

MONTHLY REPORT

July 2023



Health Access

Barriers for patients in the occupied Palestinian territory

 **9,698**

referrals issued to access health facilities outside the Palestinian MoH

2,402 Gaza
7,191 West Bank

 **81%**

of Gaza patient permit applications approved

49%
of Gaza companion permit applications approved

 **75%**

of West Bank patient permit applications approved

73%
of West Bank companion permit applications approved

 **80**

Gaza patient called for security interrogation

IN FOCUS

Attacks on health care during the military incursion of Jenin refugee camp

Part 1 Referrals

July referrals by the Ministry of Health

In July, the Palestinian Ministry of Health (MoH) issued 9,698 referrals to health services delivered by non-MoH providers. Referrals from the West Bank comprised 74% (7,191) of the total, including 1,151 referrals for patients from east Jerusalem, while referrals for the Gaza Strip accounted for 25% (2,402) of the total. Five referrals were issued for Palestinian patients present in Jordan, while the origin of 100 referrals (1%) was not reported.

Close to half (48%) of Palestinian MoH referrals were to hospitals in the West Bank, outside east Jerusalem; 37% to east Jerusalem hospitals; 7% within the Gaza Strip; 7% to Israeli hospitals; 2% to Egypt; 0.2% (17 referrals) to Jordan; and 0.02% (2 referrals) to Turkey.

The top needed specialties were oncology (26%); medical imaging (6%); urology & nephrology, cardiac catheterization, and haematology (5% each); cardiology, ophthalmology, and radiation therapy (4% each); neonatal ICU, and paediatrics (3% each); obstetrics & gynaecology, endoscopy, gastroenterology, rehabilitation, diagnostic procedures, and laboratory examinations (2% each). The remaining 23% were for 20 other medical specialties.

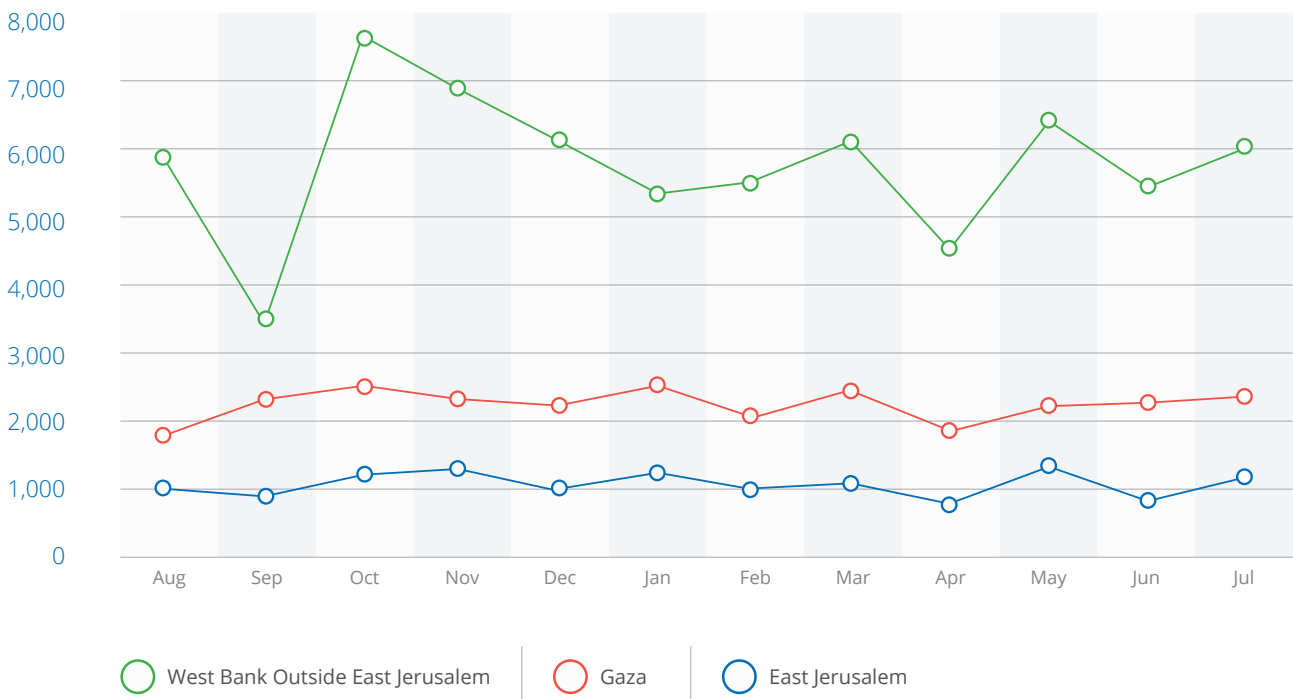
Referrals for patients under 18 years of age comprised 25% (2,414) of the total, while 28% (2,690) were for those aged 60 years or older. Referrals for female patients comprised 46% of the total.

