

MONTHLY REPORT

May 2023



Health Access

Barriers for patients in the occupied Palestinian territory

 **10,096**

referrals issued to access health facilities outside the Palestinian MoH

2,218 Gaza

7,768 West Bank

 **78%**

of Gaza patient permit applications approved

47%

of Gaza companion permit applications approved

 **74%**

of West Bank patient permit applications approved

73%

of West Bank companion permit applications approved

 **39**

Gaza patient called for security interrogation

IN FOCUS

Health access and health attacks during the May escalation in the Gaza Strip

Part 1 Referrals

May referrals by the Ministry of Health


In May, the Palestinian Ministry of Health (MoH) issued 10,096 referrals to health care services delivered by non-MoH providers. Referrals from the West Bank comprised 77% (7,768) of the total, including 1,289 referrals for patients from east Jerusalem, while referrals for the Gaza Strip accounted for 22% (2,218) of the total. Four referrals were issued for Palestinian patients present in Jordan and one in Egypt, while the origin of 105 referrals (1%) was not reported.

Palestinian MoH referrals to hospitals in the West Bank, outside east Jerusalem, comprised 49% of referrals in May; to east Jerusalem hospitals 38%; within the Gaza Strip 5%; to Israeli hospitals 6%; to Egypt 2%; and 0.2% (21 referrals) to Jordan.

The top needed specialties were oncology (26%); urology & nephrology (7%); medical imaging (6%); cardiac catheterization and haematology (5% each); ophthalmology, radiation therapy, and cardiology (4% each); and endoscopy, neonatal ICU, paediatrics, and laboratory tests (3% each). The remaining 27% were for 25 other medical specialties.

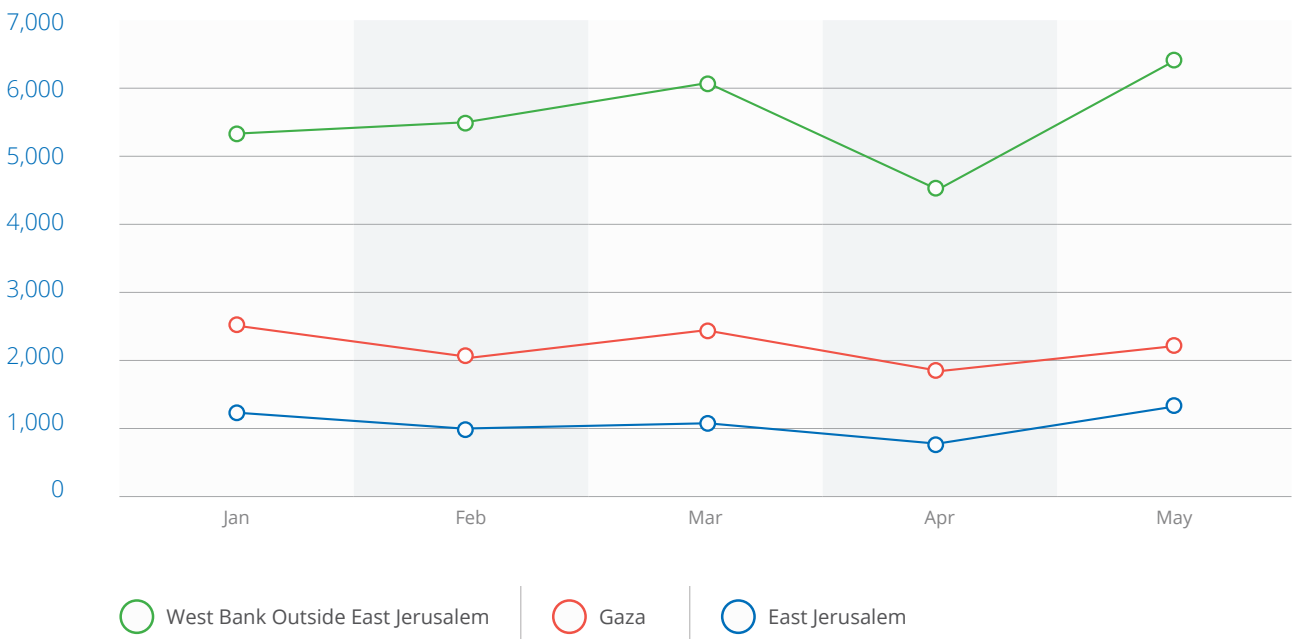
Full age disaggregation was pending at the time of reporting. Referrals for female patients comprised 47% of the total.

