



9 May 2023 - Palestinians continue to encounter major obstacles to realizing the right to health.

Today, WHO launches two reports, Right to Health 2019 to 2021 and Palestinian Voices 2022 to 2023. The reports outline how fragmentation of the Palestinian people, implementation of a permit regime, physical obstacles to movement, and protection gaps cause health inequities and create substantial barriers to health care provision and health access in the occupied West Bank, including east Jerusalem, and Gaza Strip.

“Enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health is a fundamental right of every human being,” said Dr Richard Peeperkorn, WHO Representative for the occupied Palestinian territory. “The Palestinian health system suffers the consequences of longstanding displacement, refugeehood and occupation. Public revenues, health expenditure, and ultimately health services are impacted, with longstanding shortages of health workers, equipment, medicines,

and supplies. Meanwhile, movement restrictions, including Israel's implementation of a permit regime, hinder health access."

In the Gaza Strip from 2019 to 2021, just 55% of essential medicines were available in the Central Drugs Store of the Ministry of Health. The reports describe how COVID-19 impacted outside medical referral, with a 51% decline in Gaza and an 8% decline in the West Bank from 2019 to 2020. Cancer care remains the single largest reason for referral to providers outside the Palestinian Ministry of Health, driven by gaps in public health services.

In the context of blockade and closure, 35% of permit applications by patients from the Gaza Strip were not approved in time to reach their hospital appointments from 2019 to 2021. Although rates of approval are higher for the West Bank, between 2011 and 2021 there were 331,678 patient and companion permit applications denied from the West Bank.

In 2023, the surge in violence in the West Bank has exposed Palestinian patients, health workers, ambulances, and facilities to increased attacks on health care. WHO's reports show the longer-term trends, with 750 health attacks documented in the occupied Palestinian territory from 2019 to 2022. These attacks resulted in the fatality of a health worker and 568 health worker injuries, with 315 ambulances and 160 health facilities affected.

"In 2022, we saw the highest number of Palestinians killed by Israeli Security Forces since 2005, often following excessive use of force," said Ajith Sunghay, Head of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) in the occupied Palestinian territory. "This trend has only accelerated in 2023. OHCHR and WHO documented that Israeli forces have frequently prevented access to medical care, including for first response teams to reach persons with life-threatening injuries. We are deeply concerned about failures to ensure protection against health attacks and the impact that this has on the rights of Palestinians."

"We welcome these important reports from WHO and the organization's continued support and commitment to the right to health of Palestinians," Dr Mai al-Kaila, Minister of Health for Palestine, commented in her opening remarks at the event. "The findings outline the substantial difficulties facing the Palestinian health system under occupation and underline the need for bolstering support to the health sector through ensuring provision of health resources and upholding accountability for the right to health."

WHO webpage with the reports and resources for the Right to Health: <https://www.emro.who.int/opt/information-resources/right-to-health.html>

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