 **2,402**
Gaza Strip

 **7,191**
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, August 2022 to July 2023



Access


The Gaza Strip

There were 1,851 (M: 991; F: 860) permit applications for patients from the Gaza Strip to Israeli authorities in July, 17% higher than the monthly average for the first half of 2023 (1,580). More than a quarter (27%) of applications were for children under 18 and a fifth (19%) were for patients over 60 years old. Under half (46%) were for female patients, while 84% were for referrals funded by the Palestinian MoH. 47% of applications were for appointments in east Jerusalem hospitals; 36% were for hospitals in the West Bank outside East Jerusalem; and 17% were for Israeli hospitals. Two-fifths (42%) of applications were for appointments at either Augusta Victoria Hospital (25%) or Makassed Hospital (17%), both in east Jerusalem. The top five specialties accounted for 73% of permit applications: oncology (36%); haematology (11%); cardiology (10%); orthopaedics (8%); paediatrics (8%). The remaining 27% of applications were for 22 other specialties.

A further 112 permit applications for patients and companions were submitted through the Palestinian General Authority of Civil Affairs during July 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 112 applications, 6 (5%) were approved within the month, none (0%) were denied and 106 (95%) remained pending at the time of monthly reporting.

Approved permit applications: 1,492 (M: 751; F: 741), or 81%, of the 1,851 patient applications to cross Beit Hanoun/Erez were approved in July 2023.

The approval rate for patient permit applications varies by age and sex of patients, see Table 1. In July, of the different demographic groups, men aged 18 to 40 had the lowest approval rate at 60%, men aged 41 to 60 at 71% while women aged over 60 had the highest approval rate (94%). The overall approval rate for female patients (86%) was higher than for male patients (76%).

 **1,851**
patient applications

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

 **81%**
approved

 **1%**
denied

 **19%**
delayed

Table 1

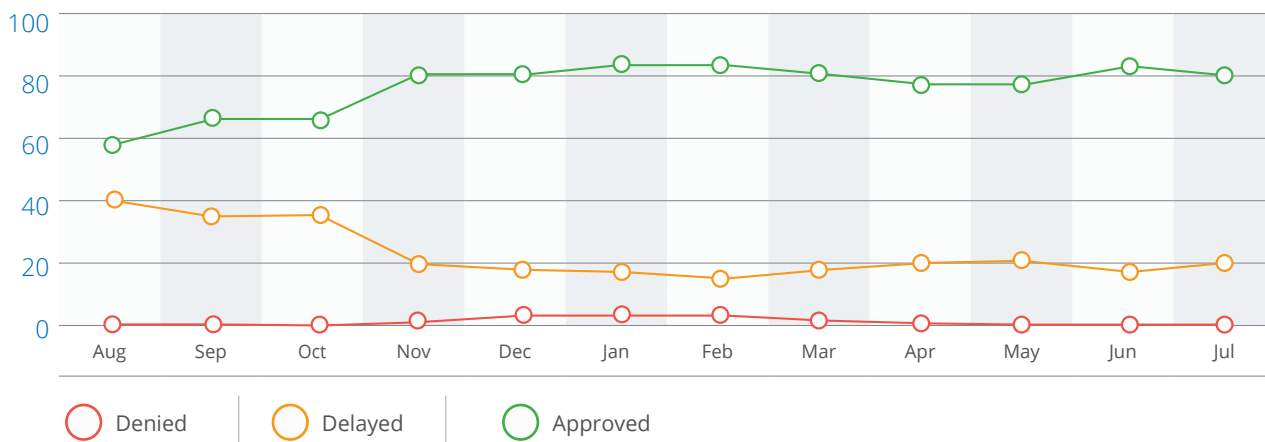
Approval rate for patient permit applications in July 2023, by age and sex