 **2,218**
Gaza Strip

 **7,768**
West Bank

referrals approved financial coverage for health care outside the Palestinian Ministry of Health

Chart 1 Number of referrals issued by the Palestinian MoH by place of origin, January to May 2023



Access


The Gaza Strip

There were 1,828 (M: 912; F: 916) permit applications for patients from the Gaza Strip to Israeli authorities in May, 8% higher than the monthly average for 2022 (1,691) and the highest monthly number of applications since December 2022 (1,802). Close to a third (30%) of applications were for children under 18 and close to a fifth (18%) were for patients over 60 years old. A half (50%) were for female patients, while 83% were for referrals funded by the Palestinian MoH. More than half (51%) of applications were for appointments in east Jerusalem hospitals; 30% were for hospitals in the West Bank outside east Jerusalem; and 19% were for Israeli hospitals. 45% of applications were for appointments at either Augusta Victoria Hospital (28%) or Makassed Hospital (17%), both in east Jerusalem. The top five specialties accounted for 73% of permit applications: oncology (37%); haematology (11%); cardiology (10%); paediatrics (9%); and ophthalmology (6%). The remaining 27% of applications were for 23 other specialties.

A further 102 permit applications for patients and companions were submitted through the Palestinian General Authority of Civil Affairs during May 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 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 102 applications, 29 (28%) were approved within the month, 0 (0%) were denied and 73 (72%) remained pending at the time of monthly reporting.

Approved permit applications: 1,419 (M: 682; F: 737), or 78%, of the 1,828 patient applications to cross Beit Hanoun/Erez were approved in May 2023. The approval rate has declined after a peak of 85% in February.

The approval rate for patient permit applications varies by age and sex of patients, see Table 1. In May, of the different demographic groups, men aged 18 to 40 had the lowest approval rate at 61%, men aged 41-60 had an approval rate of 69%, while children aged 0 to 3 years had the highest approval rate (90%). The overall approval rate for female patients (80%) was higher than for male patients (75%).

 **1,828**
patient applications

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

 **78%**
approved

 **1%**
denied

 **22%**
delayed

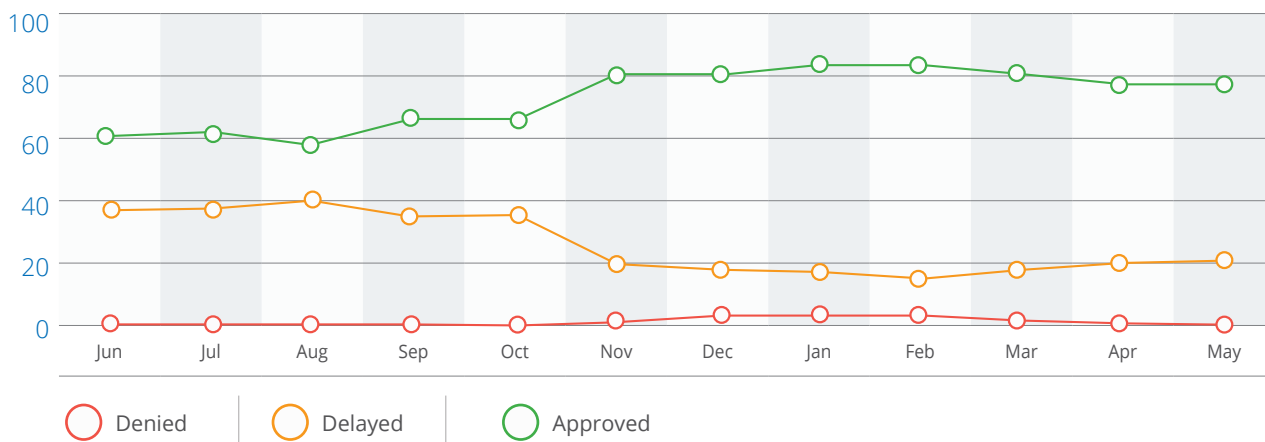
Table 1 Approval rate for patient permit applications in May 2023, by age and sex

