

Humanitarian Updates from MSF's Hebron Project in the West Bank

Obstacles to Providing and Receiving Health Care.

While the medical humanitarian needs in the West Bank are increasing, MSF's capacity to respond is decreasing due to movement restrictions and increased violence.

Impact of the increased violence and movement restrictions. Freedom of movement across Hebron governorate continues to be increasingly affected by an intensification of violence and restrictions imposed by Israeli authorities. While MSF was already forced to cancel medical activities on 12 and 26 of December, and 8 of January due to movement restrictions, increased settler presence during Jewish holidays, and Israeli military training respectively, since the ceasefire deal, such cancellations have become more common.

Since the ceasefire deal entered into effect, violence across Hebron Governorate further escalated. Israeli forces closed entrances to Hebron city with manned checkpoints, which are only sporadically opened during daytime. This directly impacts MSF's ability to organize movements and deliver medical services. On 19 and 26 of January, all MSF activities outside of Hebron had to be cancelled due to the complete closure of the city gates. Between 19 of January and 13 of February, MSF was forced to cancel six mobile clinics, two mental health group sessions and four health promotion sessions due to the difficulty of organizing, securing and coordinating movements. On 20 of January, as a result of the delays at checkpoints on the way, MSF's mobile clinic team needed to set up a triage system to prioritize the most critical cases and were unable to receive all patients, due to the limited time remaining on location.

Patients also face increasing risks in attempting to reach medical facilities and MSF services, further compounding their access to healthcare. Back in July 2024, MSF conducted a patient satisfaction and experience survey among 110 randomly selected patients who had accessed our services in Hebron Governorate in the previous month. The findings highlight the obstacles faced by patients who were seeking health care at MSF facilities during this period:

- 43%¹ of respondents reported being stopped at a military checkpoint on their way to the MSF clinic for their most recent consultation.
- Checkpoint presence affected the travel time to the clinic location, with patients stopped at checkpoints reporting an average of 48 minutes of travel time, compared to an average of 27 minutes of travel time for those who were not stopped.
- Another barrier to access to healthcare are intentional roadblocks installed by military and/or settlers (including locked gates, concrete barricades, or boulders). 39% of respondents reported having taken an alternate road due to roadblocks or checkpoints to get to their latest consultation.
- Additionally, 28% of respondents reported having experienced harassment or violence from military or settlers on their way to receive MSF services.

While patients' access to health care was already precarious in July 2024, since then, the humanitarian context has drastically deteriorated, and we would expect more obstacles if the survey was conducted today. In January and February, 12 patients cancelled their mental health appointments, citing security risks and/or movement restrictions to reach MSF facilities. Out of the 30 times MSF provided recreational activities for women and children in MSF's Hebron office between December and January, participants reported difficulties reaching our activities due to checkpoints and road closures on 11 occasions.

¹ The survey has a +/- 10% margin of error.

Ruptures in pharmacy and medical items.

MSF faced difficulties obtaining authorization for the importation of certain types of supplies, however not registered in the official list of restricted items. Specifically, Israeli authorities implemented restrictions on the importation of body-testing devices, labelled as “dual use” items, resulting in limited possibilities to obtain glucometers, Hemo-Cue devices and pregnancy tests necessary for medical activities.

Beyond the restrictions on MSF’s supplies, the availability of medications and pharmacy items in Hebron Governorate is currently limited by MoH’s financial crisis resulting from the tax freeze by Israel to the Palestinian Authority after October 2023. MoH’s inability to secure payments for international orders resulted in a complete rupture of chemotherapeutical treatments and cancer-related medicines in the West Bank. The recurring unavailability of chronic diseases medications, especially treatments for diabetes, hypertension, blood thinning and cholesterol, forces patients to transfer from one medication to another. Other medical items such as anesthetics, antibiotics, catheters and sewing tools are frequently out of stock in MoH facilities. MoH’s rupture of payments to local suppliers further resulted in reduced availability of pharmacy items in the private sector as well.

Further, UNRWA’s capacity to provide for medical and pharmaceutical items the West Bank is also impacted by Israel’s ban on its activities. UNRWA was unable to receive its shipment of medical items in October 2024, resulting in current or upcoming ruptures of sexual and reproductive health items, chronic medications, and antibiotics, among others, further limiting Palestinian refugees’ access to healthcare in the West Bank. Since January 2024, MSF started seeing patients who previously were able to get their medication within the regular health care system. Since December 2024, 52% of MSF’s chronic patients reported having experienced a stock out at the MoH pharmacy, and 39% reported having to stop taking their chronic medication.

Events exacerbating MH needs among our patients

While 2023 was already a record year in terms of violence against Palestinians in the West Bank, in 2024, we saw an increase of different types of violence and hardship among our mental health patients. Specifically, 73 patients increasingly lost their family income (161% increase in 2024 as compared to 2023), 65 patients had their personal property destroyed (117% increase), 54 patients had a family member killed (64% increase), 181 patients experienced physical violence such as beatings and shootings (48% increase), 219 patients were incarcerated or detained (24% increase), and 466 patients experienced domestic violence (23% increase)². The most frequently experienced types of violence by our mental health patients are witnessing violence (733 patients) and home incursions (532 patients).

Mass Home Demolitions Masafer Yatta

The Palestinian residents of Masafer Yatta have been under tremendous pressure and imminent risk of forcible transfer since 1981, and especially since May 2022. One of the multiple strategies to push people out of their lands is by home demolitions. From 10 to 18 of February, Israeli authorities conducted mass home demolitions in six villages in Masafer Yatta: Khallet Athaba, Maghayir al ‘Abeed, Jinba, Umm al Kheir, at-Tuwani, and Shi’b al Butum. The demolitions resulted in 88 people losing their homes. In Khallet Athaba, a village of a mere 99 residents, 46 people saw their homes being demolished. The residents of Umm al Kheir experienced their third mass home demolition within one year. MSF’s team conducted emergency interventions including social and mental health assessments with the affected families. The affected families and the communities as a whole are at an increasingly high risk of forced displacement, which may amount to forcible transfer.

² Consistent with what is known about the association between political violence and heightened occurrence of male-to-female intimate partner violence in the West Bank (Clark, C.J., Everson-Rose, S.A., Suglia, S.F., Btoush, R., Alosno, A., & Haj-Yahia, M.M. (2010). Association between exposure to political violence and intimate partner violence in the occupied Palestinian territory: a cross-sectional study. *The Lancet*, 375: 310–316.; Haj-Yahia, M.M., & Clark, C.J. (2013). Intimate partner violence in the occupied Palestinian territory: Prevalence and risk factors. *Journal of Family Violence*, 28: 797– 809.; Müller, C., & Tranchant, J.-P. (2017). Tackling violence against women and girls in Gaza. *International Institute for Environment and Development*. [http:// www.jstor.org/stable/resrep02733](http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep02733))