

# Graphing 10 years of closure

September 2017

## Introduction

Since Hamas came to power in Gaza in June 2007, Israel's policy of closure on the Strip has undergone shifts and changes, pointing, at best, to a policy in flux, and, at worst, to a lack of coherent policy entirely. Relative to the most extreme years of closure and particularly since the 2014 military operation, Protective Edge, Israel has allowed some expanded movement of people and goods. At the same time, over the past year, positive trends have been reversed and sweeping and indiscriminate restrictions on travel and on movement of goods remain in place. Compared to pre-closure data, travel of people and movement of goods remain a fraction of what they were, and certainly a fraction of what they could be.

The following information sheet graphs the changes that have occurred over the past 10-plus years, providing context for those changes based on Gisha's close analysis of policy trends since our founding in 2005. Our hope is that this information demonstrates two important insights:

1) Despite the continued presence of Hamas in Gaza, changes in policy that were once thought of as anathema did occur.

2) There is a lot more that can be done to lift the closure on Gaza, and to ensure residents of the Strip their right to freedom of movement.

# Movement of people

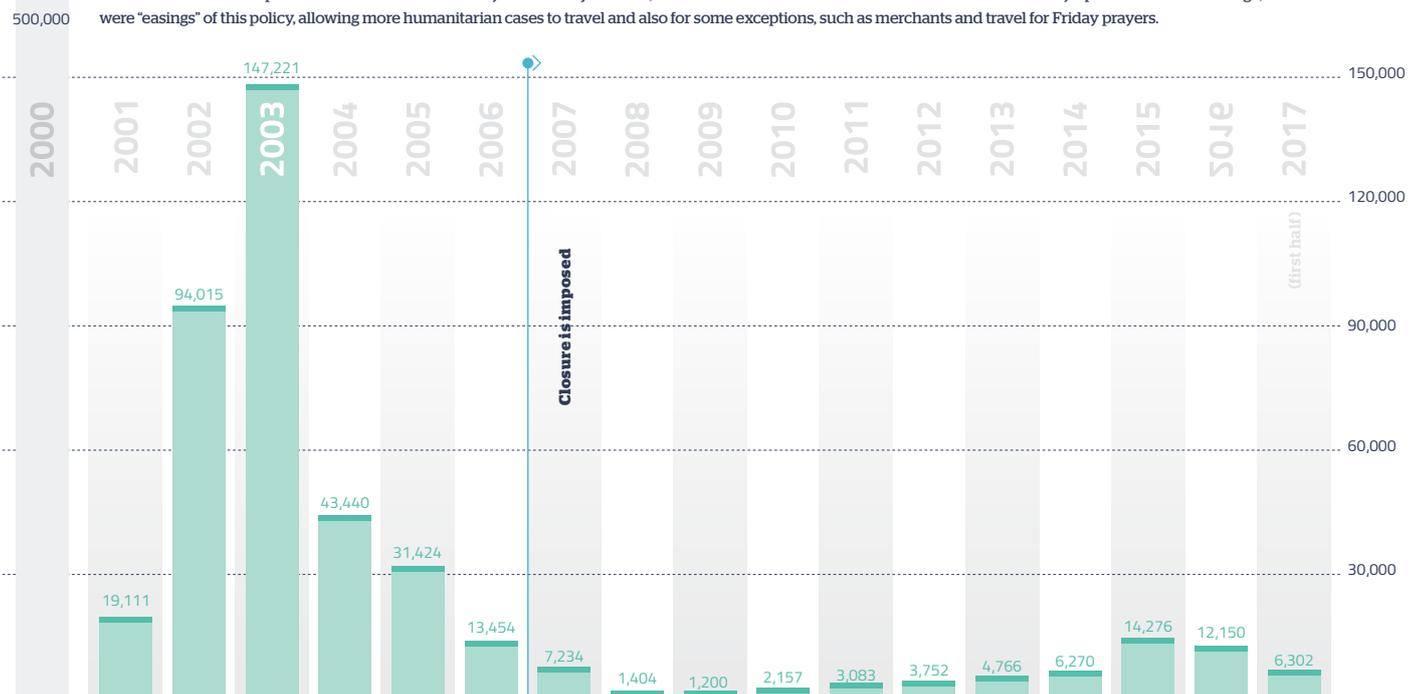
Erez Crossing (figure 1) connects Gaza to Israel and the West Bank, and particularly when Rafah is closed, also to the outside world. During the first nine months of the year 2000, over half a million exits of laborers alone were recorded at Erez. From the start of the Second Intifada, in September of that year, through the early 2000s, travel through Erez was blocked on numerous days and the number of permits issued to laborers was cut drastically. The last laborers from Gaza to enter Israel did so in April 2006. With the January 2006 parliamentary victory of Hamas, as well as the June 2006 capture of Corporal Gilad Shalit, some increases in access post-2000 were reversed. In June 2007, with Hamas's takeover of internal control in Gaza, travel through Erez became virtually impossible to the vast majority of Gaza's residents, cutting people off from their loved ones in the West Bank and Israel and blocking travel for medical care, education, and professional purposes. Over

