obtained from UNSCO.

Since a peak in January due to the influx of Muslim pilgrims returning from the Hajj in Mecca, the passenger flow has stabilized at around 650 people crossing in both directions daily. **This month, a daily average of 630 passengers arrived and 622 left the Gaza Strip.** This is an increase of more than 50% compared to April last year when Israeli authorities controlled the crossing.

b. Restrictions on medical referrals⁸

Medical referrals require passage through Rafah crossing for international treatment. In March, a total of 543 medical referral documents were issued by the Palestinian MoH, of which 230 crossed Rafah for treatment in Egypt or Jordan.⁹ A further 32 urgent patients in need of ambulance back-to-back transportation left the Gaza Strip for Egypt. Figures for medical referrals crossing in April are not available.

4. Kerem Shalom Crossing

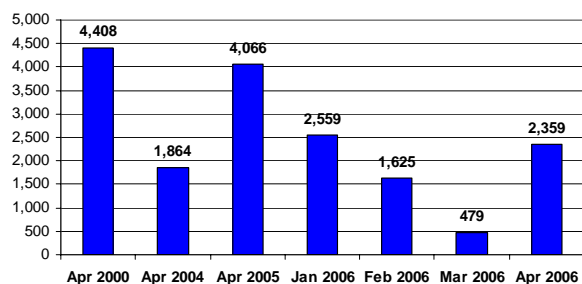
Kerem Shalom crossing on the Gaza-Israel-Egyptian border has been open for humanitarian assistance originating from Egypt since 22 March. On 26 April, the last of the Egyptian-donated truckloads of wheat flour, sugar and rice entered the Gaza Strip. On 30 April,

WFP started to import its wheat supplies through Kerem Shalom crossing.

5. Sufa Commercial Crossing (Figure 5)

Sufa crossing borders Israel and is situated northeast of Rafah crossing. Since 30 May 2004 the crossing has only been used for importing construction materials, notably gravel.¹⁰

Figure 5: Sufa Commercial Crossing – total imported truckloads of gravel¹¹



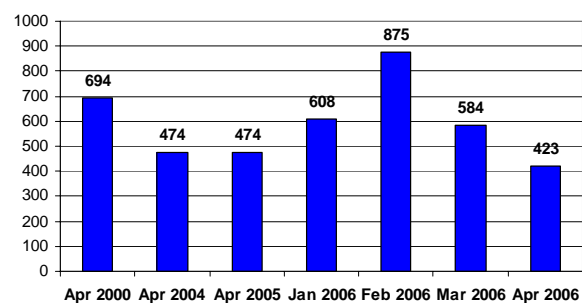
Source: Palestinian Ministry of Finance, data obtained from UNSCO.

This month the crossing was closed from 12 – 14 and on 19 April.¹² This is an improvement compared to previous months, reflected also in the increased number of truckloads entering this month. **As of 30 April, Sufa crossing has been closed 48 days in 2006 (44% of the year).**

6. Nahal Oz energy pipelines (Figure 6)

Palestine General Petroleum Company (GPC), a company owned by the PA, imports fuel (including benzene, diesel and gas) into the Gaza Strip through its Israeli counterpart, Dor Energy, using the Nahal Oz pipelines. Less fuel was received in April compared to previous months. It is reported that Dor Energy has not been paid several million US dollars due to the lack of funding in the PA.

Figure 6: Nahal Oz Pipeline – total imported truckloads of fuel (industrial gasoline excluded)¹³



Source: General Petroleum Company (GPC), data obtained from UNSCO.

¹ All movement between Israel and the Gaza Strip is controlled by the Israeli authorities. Fences and a concrete wall surround the Gaza Strip, Palestinian access to the sea is controlled by IDF naval vessels and Palestinian air traffic is prohibited.

² Weekend days are included in closure statistics when being in a closure period.

³ The IDF informed the UN on 30 April that new procedures at Erez would soon be implemented for internationals crossing in vehicles. These new procedures would include unsupervised searches of the UN vehicles as was the case made mandatory in late January this year. These procedures were re-implemented on 7 May. Such a practice contradicts the 1946 Conventions of Privileges and Immunities of the United Nations.

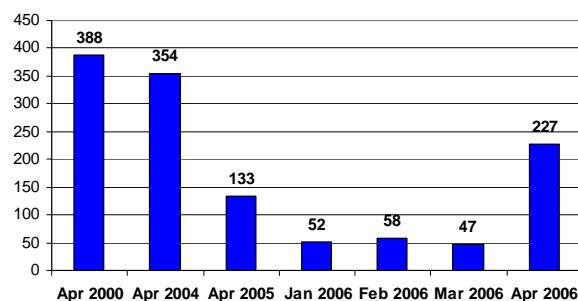
⁴ This does not include partial closure days, such as days with limited opening hours and/or days in which the crossing was only open in one direction, i.e., only for imported goods.

7. Coastal area

a. Access for Palestinian fishing (Figure 7)

The fishing catch in April 2006 (227 tonnes) was the highest this year although lower than in April in 2000 and 2004.

Figure 7: Gaza Fishing - total fishing catch in tonnes



Source: Palestinian Ministry of Agriculture/Department of Fisheries

Since January 2005, the Israeli authorities have permitted Palestinian fishing up to ten nautical miles from the Gaza Strip coastline compared to six nautical miles previously. Under the Oslo Accords, Gaza Strip fishermen are entitled to fish 20 nautical miles from the coast. Palestinian fishing is prohibited one nautical mile north of the border with Egypt and one and a half nautical miles south of the border with Israel.

b. Seaport

The 15 November Agreement stated that construction of a seaport in the Gaza Strip can commence. However, following the PLC elections, the Israeli government has stopped talks with the PA on this issue.

8. Airport

The Palestinian airport in the Gaza Strip has been closed since the beginning of the second *intifada* in late September 2000. The 15 November Agreement notes ... "an understanding between the parties [the PA and the Gol] on the importance of an operating Palestinian airport ..." However following the PLC elections, the Israeli government has cut off all talks with the PA on this issue

⁵ The average daily movement number of truckloads of goods through Karni crossing is calculated excluding weekends i.e. Saturdays.

⁶ These supplies reached a low point between 17 and 19 March when most bakeries closed and rationing was introduced at those few bakeries that remained open.

⁷ Information received from UNRWA, WFP Vulnerability Analysis and Mapping (VAM/ME) and UNICEF.

⁸ Data obtained by WHO.

⁹ Only cases holding documents released by the Palestinian MoH are recorded as referrals crossing, whilst patients not holding the referral documents are recorded as normal passengers.

¹⁰ Until 30 May 2004, the crossing point was open for a number of Palestinians working in the agricultural sector on farms in southern Israel.

¹¹ One truckload equals 40 tonnes.

¹² Sufa also closed on 6 April for commercial supplies due to the imports of WFP food supplies through the crossing at that day.

¹³ Correction: The correct amount of truckloads in March should be 584 and not 984 as reported in March Access Report.