



# MONTHLY REPORT

## February 2023

## Health Access

Barriers for patients in the occupied Palestinian territory



February data on referrals was not available

 **85%**

of Gaza patient permit applications approved

**50%**

of Gaza companion permit applications approved

 **76%**

of West Bank patient permit applications approved

**76%**

of West Bank companion permit applications approved

 **38**

Gaza patient called for security interrogation

### IN FOCUS

*Increasing attacks on health care & health worker testimony*

# Access

## The Gaza Strip

There were 1,495 (M: 808; F: 687) permit applications for patients from the Gaza Strip to Israeli authorities in February, 12% lower than the monthly average for 2022 (1,691). Close to a third (30%) of applications were for children under 18 and a fifth (21%) were for patients over 60 years old. Just less than a half (46%) were for female patients, while 84% were for referrals funded by the Palestinian MoH. Half (51%) of applications to pass Beit Hanoun/Erez checkpoint were for appointments in East Jerusalem hospitals; 28% were for hospitals in the West Bank outside East Jerusalem; and 20% were for Israeli hospitals. 43% of applications were for appointments at either Augusta Victoria Hospital (26%) or Makassed Hospital (17%), both in East Jerusalem. The top five specialties accounted for 73% of permit applications: oncology (36%); haematology (10%); cardiology (10%); paediatrics (9%); and ophthalmology (8%). The remaining 27% of applications were for 22 other specialties.

A further 144 permit applications for patients and companions were submitted through the Palestinian General Authority of Civil Affairs during February for travel by shuttle to Jordan, which requires approval of Israeli and Jordanian authorities for direct transfer from Beit Hanoun/Erez to the King Hussein Bridge crossing to Jordan, without formal entry to Israel or the West Bank. Jordanian hospitals issue an open appointment, rather than specifying a hospital appointment date, for these permit applications. Of the 144 applications, 90 (63%) were approved, 1 (1%) was denied and 53 (37%) remained pending at the time of monthly reporting.

**Approved permit applications:** 1,267 (M: 667; F: 600), or 85%, of the 1,495 patient applications to cross Beit Hanoun/Erez were approved in February 2023. This was the highest approval rate in more than eight years, since May 2014.

The approval rate for patient permit applications varies by sex and age of patients, see Table 1. In February, of the different demographic groups, men aged 18 to 40 had the lowest approval rate at 74%, while boys aged 0-3 had the highest (95%) and the approval rate for female patients (87%) was higher than for male patients (83%).

 **1,495**  
patient applications

to Israeli authorities to cross Beit Hanoun/Erez to access health care

 **85%**  
approved

 **4%**  
denied

 **11%**  
delayed

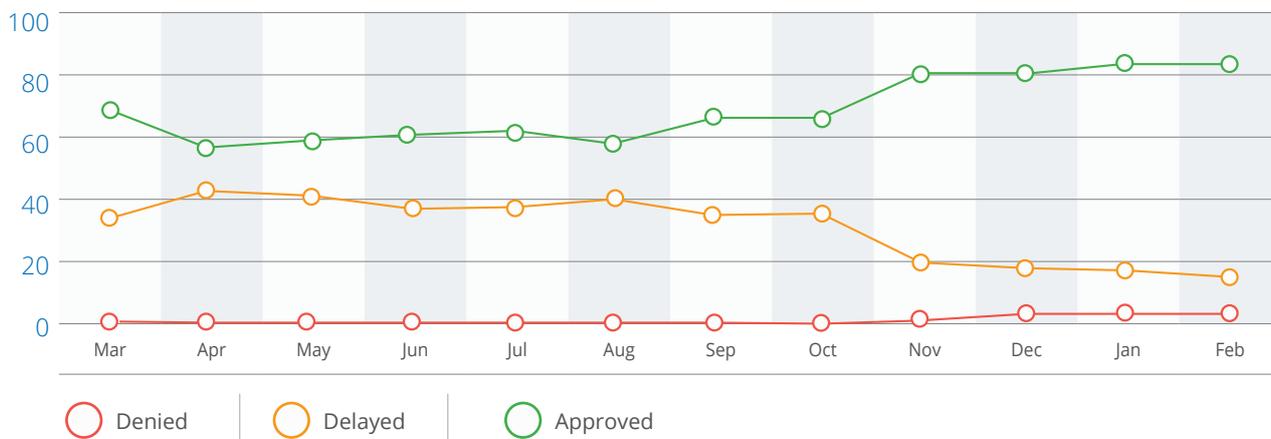
**Table 1** Approval rate for patient permit applications in February 2023, by age and sex