time, some greater access was allowed for those meeting stringent [criteria](#). After the 2014 military operation, new categories of travel were added to the criteria, allowing still more to travel, yet [numbers continued to fall](#) far short of 2000 figures. In fact, travel from Erez Crossing in 2016 was just two percent of the volume before significant restrictions were imposed at the outbreak of the Second Intifada in 2000.

Rafah Crossing (figure 2) connecting Gaza to Egypt and to the outside world has been mostly closed since the fall of Mohamed Morsi's government mid-2013. Just prior to that, the number of crossings through Rafah had risen nearly to pre-closure numbers. Since then, the numbers have dropped dramatically. In the first half of 2017, the crossing was open on 16 days total, 11 for exit and an additional five for return to Gaza only, with an average of 2,646 crossings in both directions per month.

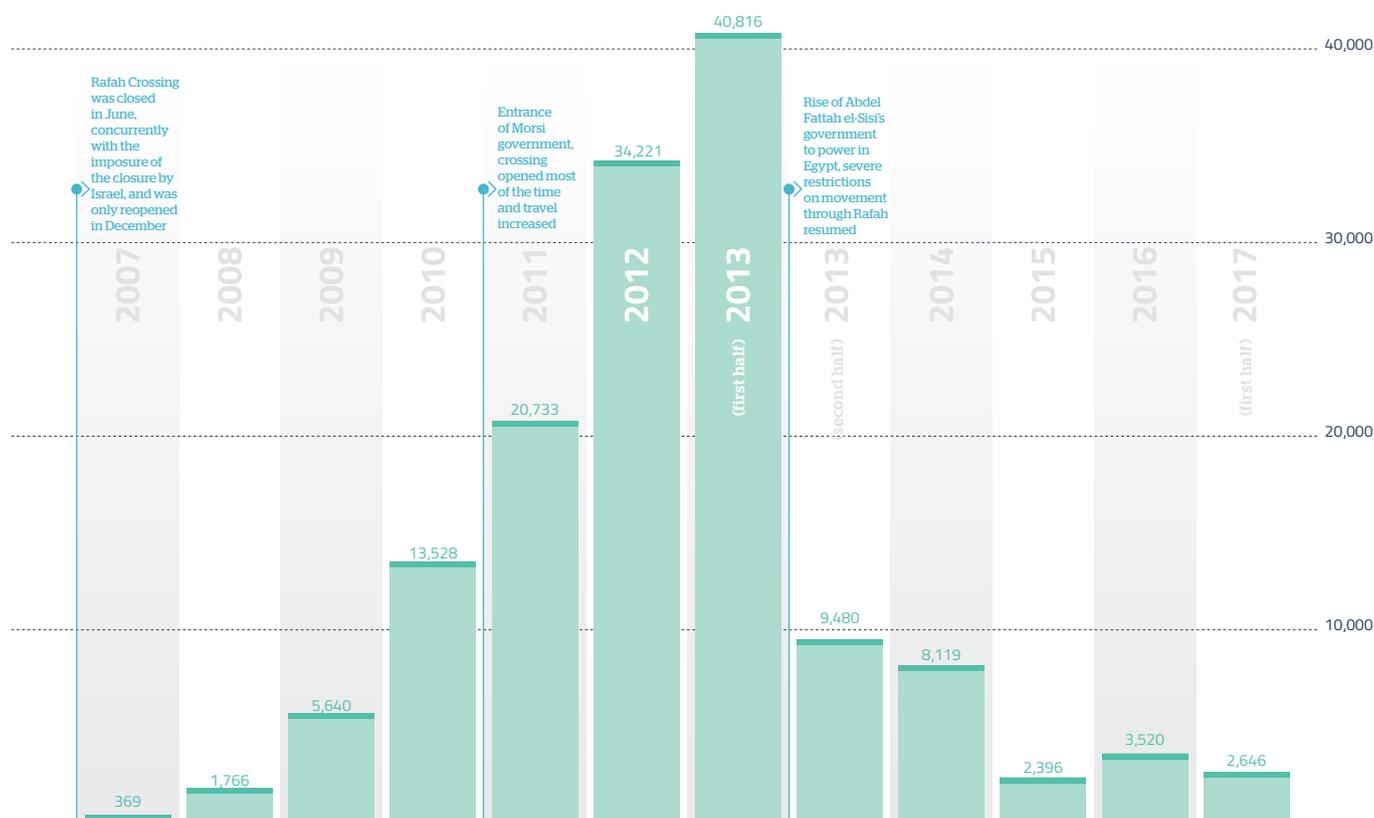
Exits of Palestinians from Gaza via Erez Crossing (monthly average)

