



MONTHLY REPORT

January 2023

Health Access

Barriers for patients in the occupied Palestinian territory




January data on referrals was not available

 **84%**

of Gaza patient permit applications approved

49%

of Gaza companion permit applications approved

 **79%**

of West Bank patient permit applications approved

77%

of West Bank companion permit applications approved

 **47**

Gaza patient called for security interrogation

IN FOCUS

Hamzeh, a paramedic, severely injured in a health attack in Nablus

Part 1 Referrals

January referrals by the Ministry of Health

Referrals data for January was not made available to WHO by the date of publication.

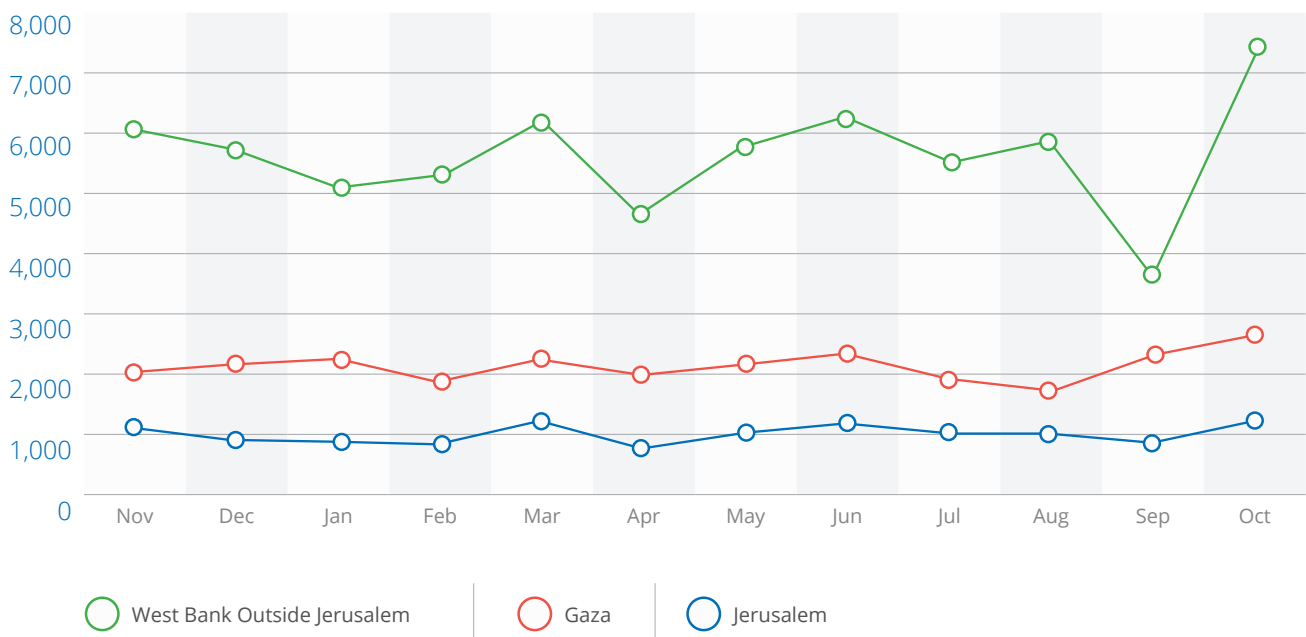


January data on referrals was not available



Chart 1

Number of referrals issued by the Palestinian MoH by place of origin, November 2021 to October 2022



Part 2 Access

The Gaza Strip

There were 1,750 (M: 900; F: 850) permit applications for patients from the Gaza Strip to Israeli authorities in January, 3% higher than the monthly average for 2022 (1,691). More than a quarter (29%) of applications were for children under 18 and more than a fifth (21%) were for patients over 60 years old. A half (49%) were for female patients, while 84% were for referrals funded by the Palestinian MoH. More than half (54%) of applications to pass Beit Hanoun/Erez checkpoint were for appointments in East Jerusalem hospitals; 27% were for hospitals in the West Bank outside East Jerusalem; and 20% were for Israeli hospitals. 47% of applications were for appointments at either Augusta Victoria Hospital (29%) or Makassed Hospital (18%), both in East Jerusalem. The top six specialties accounted for 79% of permit applications: oncology (37%); haematology (11%); cardiology (11%); paediatrics (9%); orthopaedics (6%) and ophthalmology (5%). The remaining 21% of applications were for 18 other specialties.

No data on permit applications for direct access to Jordan from the Gaza Strip in January was made available to WHO by the date of publication.