May 2023 AGE	Number of applications		Approved	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
0-3	94	78	84%	90%
4-17	214	161	82%	80%
18-40	206	249	61%	76%
41-60	213	277	69%	79%
over 60	185	151	83%	86%
sub-total	912	916	75%	80%
Total	1,828			
Overall approval rate for patient applications			78%	

Approval rates also vary by referral specialty. In May, specialties with an approval rate similar to or higher than the average (78%) with more than 20 applications included nuclear medicine (21) at 95%, oncology (671) at 84%, haematology (210) at 83% and cardiology (184) at 78%. Meanwhile, specialties with an approval rate lower than 78% and more than 20 applications included paediatrics (156) and ENT (21) at 75% each; neurosurgery (59) at 73%; ophthalmology (109) at 71%; orthopaedics (102) at 68%; general surgery (52) at 67%; internal medicine (63) at 63%; vascular surgery (25) at 60%; and urology (39) at 51%.

Chart 2

Israeli responses to Gaza patient permit applications, June 2022 to May 2023



Denied care: 10 (M: 7; F: 3) patient permit applications, less than 1% of the total for Gaza patients, were denied in May. These 10 applications were for adults aged 18 to 40 years. Three patients had appointments for orthopaedics; 2 for oncology; and 1 each for cardiology, haematology, ophthalmology, urology, and infertility. Six were destined for hospital appointments in the West Bank, 3 in east Jerusalem and one at an Israeli hospital.

Delayed care: 399 (M: 223; F: 176) patient permit applications, or 22% 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% (95 applications) were for children under the age of 18, while 13% (52) were for patients over 60 years old. Most delayed applications (365 or 91%) were classified as ‘under study’ at the time of the patient’s hospital appointment.

Interrogation

In May, 39 (M: 28; F: 11) patients from the Gaza Strip were requested for interrogation as a prerequisite to their permit applications.

18 patients were aged 18 to 40 years, 18 were aged 41 to 60 years, and 3 were over 60 years old. Of these patients, 11 had appointments for cancer care (oncology); 7 for ophthalmology; 5 for cardiology; 4 for haematology; 3 for orthopaedics; 2 each for general surgery, neurology, and neurosurgery; and 1 each for internal medicine, vascular surgery, and infertility. 22 of the patients had applied for permits to access hospitals in the West Bank, 16 for hospitals in east Jerusalem, and 1 to an Israeli hospital. Close to two-fifths of patients (38%, or 15 of 39) had submitted their permit applications more than 30 days before the hospital appointment. Two of the 39 patients were approved during the month and the remaining 37 were awaiting a response at the time of monthly reporting.

Patient companions

The Health Liaison Office submitted 2,357 companion permit applications to Israeli authorities to accompany patients in May. 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 May, 1,107 companion permit applications (47% of the total) were approved, 59 applications (3%) were denied, and the remaining 1,191 (50%) were delayed, receiving no definitive response by the time of the patient’s hospital appointment.



39

Patients

called for interrogation



0

Gaza patient or companion

arrested



2,357

companion applications

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



47% approved



3% denied



50% delayed

Patients and companions crossing Beit Hanoun/Erez

The Palestinian General Authority of Civil Affairs reported that 1,796 patients and 1,371 companions exited through Beit Hanoun/Erez checkpoint in May to access hospitals outside the Gaza Strip. A quarter, or 24% (425), of patients therefore crossed Beit Hanoun/Erez checkpoint without a companion. Of the 1,796 patients, 79 were transferred from a Palestinian- to an Israeli-registered ambulance (back-to-back) with 77 companions. The bodies of 27 deceased persons were returned to Gaza across Beit Hanoun/Erez in May. During the month, the checkpoint was open for 23 days for daytime working hours and closed on 8 days. These 8 days included 5 during the military assault from 9 to 13 May, which included one Saturday (13 May), as well as three other Saturdays.