For the years 2000-2006, the only data available is on exits of laborers from Erez, such that real totals would be higher than what is depicted. Following the start of the Second Intifada, there was a sharp decline in access for laborers, followed by a slow rise and then again a sharp drop in 2006 when all remaining permits were cancelled in April. Starting in 2007, data was made available on all exits of Palestinians via Erez, which the graph depicts. With the Hamas takeover in June 2007, travel via Erez was limited even further to include "exceptional humanitarian cases" only. At various junctures, such as after the 2010 flotilla incident and the 2014 military operation Protective Edge, there were "easings" of this policy, allowing more humanitarian cases to travel and also for some exceptions, such as merchants and travel for Friday prayers.



## Exits and entries via Rafah Crossing (monthly average)

Following the Hamas takeover in June 2007, travel via Rafah was severely limited. With the election of Mohamed Morsi, travel began to increase and reached the levels seen pre-closure. With his fall from power in mid-2013, again travel was limited. In the first half of 2017, the crossing opened on 16 days only, 11 of which were for exit from Gaza.



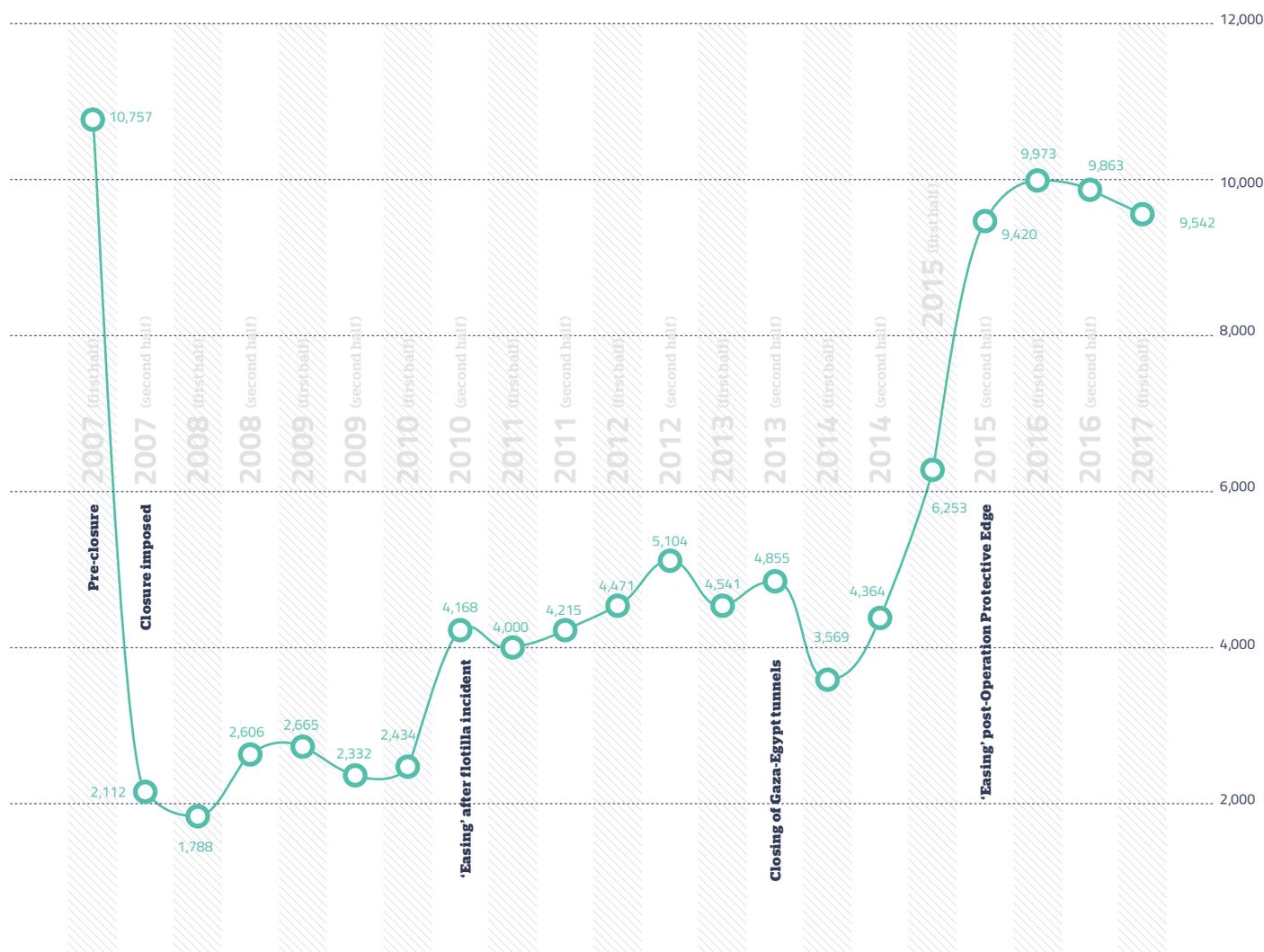
## Movement of goods

The volume of goods allowed into the Strip (figure 3) increased gradually from the worst years of the closure (2007 - 2010), when everyday items like children's toys and paper were blocked from entering. There has been a mostly steady increase since [June 2010](#), after the flotilla incident and Israel's decision to allow in everything save for a list of what it considers "dual-use" items. Included on the dual-use list are items vital for construction and industry, two main drivers of Gaza's economy. As more of these have come in, especially since Operation Protective Edge through the Gaza

Reconstruction Mechanism, the gap between pre-closure and today's figures has narrowed. At the same time, the population has increased by approximately 35 percent since then, meaning that need remains far from being met. The dual-use list is expansive, containing far beyond its 118 items, as broad categories like 'communications equipment' include hundreds of items alone. The list and its management continue to block industry, construction, impede medical treatment and the functioning of civilian infrastructure.

## Entry of goods to Gaza via Kerem Shalom Crossing (monthly average number of truckloads)

From 2007-2010, entrance of goods to Gaza via Kerem Shalom Crossing was severely limited to items considered to be vital for the survival of the civilian population only. During these years, tunnels crossing from Egypt to Gaza proliferated and everyday goods that were prevented from coming in via Israel were brought in via this 'black market' for those who could afford to buy them. The tunnel economy created a source of revenue for the Hamas government, while traders that had relied on Kerem Shalom saw their businesses go to ruin. After the 2010 flotilla incident and increasing awareness about the lack of security rationale behind the goods policy, Israel reversed its policy and instead of enforcing a narrow list of what could enter, it devised a long list of what could not - items considered to be "dual-use." Included on this list are everyday items needed for construction and industry. The graph depicts a rise in entrance of goods, particularly as more of these were allowed in following Operation Protective Edge.