Approved permit applications: 1,470 (M: 719; F: 751), or 84%, of the 1,750 patient applications to cross Beit Hanoun/Erez were approved in January 2023. This is the highest approval rate in over eight years, similar to May 2015.

The approval rate for patient permit applications varies by sex and age of patients, see Table 1. In January, of the different demographic groups, men aged 18 to 40 had the lowest approval rate at 67%, while women over 60 had the highest approval rate of 94%.



1,750
patient applications

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



84%
approved



4%
denied



12%
delayed

Table 1

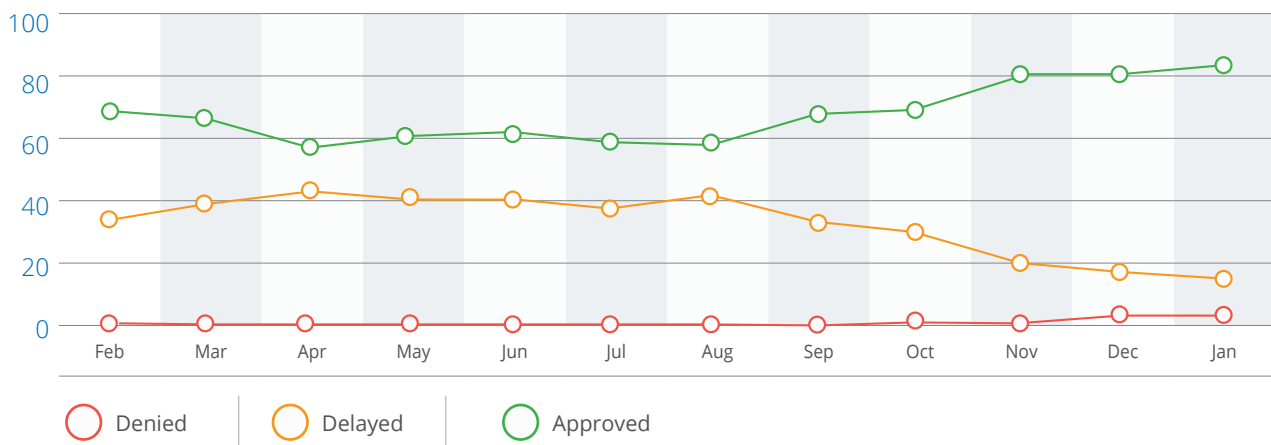
Approval rate for patient permit applications in December 2022, by age and sex

December 2022 AGE	Number of applications		Approved	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
0-3	83	60	90%	83%
4-17	206	164	90%	90%
18-40	213	213	67%	86%
41-60	204	236	72%	86%
over 60	194	177	88%	94%
sub-total	900	850	80%	88%
Total	1,750			
Overall approval rate for patient applications			84%	

Approval rates also vary by referral specialty. In January, specialties with an approval rate 84% or higher with more than 20 applications included neurosurgery (92) at 90%, oncology (648) at 89%, nephrology (35) at 89%, haematology (195) at 87%, cardiology (194) at 86%, and paediatrics (159) at 86%. Specialties with an approval rate lower than 84% and more than 20 applications included, orthopaedics (99) at 82%, general surgery (51) at 78%, neurology (25) at 72%, ophthalmology (96) at 72%, internal medicine (56) at 68%, and urology (42) at 55%.

Chart 2

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



Denied care: 62 (M: 33; F: 29) patient permit applications, comprising 4% of the total for Gaza, were denied in January. These included three children under 18 years, 29 adults aged 18 to 40 years, 26 adults aged 41 to 60 years and 4 adults over 60 years of age. They were referred for oncology (17); internal medicine (9); cardiology and general surgery (6 each); haematology, ophthalmology, and urology (4 each); orthopaedics (3); obstetrics and gynaecology (2); and neurosurgery, vascular surgery, heart surgery, paediatrics, endocrinology, neurology and infertility (1 each). More than half, 53% (33) patients were referred to hospitals in the West Bank outside East Jerusalem, 37% (23) to East Jerusalem hospitals, and 10% (6) to Israeli hospitals.

Delayed care: 218 (M: 148; F: 70) patient permit applications, or 12% 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, 24% (53 applications) were for children under the age of 18, while 14% (30) were for patients over 60 years old. Close to half (48%) were for appointments in East Jerusalem hospitals, while 33% were for the West Bank outside East Jerusalem, and 20% for Israeli hospitals. 25% of application delayed were for cancer care (oncology), 11% for ophthalmology, and 10% for haematology. The remaining 54% were for 17 other specialties.

Most delayed applications (202 or 93%) were classified as 'under study' at the time of the patient's hospital appointment. There were 11 patients called for security interrogation who did not have appointments scheduled in January, while one patient was delayed based on the assertion by Israeli COGAT that suitable care is available within Gaza, though no evidence was provided to support this claim.

