

HUMANITARIAN ACCESS GAZA STRIP

1-29 FEBRUARY 2024

OVERVIEW

Despite facing extreme challenges for humanitarian work, including two operational pauses and the continuation of extreme constraints on humanitarian movement and operations in February, there was nevertheless a significant scale-up in humanitarian efforts. This period witnessed a 48% increase in the overall number of coordinated humanitarian missions facilitated by the Israeli authorities across Gaza, climbing from 75 in January to 111 in February. However, the effectiveness of these expanded efforts was undermined by a cessation of operations to the north and an overall decline in the security of civilians, including humanitarian aid workers. This decline was chiefly attributable to the diminished presence of local police, following a spate of attacks by Israeli forces that led to police casualties. The resultant deterioration in law and order imposed severe access constraints, significantly impeding the movement of aid within and across Gaza. In the face of these formidable obstacles, the humanitarian operations in February demonstrated a resolute commitment to ramping up aid, highlighting an enduring determination to surmount the hurdles encountered.

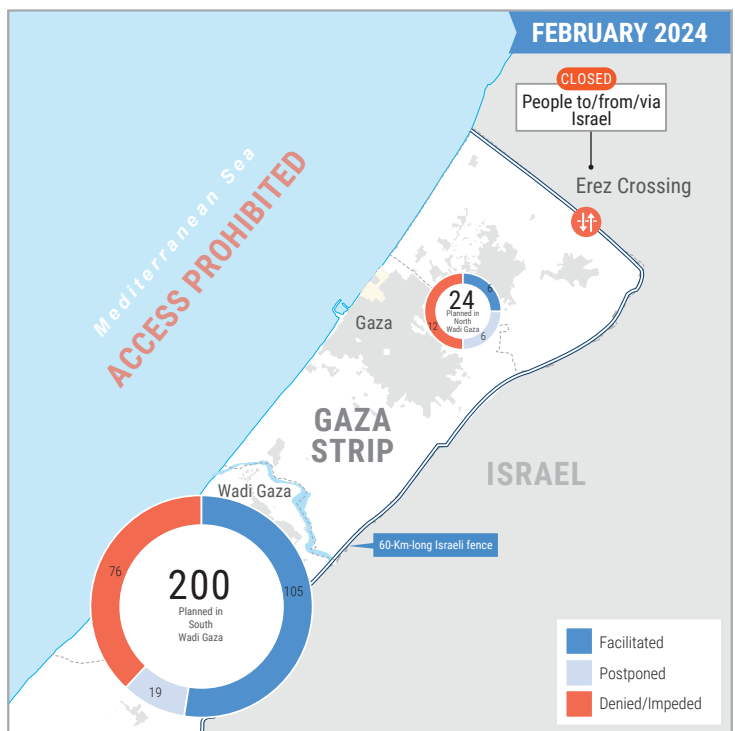
MISSIONS TO THE NORTH AND THE OPERATIONAL PAUSE

In February, the UN and its humanitarian partners planned only 24 missions to areas north of Gaza, of which six (25%) were facilitated. This stands in stark contrast to January, when 61 missions were planned to the north, with nine (15%) facilitated. The decrease in planned and facilitated missions was primarily the result of an operational pause taken after a UN-coordinated food convoy was directly hit by Israeli naval fire on 5 February while waiting at a holding point as required by the Israeli military. The following day, UN staff reported harassment and intimidation by Israeli soldiers towards them and convoy members at an Israeli checkpoint. These incidents, coupled with previous impacts to UN-coordinated movements, led the UN and its partners to temporarily halt coordinated aid missions to the north of Gaza from the evening of 6 February. The pause aimed to allow the Israeli military to produce a framework that would adequately safeguard UN personnel, partners, and contractors from the risk of attack, abuse, or detainment at Israeli military checkpoints and in areas under Israeli control. However, when little progress was shown, the UN nevertheless attempted two food convoys to the north on 18 and 19 February; but the lack of law and order – and aggressive stance by the Israeli military towards approaching crowds – necessitated the renewal of the pause.

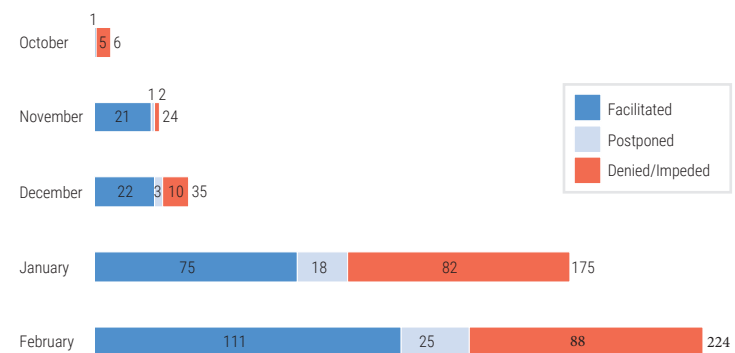
MISSIONS IN THE SOUTH AND THE 48-HOUR PAUSE

Despite the reduction in humanitarian operations towards the north, February recorded a 48% increase in the overall number of coordinated missions (111) facilitated by Israeli authorities to