July 2023 AGE	Number of applications		Approved	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
0-3	91	54	87%	85%
4-17	206	148	83%	84%
18-40	250	248	60%	82%
41-60	251	245	71%	86%
over 60	193	165	89%	94%
sub-total	991	860	76%	86%
Total	1,851			
Overall approval rate for patient applications			81%	

Approval rates also vary by referral specialty. In July, specialties with an approval rate similar to or higher than the average (81%) with more than 20 applications included oncology (673) at 89%, paediatrics (147) at 85%, haematology (196) at 84%, and ENT (24) at 83%. Meanwhile, specialties with an approval rate lower than 81% and more than 20 applications included ophthalmology (107) at 79%, general surgery (43) at 77%, orthopaedics (148) at 76%, cardiology (187) at 75%, neurosurgery (61) at 74%, internal medicine (64) at 72%, neurology (31) at 68%, nephrology (29) at 62%, and urology (40) at 43%.

Chart 2

Israeli responses to Gaza patient permit applications, Aug 2022 to July 2023



Denied care: 12 (M: 10; F: 2) patient permit applications, 1% of the total for Gaza patients, were denied in July. Five of these 12 patient applications were for adults aged 18 to 40 years, three for adults aged 41-60 years and four for patients over 60 years old. Six patients had appointments for oncology; two for internal medicine; and one each for neurology, general surgery, heart surgery and ophthalmology. Nine were destined for hospital appointments in the West Bank outside east Jerusalem and three to East Jerusalem.

Delayed care: 347 (M: 230; F: 117) patient permit applications, or 19% 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, 22% (78 applications) were for children under the age of 18, while 8% (27) were for patients over 60 years old. Most delayed applications (327 or 94%) were classified as 'under study' at the time of the patient's hospital appointment. Five applications were 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 July, 80 (M: 58; F: 22) patients from the Gaza Strip were requested for interrogation as a prerequisite to their permit applications, the highest monthly number in six years – since July 2017, when 94 patients were requested for interrogation. The number of patients requested for interrogation has significantly increased since October 2022.

39 patients were aged 18 to 40 years, 32 were aged 41 to 60 years, and 9 were over 60 years old. Of these patients, 23 had appointments for cancer care (oncology); 11 for cardiology; 10 for orthopaedics; 8 for haematology; 4 each for internal medicine, general surgery, and ophthalmology; 3 each for neurology, neurosurgery and ENT; 2 each for urology and obstetrics/gynecology; and 1 each for pulmonary medicine, nephrology, and maxillo-facial surgery. 48 of the patients had applied for permits to access hospitals in east Jerusalem, 28 to hospitals in the West Bank outside east Jerusalem and 4 to Israeli hospitals. Over three-fifths of patients (64%, or 51/80) had submitted their permit applications more than 30 days before the hospital appointment. 1 of the 80 patients was approved during the month and the remaining 79 were awaiting a response at the time of monthly reporting.



80

Patients

called for interrogation



0

Gaza patient or companion


arrested

Patient companions

The Health Liaison Office submitted 2,378 companion permit applications to Israeli authorities to accompany patients in July. 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 July, 1,167 companion permit applications (49% of the total) were approved, 56 applications (2%) were denied, and the remaining 1,155 (49%) 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 2,067 patients and 1,596 companions exited through Beit Hanoun/Erez checkpoint in July to access hospitals outside the Gaza Strip. Therefore, **close to a quarter, or 23% (471), of patients crossed Beit Hanoun/Erez checkpoint without a companion.** Of the 2,067 patients, 95 were transferred from a Palestinian- to an Israeli-registered ambulance (back-to-back) with 95 companions. The bodies of 29 deceased persons were returned to Gaza across Beit Hanoun/Erez in July. During the month, the checkpoint was open for 26 days for daytime working hours and closed on five days (five Saturdays).