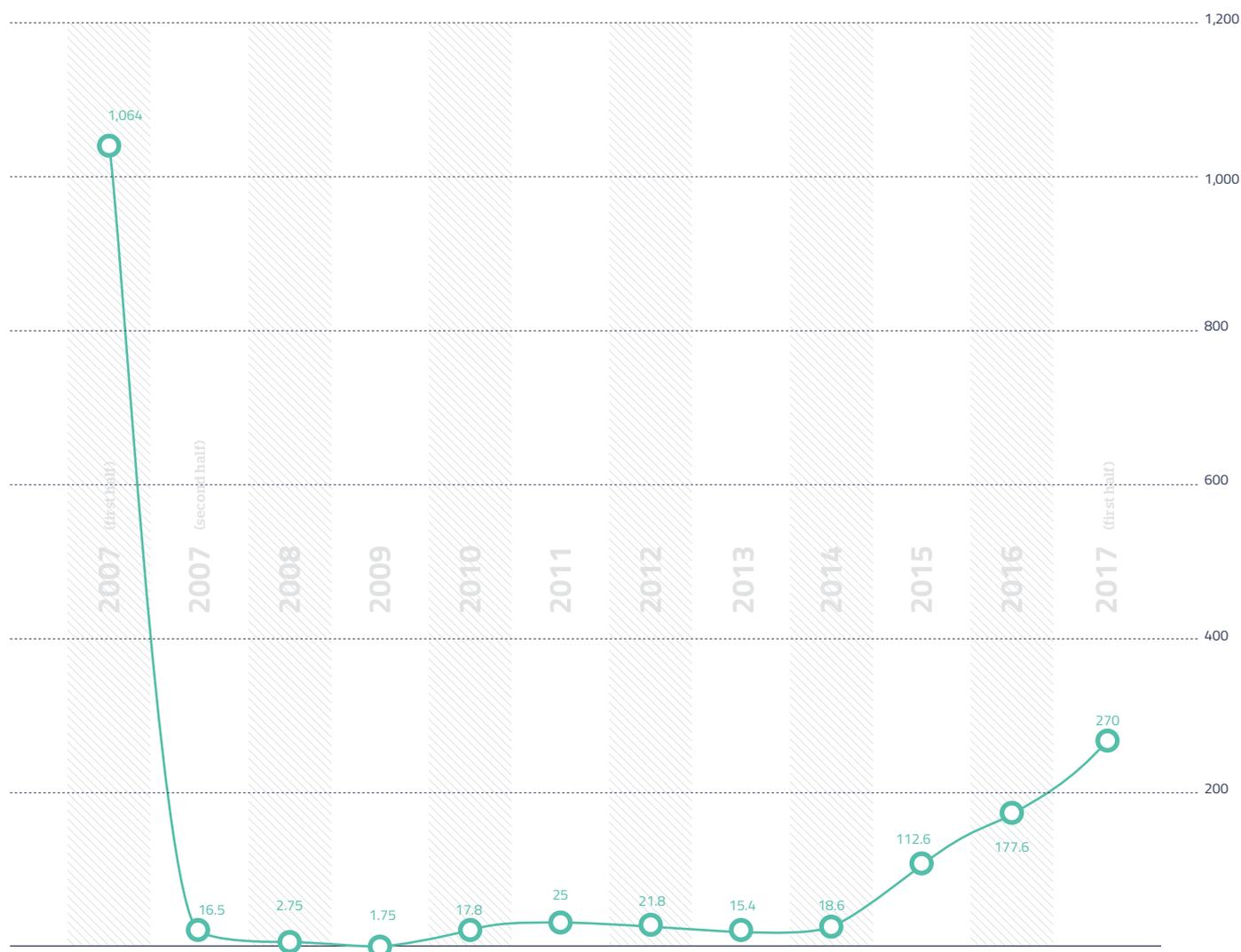
Exit of goods also increased, particularly following the [post-OPE decision](#) to allow access for goods from Gaza to their once traditional markets in Israel and the West Bank. However, the numbers remain a fraction of what they were pre-closure for a number of reasons: remaining restrictions on the types and destination of products, lack of permits for businesspeople and corresponding lack of markets. In the years when no goods were

allowed out of the Strip, buyers simply went elsewhere.

While consumption, reconstruction after Operation Protective Edge and external aid flows have prevented a total plummeting of Gaza's per capita GDP, the labor-intensive industrial and agricultural sectors remain far below their pre-closure levels of production or potential. Although GDP has experienced

## Exit of goods from Gaza via Kerem Shalom Crossing (monthly average number of truckloads)

With the Hamas takeover in June 2007, Israel closed the crossings to exit of goods entirely. The only goods that crossed from 2007-2010 did so in the context of a project subsidized by the Netherlands which had begun in 2006. Carnation flowers, strawberries and later cherry tomatoes and peppers exited in small quantities for destinations in Europe throughout these years. From 2010-2014, cash crops and a few other products exited to additional destinations. It was only in 2014, after Operation Protective Edge, that goods were allowed to reach the West Bank and then in March 2015 Israel. Israel and the West Bank had been the primary destinations for Gaza products until 2007 when the full ban on exit of goods was instituted. Given that the ban has been partially lifted, exit of goods has increased but is still far from reaching the level it was pre-closure.



growth in recent years, it remains lower than it was in the year 2005 or even 1994 (Fig. 5) and, as seen in the graph, diverged dramatically from the GDP of the West Bank. Given that the Palestinian economy is still mostly integrated, however, low per capita GDP in Gaza has an impact on the West Bank

as well. Unemployment in Gaza has also diverged from that of the West Bank, rising in conjunction with various events like the onset of the closure and the fall of the Morsi regime in Egypt (Fig. 6).