February 2023 AGE	Number of applications		Approved	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
0-3	82	43	95%	91%
4-17	177	142	84%	91%
18-40	208	155	74%	79%
41-60	172	203	78%	88%
over 60	169	144	91%	91%
<b>sub-total</b>	<b>808</b>	<b>687</b>	<b>83%</b>	<b>87%</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,495</b>		<b>85%</b>	
<b>Overall approval rate for patient applications</b>			<b>85%</b>	

Approval rates also vary by referral specialty. In February, specialties with an approval rate 85% or higher with more than 20 applications included oncology (533) at 90%, paediatrics (128) at 90%, cardiology (152) at 89%, haematology (153) at 86%. Meanwhile, specialties with an approval rate lower than 85% and more than 20 applications included ENT (30) at 83%, neurosurgery (35) at 83%, general surgery (49) at 80%, ophthalmology (118) at 77%, orthopaedics (80) at 75%, internal medicine (57) at 74%, and urology (39) at 67%.

## Chart 1

Israeli responses to Gaza patient permit applications, March 2022 to February 2023



**Denied care:** 65 (M: 38; F: 27) patient permit applications, 4% of the total for Gaza, were denied in February. These included six applications for children under 18 years, 27 for adults aged 18 to 40 years, 27 for adults aged 41 to 60 years and 5 for adults over 60 years of age. They were referred for oncology (16); ophthalmology (9); internal medicine (8); orthopaedics (6); haematology (5); neurology and infertility (4 each); cardiology (3); ENT, general surgery and urology (2 each); and neurosurgery, vascular surgery, nephrology and nuclear medicine (1 each). Close to half, 46% (30) patients were referred to East Jerusalem hospitals, 44% (29) to hospitals in the West Bank outside East Jerusalem, and 9% (6) to Israeli hospitals.

**Delayed care:** 163 (M: 103; F: 60) patient permit applications, or 11% of the total, were delayed access to care, receiving no definitive response to their application by the date of their hospital appointment. Of delayed applications, 26% (43 applications) were for children under the age of 18, while 14% (23) were for patients over 60 years old. Close to half (44%) were for appointments in East Jerusalem hospitals, while 33% were for the West Bank outside East Jerusalem, and 22% for Israeli hospitals. 21% of application delayed were for cancer care (oncology), 11% for ophthalmology, 10% for haematology, 9% for cardiology and another 9% for orthopaedics. The remaining 40% were for 16 other specialties.

Most delayed applications (128 or 79%) were classified as 'under study' at the time of the patient's hospital appointment.

### Interrogation

In February, 38 (M: 32; F: 6) patients from the Gaza Strip were requested for interrogation as a prerequisite to their permit applications. 20 were aged 18 to 40 years, 13 were aged 41 to 60 years, and five were over 60 years old. Of these patients, 8 had appointments for cancer care (oncology); 5 each for ophthalmology and cardiology; 4 for general surgery; 3 each for urology, haematology and orthopaedics; 2 for nephrology; and 1 each for vascular surgery, neurosurgery, ENT, internal medicine, and nuclear medicine. 22 of the patients had applied for permits to access hospitals in East Jerusalem, 13 for hospitals in the West Bank and 3 for Israeli hospitals. Half of patients (50%, or 19 of 38) had submitted their permit applications more than 30 days before the hospital appointment. None of the 38 patients was approved during February. Five were denied and 33 were delayed, of whom 7 did not have appointments for interrogation scheduled during February.



**38**

**Gaza patients**

called for security interrogation



**0**

**Gaza patients or companions**

arrested

## Patient companions

The Health Liaison Office submitted 2,031 companion permit applications to Israeli authorities to accompany patients in February. These applications include parents or other companions applying to travel with children. Patients are eligible to apply to Israeli authorities for one companion to accompany them for health care outside the Gaza Strip. In February, 1,025 companion permit applications (50% of the total) were approved, 575 applications (28%) were denied, and the remaining 431 (22%) were delayed, receiving no definitive response by the time of the patient's hospital appointment. This is the second highest denial rate recorded for patient companions, with highest denial rate of 31% in January 2023.