 **2,378**
companion applications

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

 **49% approved**

 **2% denied**

 **49% delayed**

 **2,067**
patient-exits
through Beit Hanoun/Erez

 **1,596**
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 182 patients from the Palestinian to the Egyptian side of the crossing and the return of 5 bodies of deceased persons during July. Specific data on patient crossings was not made available by Rafah terminal authorities. There were 19,930 person-entries and 14,989 person-exits across Rafah reported by OCHA. A further 216 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 18 days and closed on 13 days (9 weekends and 4 days for Egyptian official holidays). 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 8,678 permit applications by patients from the West Bank outside east Jerusalem in July. Of patient permit applications, 4,477 (52%) were for female patients, 1,921 (22%) were for children under the age of 18 years, and 731 (8%) were for patients over 60 years. Two-thirds (67%) were for appointments at hospitals in east Jerusalem, while a third (33%) were for Israeli hospitals or clinics.

Of the 8,678 West Bank patient applications in July, 6,477 (75%) were approved, 7% 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 1,949 (22%) unsuccessful applications and 252 (3%) applications pending at the time of monthly reporting.


The approval rate of patient permits varies by location. In July, governorates with an approval rate of 75% or higher included Abu Dis (87%); Jericho (85%); Ar-Ram (82%); Tubas and Qalqilya (80%) each; Salfit (76%); and Tulkarem (75%). Governorates with an approval rate lower than the average of 75% included Bethlehem (74%), Jenin (73%), Ramallah (72%), Al-Khalil (Hebron) (68%), and Nablus (65%).


Companions: In July, there were 10,324 companion permit applications to Israeli authorities from the West Bank outside east Jerusalem, to access health care in east Jerusalem and Israel. 5,344 (52%) were for female companions, while 88% of applications were for companions aged from 18-59 years.


Of the 10,324 West Bank companion applications, 7,559 (73%) were approved. 2,396 (23%) were unsuccessful and 369 (4%) were pending reply at the time of monthly reporting.

 **8,678**
patient permit
applications

for Israeli permits to access
healthcare in east Jerusalem
and Israel


 **75% approved**


 **22% unsuccessful**


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

 **10,324**
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

Attacks on health care during the military incursion of Jenin refugee camp

Sabrin is 32 years old and a paramedic from Silat al-Harithiya village, near Jenin in the West Bank. She has worked with the Palestine Red Crescent Society for the past five years.

On Monday 3rd July, Sabrin woke up to news of the military operation on Jenin refugee camp. She tried to reach the PRCS ambulance centre in Jenin for duty but faced difficulties. She stated, "The taxi driver told me it would be difficult to reach Jenin, but I told him I had to reach the ambulance centre to go and help. We agreed to go to the entrance of Jenin, after which I had to find my own way to the ambulance centre."



Photo by: Nidal Eshtayeh

Sabrin contacted a private ambulance, who helped her reach. All PRCS ambulances were busy responding to the injuries.

Sabrin accompanied an ambulance team to assist a woman who had gone into delivery inside the camp. The team coordinated for access with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). However, as the team approached the refugee camp, they encountered difficulties. Sabrin explains, "We came to an intersection, where a military jeep in front of us started ordering us to go backwards. But we could see there were already some military jeeps and a bulldozer behind us." The driver attempted to negotiate, but discussion began to escalate. "I was worried that the soldiers would shoot towards us. I felt that we could be shot at at any moment. I was scared but I also felt responsibility for the woman who was in delivery. I was worried about her and her baby. The occupation forces insisted that we had to go back, but there was nowhere to reverse as two jeeps were blocking our way from behind. The military jeeps moved and as we began to reverse the military jeep in front of us rammed into our front, pushing us backwards. It was intense, we were all so stressed."

Another ambulance was sent from the ambulance dispatch centre to respond to the woman in delivery, with coordination through the ICRC. However, this second ambulance was also unable to reach the woman.

On the same day, the same ambulance team was prevented access when trying to evacuate families with children from their homes. Sabrin said, "We wanted to evacuate people suffering with tear gas inhalation. On one occasion I had to get out of the ambulance vehicle to request a military officer to allow us to reach the homes. I told him there were children inside, but he only shouted at me to go back. I tried to talk to another military officer, but he also didn't allow us."