1,796

patient-exits
through Beit
Hanoun/Erez



1,371

companion-exits
through Beit
Hanoun/Erez

Rafah border crossing to Egypt



The ambulance service of the Ministry of Health in Gaza reported the transfer of 190 patients from the Palestinian to the Egyptian side of the crossing and the return of 10 bodies of deceased persons during May. Specific data on patient crossings was not made available by Rafah terminal authorities. There were 10,441 person-entries and 14,855 person-exits across Rafah reported by OCHA. A further 377 Palestinians seeking to exit from the Palestinian side were denied access by the Egyptian authorities and returned to Gaza. The border crossing was open on 22 days and closed on 9 days (8 weekends, 1 day for an official Egyptian holiday). 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: There were 9,214 permit applications by patients from the West Bank outside east Jerusalem in May. Of patient permit applications, 4,194 (46%) were for female patients, 1,873 (20%) were for children under the age of 18 years, and 774 (8%) were for patients over 60 years. Two-thirds (66%) were for appointments at hospitals in east Jerusalem, while a third (33%) were for Israeli hospitals or clinics.

Of the 9,214 West Bank patient applications in May, 6,789 (74%) were approved, 8% lower than the average approval rate in 2022 (82%). The approval rate has been declining gradually since the beginning of the year and currently remains lower than the approval rate for the Gaza Strip. There were 2,133 (23%) denied applications and 292 (3%) applications pending at the time of monthly reporting.


The approval rate of patient permits varies by location. In May, governorates with an approval rate of 74% or higher included Abu Dis (88%), Ar-Ram (86%), Jericho (83%), Bethlehem (79%), and Tulkarem (79%). Governorates with an approval rate lower than the average of 74% included Ramallah (71%), Nablus (70%), Tubas (70%), Qalqilya (69%), Jenin (67%), Salfit (66%), and Al-Khalil (Hebron) (64%).


Companions: In May, there were 10,371 companion permit applications to Israeli authorities from the West Bank outside east Jerusalem, to access health care in east Jerusalem and Israel. 5,320 (51%) were for female companions, while 89% of applications were for companions aged from 18-59 years.


Of the 10,371 West Bank companion applications, 7,606 (73%) were approved, 3% less than the average approval rate of last year. 2,347 (23%) were unsuccessful and 418 (4%) were pending reply at the time of monthly reporting.