## Patients and companions crossing Beit Hanoun/Erez

The Palestinian General Authority of Civil Affairs reported that 1,651 Gaza patients and 1,259 companions exited through Beit Hanoun/Erez checkpoint in February to access hospitals outside the Gaza Strip. **Close to a quarter, or 24% (392), of patients** therefore crossed Beit Hanoun/Erez checkpoint without a companion. Of the 1,651 patients, 53 were transferred by back-to-back ambulance with 53 companions. The number of patients exiting via Beit Hanoun/Erez in the month was 25% higher than the monthly average for the last year (1,320). The bodies of 14 deceased patients were returned to Gaza across Beit Hanoun/Erez in February. During the month, the checkpoint was open for 24 days for daytime working hours and closed on 4 days (4 Saturdays).

 **2,301**  
companion applications

to Israeli authorities to cross Beit Hanoun/Erez to accompany patients

 **50% approved**

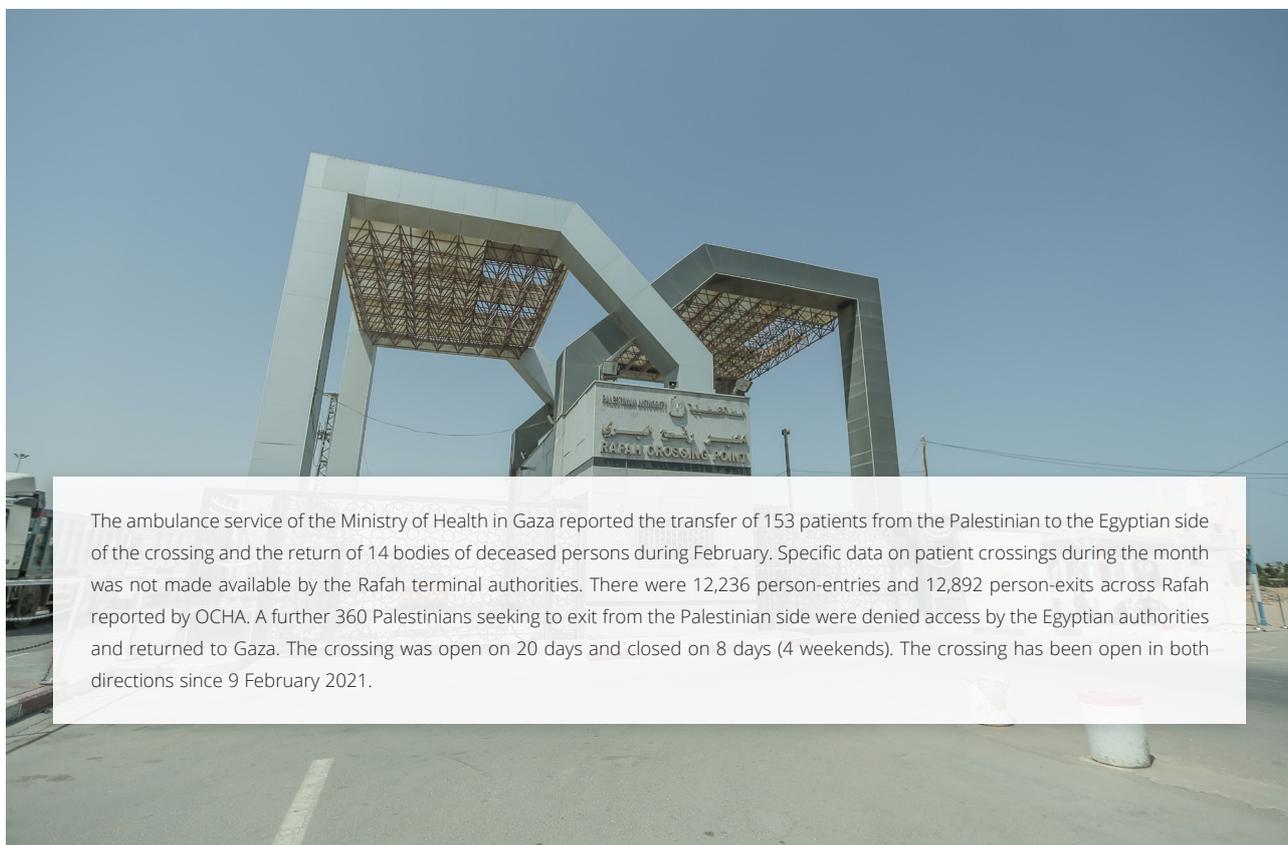
 **28% denied**

 **22% delayed**

 **1,651**  
patients  
exited through Beit Hanoun/Erez

 **1,259**  
companions  
exits through Beit Hanoun/Erez

## Rafah crossing - Egypt



The ambulance service of the Ministry of Health in Gaza reported the transfer of 153 patients from the Palestinian to the Egyptian side of the crossing and the return of 14 bodies of deceased persons during February. Specific data on patient crossings during the month was not made available by the Rafah terminal authorities. There were 12,236 person-entries and 12,892 person-exits across Rafah reported by OCHA. A further 360 Palestinians seeking to exit from the Palestinian side were denied access by the Egyptian authorities and returned to Gaza. The crossing was open on 20 days and closed on 8 days (4 weekends). The crossing has been open in both directions since 9 February 2021.

## The West Bank

Most Palestinian patients from the West Bank outside of East Jerusalem are required to obtain permits to reach hospitals in East Jerusalem or Israel. Most women older than 50 years of age and men older than 55 years of age are exempted from the requirement, though a proportion of these are also restricted on purported security grounds.

**Patients:** In February, there were 7,708 permit applications by patients from the West Bank outside East Jerusalem. Of patient permit applications, 3,488 (45%) were for female patients, 1,555 (20%) were for children under the age of 18 years, and 628 (8%) were for patients over 60 years. Close to two-thirds (63%) were for appointments at hospitals in East Jerusalem, while close to two-fifths (37%) were for Israeli hospitals or clinics.

Of the 7,708 West Bank patient applications in February, 5,863 (76%) were approved, 6% lower than the average approval rate of the last year (82%). 1,605 (21%) were unsuccessful (denied) and 240 (3%) were pending reply at the time of monthly reporting.