Interrogation

In January, 47 (M: 35; F: 12) patients from the Gaza Strip were requested for interrogation as a prerequisite to their permit applications. 21 were aged 18 to 40 years, 20 were aged 41 to 60 years, and six were over 60 years old. Of these patients, 17 had appointments for cancer care (oncology); five for ophthalmology; four each for urology and internal medicine; three each for cardiology, haematology and orthopaedics; two each for vascular surgery, and neurosurgery; and one each for nephrology, dermatology, ENT and general surgery. 30 of the patients had applied for permits to access hospitals in East Jerusalem, 15 for hospitals in the West Bank and two for Israeli hospitals.

Three-fifths of patients (60%, or 28 of 47) had submitted their permit applications more than 30 days before the hospital appointment. Two patients out of the 47 were approved, one was denied, and 44 were delayed, not receiving any definitive response by the date of their hospital appointment. Of these 44, 11 did not have appointments for interrogation scheduled during January.



47

Gaza patients

called for security interrogation



0

Gaza patients or companions

arrested

Patient companions

The Health Liaison Office submitted 2,429 companion permit applications to Israeli authorities to accompany patients in January. 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 January, 1,194 companion permit applications (49% of the total) were approved, 742 applications (31%) were denied, the highest denial rate ever, and the remaining 493 (20%) were delayed, receiving no definitive response by the time of the patient's hospital appointment.

Patients and companions crossing Beit Hanoun/Erez

The Palestinian General Authority of Civil Affairs reported that 1,924 Gaza patients and 1,478 companions exited through Beit Hanoun/Erez checkpoint in January to access hospitals outside the Gaza Strip. **More than a fifth, or 23% (446), of patients** therefore crossed Beit Hanoun/Erez checkpoint without a companion. Of the 1,924 patients, 81 were transferred by back-to-back ambulance with 77 companions. The number of patients exiting via Beit Hanoun/Erez in the month was the highest for more than four years. The bodies of 23 deceased patients were returned to Gaza across Beit Hanoun/Erez in January. During the month, the checkpoint was open for 27 days for daytime working hours and closed on 4 days (4 Saturdays).