END-FEBRUARY 2024



PLANNED AID MISSIONS BY MONTH



The above figures only cover missions in areas necessitating coordination

areas necessitating coordination to the north and the south of Wadi Gaza combined. This was largely due to scale-up of in the number of coordination requests for the humanitarian missions to the south. In February, out of 200 planned missions to areas south of Wadi Gaza assessed as requiring coordination, 105 were successfully facilitated, illustrating a significant 62% increase over the number of planned missions successfully facilitated in January (65). Nevertheless, February witnessed a 38 per cent of coordinated humanitarian missions to the south of Gaza denied or impeded, an increase as compared to 32 per cent captured in January. The rate of mission postponements remained relatively stable, with February's 11% closely aligning with the 9% observed in January. Areas not requiring coordination are excluded from these statistics.

This increase in missions planned and facilitated occurred despite a 48-hour pause in coordinated missions in the south (26-27 February). The pause was taken by the UN and partners after two medical workers were detained from a UN-coordinated medical evacuation on 25 February. The detainment occurred despite the fact that the coordination process includes Israeli clearance of all convoy members. The convoy was transporting 24 critical patients including children; one of whom was a new-born. The medevac mission encountered severe obstructions, including the detainment, which created a delay of over seven hours. The incident – in violation of existing assurances – further highlighted the deteriorating context the Israeli military is forcing on aid workers, and the resulting risks.

A DETERIORATING ENVIRONMENT, DEGRADED ASSURANCES AND HEALTH ACTORS

To further highlight the degraded humanitarian space, during the period between the attack on the food convoy on 5 February and the detention of medical staff on 25 February, several significant incidents occurred. These included an attack that directly hit ambulances conducting a coordinated medical evacuation on 7 February; an Israeli military operation to arrest medical staff—alleged by the Israeli military to be combatants—inside Al Amal Hospital on 9 February; and Israeli military operations in Nasser Hospital starting from 13 February. The latter, also alleged by the Israeli military to be a response to the combatant use of the hospital for military purposes, included the forced displacement of internally displaced persons (IDPs). As a result of multiple reports of Israeli strikes, the UN attempted to reach Al Amal eight times from 15 February; but movements were denied or impeded every time, except for a fuelling mission on 20 February; the UN was also denied access to Nasser Hospital to assess and support critical patients there prior to the initiation of operations – and then for multiple days once operations had commenced. February saw the UN plan 27 missions to Nasser, yet only 12 were initially coordinated by the Israeli military for facilitation, of which six were then impeded. Denials and impediments particularly affected missions involving urgent medical evacuations and refuelling.

Finally, on 20 February, a deconflicted International Non-Governmental Organization compound housing health workers and their families was directly hit – reportedly by an Israeli tank – led to the death of two family members residing with members of the International Non-Governmental Organization and injuries to six others.

Attacks on deconflicted compounds (humanitarian locations notified in advance to all parties) – such as the reported strike against the occupied living quarters of another International Non-Governmental Organization engaged in the health sector on 18 January – degrade confidence in the implementation of the Humanitarian Notification System for Deconfliction; and underscore the severe risks faced by health workers and other humanitarians struggling to stay and deliver in a degrading security situation in Gaza.

THE DETERIORATION OF LAW AND ORDER

As law and order deteriorated, Gaza saw an increase in violence targeting humanitarian workers and faced significant challenges in the movement and distribution of aid. The stance of the Israeli army, which views police forces as combatants, further complicates the efforts to restore law and order—elements that are crucial for protection of civilians as well as the smooth facilitation of humanitarian assistance. Reports were captured of at least five separate Israeli attacks on Gaza police elements in February; resulting in a decreased presence in open areas – such as main supply routes through Gaza and border crossings where humanitarian aid enters Gaza – and a correlating deterioration in security. The combination of massive displacements, high levels of vulnerability and need, and degraded security has led to complications in moving aid throughout Gaza and cases of violence by people attempting to seize humanitarian supplies. As the UN has entered into discussions with both local communities and the Israeli military to resolve this issue, the Israeli military initiated bilateral discussions with the private sector which led to a small number of movements to the north – not coordinated by the UN – that reportedly resulted in major protection issues and civilian deaths. Until the provision of law and order can be restored, and multiple entry points provided, the entry and facilitation of humanitarian aid remain severely hampered.

INSECURITY AT THE CROSSINGS

From late January through February, the frequent and sometimes prolonged closures and/or blockages at Kerem Shalom and Nitzana crossings have significantly hampered the cross-border movement of humanitarian cargoes. Specifically, the Kerem Shalom crossing was inaccessible on no less than 16 occasions, with Nitzana facing closures on at least 10 different days due to protests and insecurity. Notably, the onset of insecurity in the corridor – linked to security gaps that were created following attacks on the local police - generated a series of supply chain disruptions. This pattern of closures, particularly affecting the Kerem Shalom crossing, underscores a critical vulnerability in the humanitarian supply chain, reflecting how external pressures and security concerns directly translate into operational impediments. The cumulative effect of these disruptions had a tangible decrease in the efficiency and predictability of aid delivery into Gaza, with no evidence to suggest an imminent improvement in the situation.