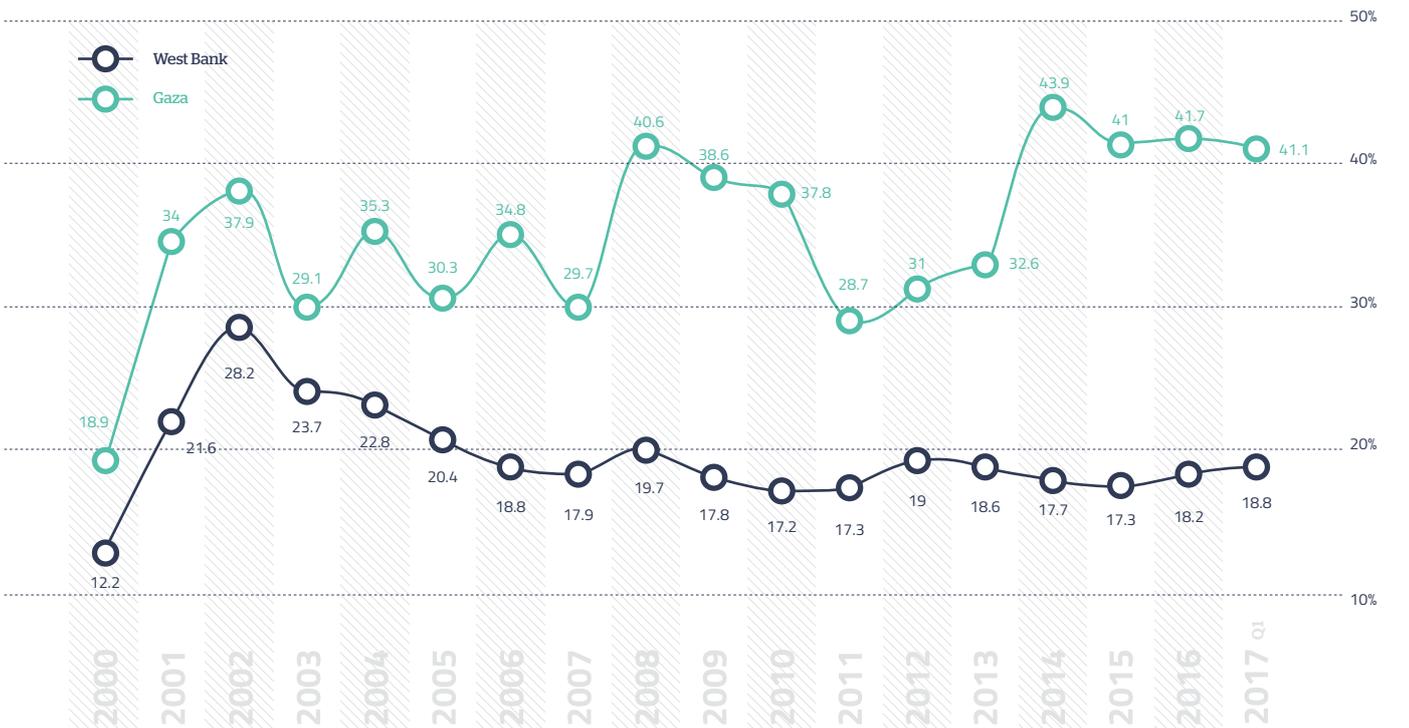
## GDP per capita in Gaza and the West Bank

Gross domestic product per capita in Gaza diverges drastically from that of the West Bank, yet given that the Palestinian economy remains mostly integrated, low growth in Gaza also impacts the West Bank.



## Unemployment rate in Gaza and the West Bank

The unemployment rate in Gaza diverged from that in the West Bank with the onset of the closure.



# Conclusion

Ten years into the closure, one can look back and easily see that decisions were made and not made with little regard for the true needs and rights of the civilian population in Gaza. Given that Israel doesn't see itself as responsible for the situation in Gaza or for the well-being of its residents, it didn't rush to take steps to improve conditions, even after it ostensibly abandoned its 2007-2010 policy of ["economic warfare."](#) Since then, elements of policy that were once deemed absolutely necessary to achieve Israel's security and political goals, were summarily reversed, sometimes in response to the [harsh words](#) of the American secretary of state and often in the context of ceasefire negotiations after the three devastating military operations. In this sense, it's easy to see that elements of the closure policy are actually viewed by Israel not as necessary for security but rather as bargaining chips. What's hard to understand, however, is how, ten years later, we're no better off and no smarter. After [dozens of senior](#) Israeli officials recognized the connection between prosperity and stability, restrictions on movement persist, holding back the economy and crushing hope, and with these, the chances of prosperity for us all.