2,429

companion applications

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



49% approved



31% denied



20% delayed



1,924

patients

exited through Beit Hanoun/Erez

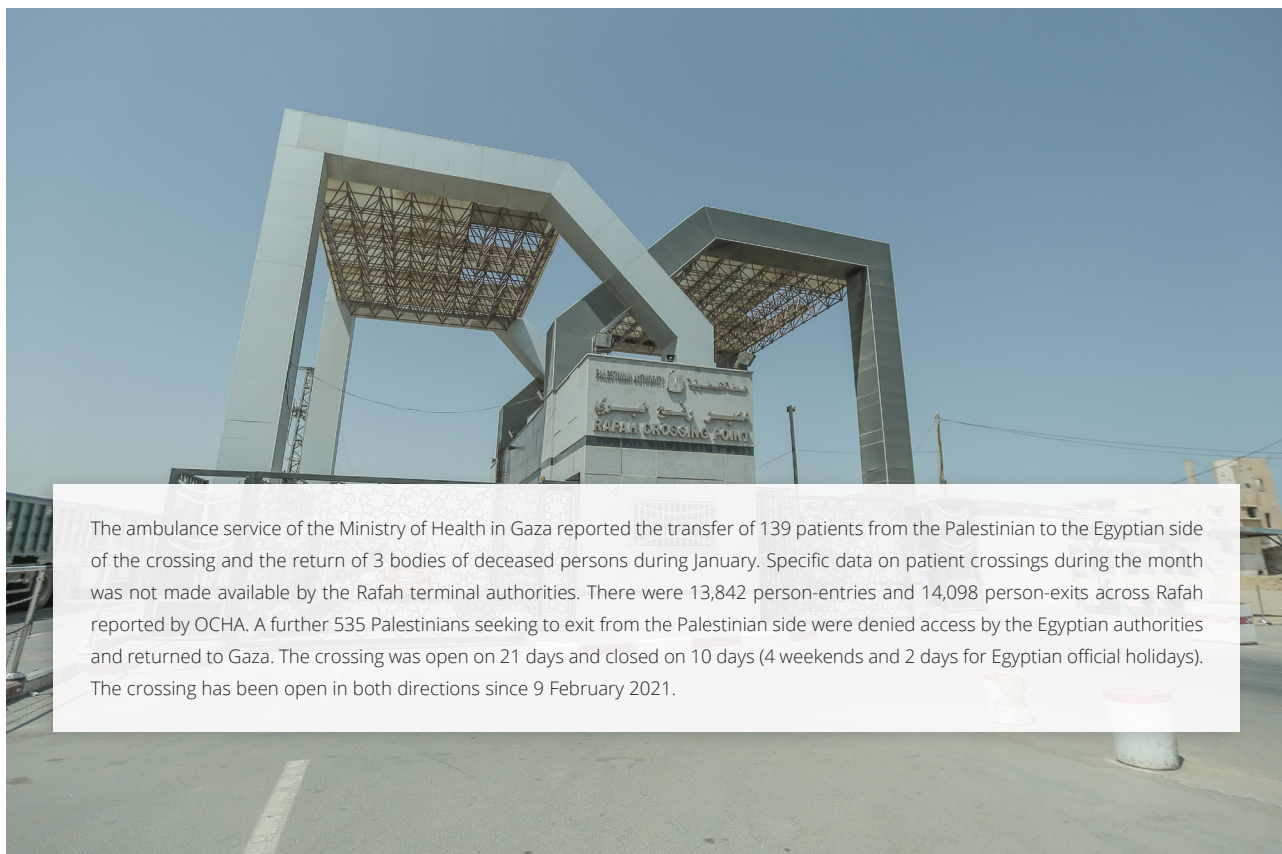


1,478

companions

exits through Beit Hanoun/Erez

Rafah crossing - Egypt



The ambulance service of the Ministry of Health in Gaza reported the transfer of 139 patients from the Palestinian to the Egyptian side of the crossing and the return of 3 bodies of deceased persons during January. Specific data on patient crossings during the month was not made available by the Rafah terminal authorities. There were 13,842 person-entries and 14,098 person-exits across Rafah reported by OCHA. A further 535 Palestinians seeking to exit from the Palestinian side were denied access by the Egyptian authorities and returned to Gaza. The crossing was open on 21 days and closed on 10 days (4 weekends and 2 days for Egyptian official holidays). The crossing has been open in both directions since 9 February 2021.

The West Bank

Restrictions on the movement of Palestinians from the West Bank to Israel and East Jerusalem affect parts of the population more than others. Many women older than 50 years of age and men older than 55 years of age are exempted from the requirement to obtain a permit to travel – provided they are not traveling on a Saturday, before 8am or after 7pm.

Patients: In January, there were 9,365 permit applications by patients from the West Bank outside Jerusalem to Israeli authorities to access hospitals in East Jerusalem and Israeli hospitals. Of patient permit applications, 4,337 (46%) were for female patients, 1,783 (19%) were for children under the age of 18 years, and 701 (7%) were for patients over 60 years. More than two-thirds (68%) were for appointments at hospitals in East Jerusalem, while a third (32%) were for Israeli hospitals or clinics.


Of the 9,365 West Bank patient applications in January, 7,436 (79%) were approved, 1,646 (18%) were unsuccessful (denied) and 283 (3%) were pending reply at the time of monthly reporting.


Companions: In January 2022, there were 10,153 patient companion permit applications to Israeli authorities from the West Bank outside East Jerusalem, to access health care in East Jerusalem and Israel. 5,292 (52%) were for female companions, while 90% of companion permit applications were for companions aged from 18-59 years.


Of the 10,153 West Bank companion applications, 7,807 (77%) were approved, 1,805 (18%) were unsuccessful and 541 (5%) were pending reply at the time of monthly reporting.

 **9,365**
patient permit
applications

for Israeli permits to access
healthcare in East Jerusalem
and Israel


 **79% approved**


 **18% unsuccessful**


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

 **10,153**
patient companion
applications

to access healthcare in East
Jerusalem and Israel

 **77% approved**

 **18% unsuccessful**

 **5% pending**
at the time of monthly
reporting

In Focus

Hamzeh, a paramedic, severely injured in a health attack in Nablus

27-year-old Hamzeh Abu Hajar is a volunteer paramedic with the Palestinian Medical Relief Society (PMRS).

Hamzeh first joined PMRS in 2019, participating in courses on first aid and community engagement at their youth centre. In March 2020, after the first cases of COVID-19 were identified in the occupied Palestinian territory, he signed up to join their field teams providing community support and helping sick patients in the Old City of Nablus.

"Helping people during COVID-19 was rewarding. People had no one else to help them, especially older people in our community and those who could not go out of their homes. I used to work night shifts with the other volunteers. We helped with all sorts of tasks, from bringing food to people's houses to paying for their electricity bills or taking sick patients to doctors and hospitals... I enjoyed the work, and I knew that I wanted to continue to support people in this way."



