

Medical evacuees in Egypt

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Since the escalation of the conflict in Gaza on October 7, 2023, Egypt has become one of the main destination countries for displaced Palestinians. Around 130,000 Palestinians have entered Egypt, including 30,000 children, alongside large numbers of Sudanese and Syrian refugees. Among those 130,000, approximately 8,000 of those are medical evacuees. Egypt has taken in most medical evacuees in region; 53.3%. Save the Children Egypt is an active member of the Gaza Health Cluster, led by the World Health Organization (WHO), and has been providing aid for decades to thousands of Palestinians. With decades of experience providing medical assistance in armed conflicts and supporting refugees when their own health systems have collapsed, Save the Children is uniquely positioned to respond to these urgent needs.

Gaza is facing a complete failure of its healthcare system. The mass destruction brought by Israeli forces has resulted in a major lack of available healthcare and resources. As of September 2025, out of the 36 hospitals and healthcare facilities Gaza had, only 18 of them are (partially) functioning. In addition to the destruction of healthcare facilities, its healthcare staff is overworked and targeted. Doctors and nurses are exhausted and burned-out. This leads to the current situation, in which only emergency cases or mass casualty events can be treated. There are no resources or spaces to treat chronic diseases, such as cancer. The severe shortages of essential resources, including medicines, doctors, and nurses, has led to an almost complete stop of long-term care. Patients with complex medical needs cannot receive the care they require in Gaza. Those cases must be evacuated to ensure proper care. However, the waiting list to be evacuated is long. Currently, 15,600 patients, of which 3,800 are children, are waiting for a medical evacuation. Unfortunately, the actual number of patients in need of medical evacuation is expected to be at least two times higher, due to a lack of registration. The current pace of medical evacuations per month is too slow. Even with a ceasefire, it will take up to two years to evacuate everyone on the list, ignoring the fact that the number is very likely to be doubled. Because of the long wait, hundreds of patients are dying while they are on the waiting list.

In November 2023, Save the Children Egypt trained paramedics in child safeguarding and MHPSS practices. Additionally, 201 medical staff members have been trained in trauma care, pediatric blast injury response, and mass casualty management.

In 2024, Egypt was responsible for most of the medical evacuations in the region and took in around 8,000 medical evacuations. Those were spread out over 300 hospitals across Egypt, supplemented by floating hospitals and international contributions such as France's *Dixmude* and Italy's *Vulcano*. More than 5,160 surgeries have been performed across all those hospitals, supported by 38,000 doctors, 25,000 nurses, 13,000 hospital beds, and 1,847 ICU beds. Despite these efforts, the scale and complexity of cases far exceed national capacity. Many patients require multiple interventions and extended stays: over 15,000 dialysis sessions have already been delivered, and nearly 1,000 cancer patients remain under treatment, at an estimated cost exceeding USD 50 million. With women and children making up the majority of evacuees, resulting in paediatric wards and maternity units having become frontline spaces of humanitarian care.

Egypt has become a critical refuge for displaced Palestinians. The majority of the displaced Palestinians are suffering from ongoing trauma. Most Palestinians have relied on support from relatives abroad, but after nearly two years, that support has decreased or ceased entirely. 75% of Palestinian households and medical evacuees do not have a source of income, while 62% have not received any form of support since their arrival in Egypt. A staggering 93% of families, mainly women and children, cannot meet their essential needs. To cope with living costs and split rent, many families are sharing accommodation with relatives, creating crowded households with daily conversations about the situation in Gaza – often focussing on death and destruction, further exacerbating the psychological distress and trauma of children. Additionally, the conversations in those crowded household are often about developments in Gaza. Adults want to monitor updates about their loved ones, homes, and neighbourhoods. As these updates are often negative, ultimately creating more stress for the children.

Save the Children Egypt is assisting these households through a range of interventions. One of the most needed interventions is cash assistance. Through multi-purpose cash assistance, displaced Palestinians are able to buy food, clothing, and other basic needs. Cash assistance has reached almost 8,000 Palestinians. However, the Save the Children Hotline has received over 12,000 requests for cash assistance since February 2024, so a lot more is needed. Save the Children Egypt has set up two Child-Friendly Spaces (CFSs), one at Nasr City, and another at Mohandessin to provide early childhood care and development (ECCD), catch-up classes, caregiver support and MHPSS. Over 700 children have received education, early childhood care and development, and catch-up classes at the CFSs, and individual counseling has reached 161 whereas group counseling has reached almost 1,500 individuals. While these are great accomplishments, the vast majority of displaced Palestinians have not been reached yet. Robust financial and structural support is urgently needed to provide every displaced Palestinian with the care and dignity they deserve.

Despite ongoing efforts, Egypt's healthcare system continues to struggle with quality, treatment availability, and follow-up care. Acute and trauma care is often still managed by Egyptian hospitals. However, complex cases involving advanced war-related reconstructive surgery, oncology, cardiovascular diseases, and congenital anomalies are confronted by severe challenges. The long waiting list with complex cases and the limited capacity Egypt can offer has put the Egyptian healthcare system under incredibly high pressure. In areas such as oncology, Egyptian hospitals are experiencing medication shortages. These medication shortages result in longer waiting lists for both Palestinian and Egyptian cancer patients. Additionally, Egypt lacks capacity in post-treatment care. Currently, patients are staying unnecessarily long – an average of 180 days – in high-cost hospital beds, occupying spots that could otherwise be used by new patients. To make this more efficient, Egypt needs support in providing post-treatment care and rehabilitation.

Approximately 80% of the patients who have been evacuated to Egypt are still waiting for care. One of those patients has stated the following:

"I have been in Egypt for two weeks now [...] and I have not received any treatment yet. They do not provide us with any funds. We feel like prisoners with no rights at all."

Often, such patients are waiting in government hospitals and are in need of sponsors to pay for treatment in private clinics or must be referred to hospitals abroad to receive the care they require. Such cases include advanced reconstructive and post-amputation surgeries, complex procedures such as nerve and muscle grafts or transplants, advanced oncology treatments, spinal cord and neurological injuries, and specialised eye and ear surgeries for children who have lost vision or hearing due to delayed access. Referral abroad is needed because of a lack of medical devices, prosthetics, medication, advanced technology or outdated treatment options.

Furthermore, Egypt's regulations on organ transplants are strict and has long waiting lists for procedures such as liver, nerve, and muscle transplants.

More specific examples of these complex cases include:

- Two children born with congenital heart conditions
- One child in need of a muscle transplant
- One child requiring brain surgery
- One child paralyzed due to a spinal cord injury
- One child in need of a liver transplant
- One child/youth (17-18 years old) requiring multi-stage facial reconstructive surgery
- One child in need of ear surgery
- One child requiring an artificial elbow joint

These are some of the cases Save the Children Egypt has received but is, unfortunately, unable to support due to limitations in capacity, expertise or resources. As of July 2025, the Save the Children Hotline has received 1,670 requests from medical evacuees. Approximately 30% of those cases are children. The key needs for those requests are surgery, oncology, physiotherapy, pregnancy assistance, assistive devices, and chronic disease management.

Egypt has carried an immense share of the regional humanitarian and medical burden since the escalation of the conflict in Gaza, yet the scale and complexity of needs far exceed its current capacity. Save the Children Egypt has been on the frontlines of the response, but its efforts alone cannot meet the overwhelming demand. International support is needed to help relieve the immense pressure on Egypt's overstretched healthcare system.