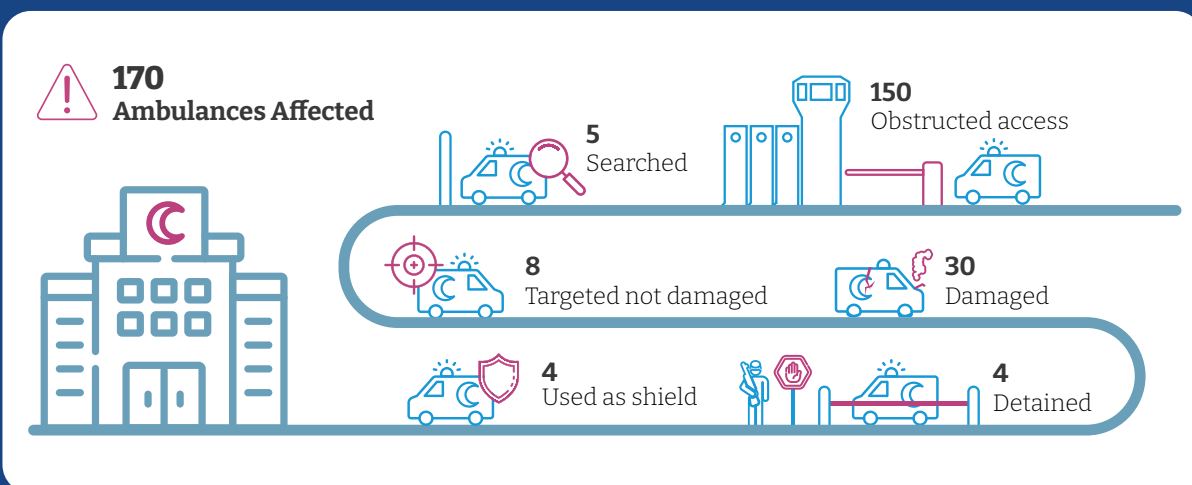
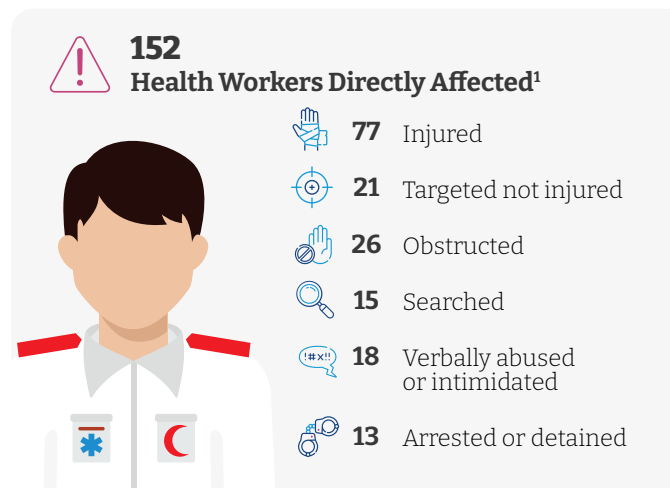
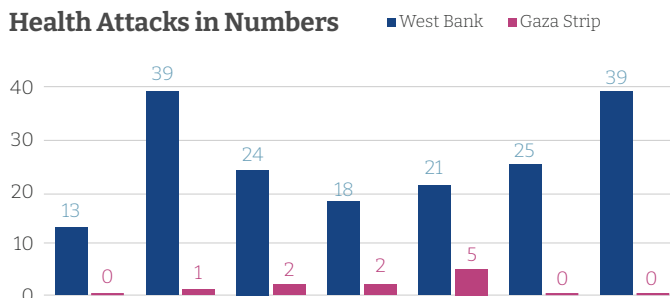
The next day, Tuesday, 4th July, Sabrin was unable to reach the PRCS ambulance centre and report on duty due to severe movement restrictions in the area.

"This isn't the first time we faced difficulties," she said. "We've been shot at and targeted with live ammunition. I get scared every time. I have two daughters and I worry that I would not return to them. But I still feel a strong obligation towards the people. The attacks scare me, but they won't stop me from continuing my work. In fact, they encourage me to continue because I understand that people depend on us."

WHO documented 25 attacks on health care during the military incursion of Jenin refugee camp on 3rd and 4th July. Of these attacks, 12 involved some form physical violence towards health care while 16 involved obstruction to delivery of health care (one attack can include different types of violation). As a result of the attacks, many health workers and patients suffered injury (most involving gas inhalation during attacks on hospitals in Jenin). Meanwhile, eight health workers reported being searched, while at least 12 ambulances were affected.

Health attacks in the oPt

1 January – 31 July 2023



1. This includes conservative estimates for the number of health workers affected by gas inhalation during incursions on hospitals in Jenin.