 **9,214**
patient permit
applications

for Israeli permits to access
healthcare in east Jerusalem
and Israel


 **74% approved**


 **23% unsuccessful**


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

 **10,371**
patient companion
applications

to access healthcare in East
Jerusalem and Israel

 **73% approved**

 **23% unsuccessful**

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

In Focus

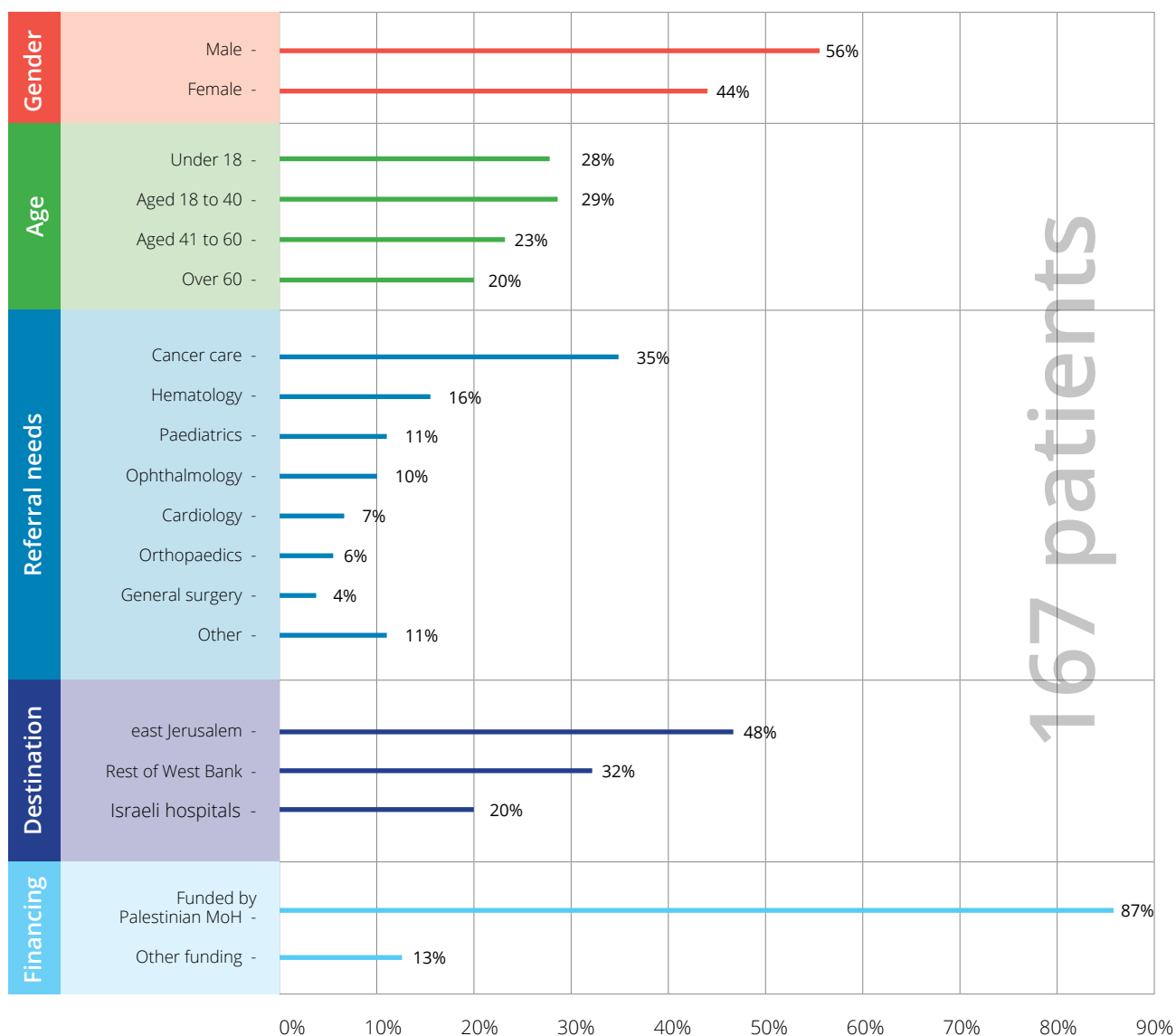
Health access and health attacks during the May escalation in the Gaza Strip

The escalation of hostilities from 9 to 13 May in the Gaza Strip resulted in 33 fatalities and 190 casualties. The civilian victims of the attacks included the director of Al-Wafa Rehabilitation Hospital, who was killed in his home in Gaza City along with his wife and his son.

During the period of bombardment, Beit Hanoun (Erez) checkpoint was closed, preventing the passage of patients requiring essential health services in the West Bank, including east Jerusalem, as well as at Israeli hospitals. WHO documented that 167 patients had applied for permits to reach appointments for health care during these dates but were prevented due to the checkpoint closure. Figure 1 provides full details of their health needs.

Figure 1

Referral needs for patients unable to exit during May escalation



There were three health facilities damaged in four separate health attacks during the bombardment: Shuhada Al-Aqsa Hospital in Deir Al-Balah (collapse to the fore ceiling); Indonesi Hospital in North Gaza (collapse to the fore ceiling); and Muscat Primary Health Care Centre in Khan Younis (damage to the windows and the communications system from two separate bombardments).

From January to the end of May 2023, there have been at least 124 health attacks across the occupied Palestinian territory, resulting in 39 health worker injuries and the arrest and/or detention of 9 health workers, 1 patient and 1 companion. At least 117 ambulances were affected in attacks, including 104 obstructed access, 15 damaged, 3 used as a shield, 4 searched and 4 directly targeted without causing damage to vehicle body. Meanwhile, 12 attacks involved damage to health facilities.

Health is a fundamental right for every human being that must be respected and protected at all times.