In 2022, with increasing escalations across the West Bank, Hamzeh began volunteering as a PMRS first responder.

“Every time the Israeli forces would raid Nablus Old City, I would join the field team. PMRS cars would drive us to different locations where people were injured and needed our help. I always made sure to wear my vest before leaving the house, while PMRS made sure we were all wearing vests by the time we reached a location with injured people... At first, wearing the paramedic vests made us feel protected. However, as the confrontations increased the occupation forces stopped distinguishing between paramedics, journalists and others. We all feel or show fear in different ways. Of course, I was scared when going into the field, but it wasn't the kind of fear that would prevent me from going to help the people who depended on us.”

At around 8am on the morning of Friday 30th December 2022, Israeli forces raided Nablus Old City. Hamzeh was called to the field to support treating the injured. He left his house wearing his paramedic vest and went towards the Old City with other PMRS volunteers. Around 15 PMRS volunteers were dispersed to different locations to cover the emergency response as effectively as possible. Hamzeh was stationed at the western side of Al Khan neighbourhood.

“I heard calls to help with an injury near my location. I immediately went to respond, and there were another two paramedics behind me. Around five metres before reaching the guy, I was shot in the right side of my upper body. I went back around two meters and fell to the ground. I told the other paramedics that I had been shot. I felt that my body was tearing apart from the inside. I was on the ground for several minutes until Al Razi ambulance [a private ambulance] reached me. A sniper had been shooting between the two ambulances on site and me.”

The second ambulance had been from the Palestine Red Crescent Society, which was obstructed from reaching Hamzeh. After Al Razi ambulance reached him, they transferred him to hospital. The ambulance tried to exit via the western route to Rafidia Government Hospital but was again obstructed by Israeli forces, which compelled the team to return and take a different route.



(Photo provided by PMRS)

"I remember slipping in and out of consciousness. I vaguely remember being in the ambulance. I also remember my brother, doctors, some of my PMRS friends, and many other people surrounding me in the hospital. I was put in an emergency intensive care room when I reached the hospital and ten minutes later I was transferred to the operating room."

Hamzeh's surgery took 4.5 hours. He stayed in the intensive care unit for 6 days, after which he was transferred to another ward for a further two days before being discharged home. The bullet had injured Hamzeh's right lung and diaphragm, torn part of his liver and right kidney, and broken four of his ribs. He also suffered a bladder injury. After being shot, the bullet exited from his back, resulting in a tear of his muscle and an open wound around 20 to 25 centimetres in diameter. As a result of his surgery, Hamzeh had 40 stitches in his abdomen, while his back wound remains open and will require several months to heal.

"When my family first heard I had been injured they didn't understand the extent of my injuries. When doctors explained to them that I was in a critical condition they were shocked and devastated. They were very worried that – God forbid – I would die. When I woke up after surgery it was difficult for me to understand what had happened to me. I was in shock, and I needed time to process everything... Since I returned home, I have been on many medications, from pain killers to anti-inflammatory medications. I use an inhaler and need oxygen, especially at night. My colleagues from PMRS come on daily basis to help change my dressings. The open wound on my back is the one that hurts me the most. Moving is still very painful for me. I haven't had a full night's sleep since I got home. I manage to sleep two hours at most because every place in my body hurts and there is no position I can lie in without pain."

Hamzeh is still at home undergoing a slow recovery. He moves around the house and goes for follow up visits to the hospital every Tuesday. Because of his broken ribs he faces difficulties moving and sleeping. The injury of his lungs means he gets very tired whenever he tries to move around the house.

"Before my injuries I was very active, I used to go to work and after that I would go out with my friends. Since my injuries I only go out for hospital visits. My friends still visit me at home, but it is not the same! I feel closer to my family now, I sit with them more than I used to before. My family understands my injuries better now and they all try to help me. My brother and mother help me the most."

Hamzeh is making a slow recovery. He needs close follow up to monitor potential complications of his injuries. Even despite this, he plans to return to the field.

"Before my injury I witnessed some difficult cases working in the first response teams. I helped provide first aid to people who had very severe injuries. I even had to move people who had been killed. One of the hardest experiences was when I had to move a martyr who turned out to be my friend. I had been with him just a few hours before the raid. I was so shocked to see that it was my friend. Even these experiences didn't prevent me from going back to the field. On the contrary, it gave me a stronger push to go and to support those in need, especially knowing that they depended on our help. I felt it was my duty to help them. After I fully recover, I plan to return. My mother is worried. She keeps telling me that she doesn't want me to go back. She says the first time I was lucky, but we don't know what will happen next time. Still, I plan to return."