The approval rate of patient permits varies by location. In February, governorates with an approval rate of 76% or higher included Jericho (93%), Abu-Dis (92%), Arram (88%), Ramallah (81%), Tulkarem (80%), Qalqilya (79%), Salfit (79%) and Bethlehem (78%). Governorates with an approval rate lower than the average of 76% included Jenin (74%), Nablus (67%), Al-Khalil (Hebron, 66%), and Tubas (64%).

**Companions:** In February 2023, there were 8,367 companion permit applications to Israeli authorities from the West Bank outside East Jerusalem, to access health care in East Jerusalem and Israel. 4,110 (49%) were for female companions, while 92% of companion permit applications were for companions aged from 18-59 years.

Of the 8,367 West Bank companion applications, 6,388 (76%) were approved, similar to the average approval rate of last year. 1,618 (19%) were unsuccessful and 361 (4%) were pending reply at the time of monthly reporting.

 **7,708**  
patient permit  
applications

for Israeli permits to access  
healthcare in East Jerusalem  
and Israel

 **76% approved**

 **21% unsuccessful**

 **3% pending**  
at the time of monthly  
reporting

 **8,367**  
patient companion  
applications

to access healthcare in East  
Jerusalem and Israel

 **76% approved**

 **19% unsuccessful**

 **4% pending**  
at the time of monthly  
reporting

## In Focus

### Increasing attacks on health care & health worker testimony

In February 2023, there was a significant increase in attacks on health care in the West Bank. Health attacks occurred in the context of major incursions by Israeli forces into Palestinian towns and refugee camps and a rise in violence carried out by Israeli settler groups.

WHO verified 47 health attacks in the first two months of 2023, which included: <sup>1</sup>

- 37 incidents involving obstruction to the delivery of health care, which included closures that happened during incursions on Jenin, Nablus and Huwara,



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1 Each attack can involve more than one type of incident

- 21 incidents involving acts of physical violence towards health care providers, which included exposure to targeting with live ammunition that prevented the provision of first aid and evacuation of injured persons who subsequently died,
- 3 incidents of militarized search of a vehicle.

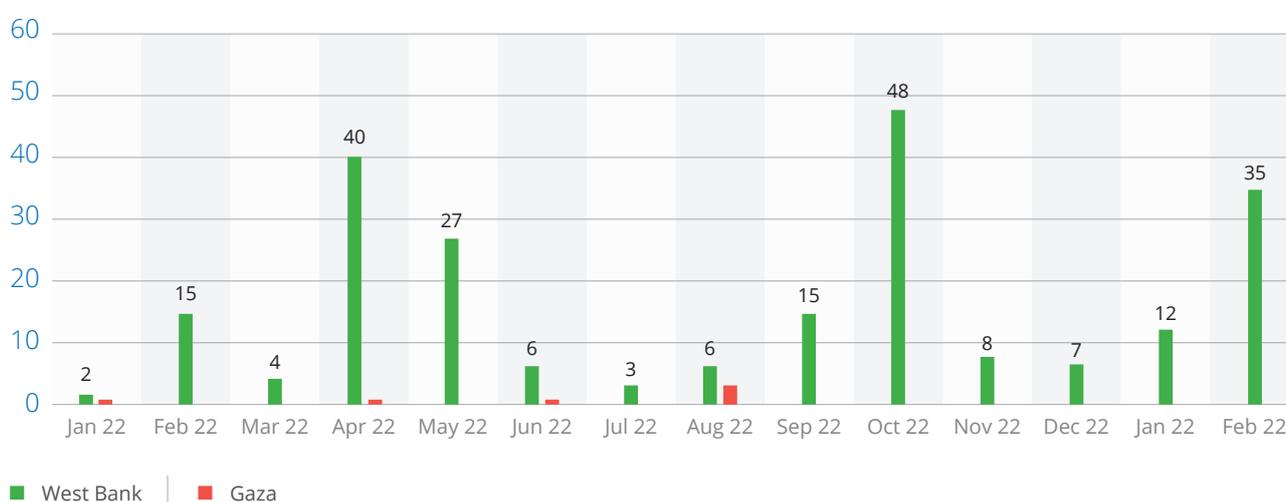
There was injury to 24 health workers and targeting without injury of at least 12, with three health workers made to undergo strip search and four detained. 44 ambulances were affected, including 42 that were obstructed access to provide health care, six that were damaged, and a further three that were targeted without being damaged.

Two-thirds (68%) of recorded attacks were in the district of Nablus, with other affected areas including Hebron, Jericho, Jenin, Bethlehem, and Jerusalem.

The increased attacks in February echo peaks in health attacks during April and October 2022, see Chart 2.

## Chart 2

### Health attacks in the occupied Palestinian territory by month, January 2022 to February 2023



### Testimony of Ahmad, a health worker with PRCS

Ahmad has been working for the Palestine Red Crescent Society (PRCS) for 26 years.

“On the 22nd of February during the military raid on Nablus, I was in one of the nine PRCS ambulances that were prevented from entering the Old City to evacuate people who had been severely injured. We were told that there was no coordination [with Israeli forces] for the ambulances to enter, so we decided to continue by foot at our own risk.

“One of the teams went to treat a 2-year-old child who has a heart condition and was suffering from tear gas inhalation. After they reached the patient’s house, they were stuck for two hours inside before they could coordinate to transfer the child to hospital.

“A team of four paramedics had just left their ambulance vehicle to evacuate an injured person when they were directly targeted with rubber coated bullets. The team managed to get the injured person to the ambulance without being directly hit.

“In other attacks on that day, an ambulance was targeted with rubber bullets and another was hit by an Israeli military vehicle causing damage to the body of the ambulance.”

Ahmad describes the difficulties with access and the impact of some of the health attacks in Nablus:

“In normal circumstances, entering the Old City is difficult because of the narrow roads. Entering during a military incursion is even more

difficult. The Palestine Red Crescent Society is currently in the final stages of bringing small, specialized vehicles (“tractorons”) to make entry and transfer of patients easier.

“I am scared for the team. We try to protect ourselves as best we can. It’s so hard to see one of your team injured. Last year, during confrontations in Beita, one of our team was shot while he was in the ambulance. The ambulance was close to a cliff, it could easily have fallen. It was a very intense and difficult situation.

“When a vehicle is damaged it can go out of service for some time. We already have a shortage, especially with the growing needs and the increased number of injuries during the recent violence.”

PRCS has recently started provision of bullet proof vests, helmets, and tear gas masks to its teams, following incidents of direct targeting of health workers. The organization systematically monitors violations against its staff, ambulance and facilities and advocates for enhanced respect and protection of health care across the occupied Palestinian territory.



Ahmad 2<sup>nd</sup> on the right

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