



Patients need to cross through one kilometre corridor between the Palestinian and Israeli sides at Erez © WHO

Health Access for Referral Patients from the Gaza Strip

Ref: Seven
(Published 7 September 2017)

Summary: July 2017

Two in every five Gaza patients delayed or denied access to health care outside Gaza

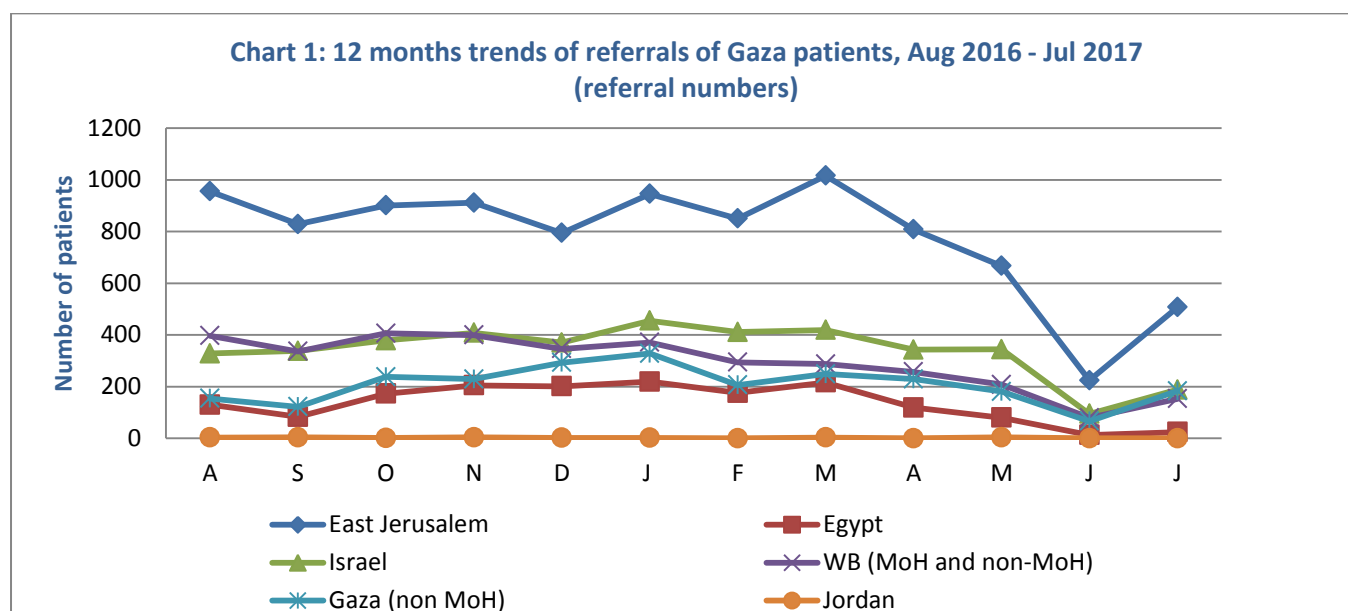
- **Increase in the number of referral decisions by the Ministry of Health for Gaza patients:** About half of Gaza patient requests for financial coverage of referrals were approved (1,055 out of 2,143) in July.
- **42.6% of patients delayed/denied security permits by Israeli authorities:** Of 1,847 patient applications for a permit to exit Gaza through Erez checkpoint for hospital appointments in July 2017, 1,060 (57.4%) were approved, 45 (2.4%) were denied, and 742 (40.2%) were delayed with no response by the time of the patient's hospital appointment. Among those delayed were 153 children under the age of 18 years and 89 people aged 60 years or older.
- **More than half of patient companions delayed/denied permits:** Of 2,013 permit applications for patient companions in July 2017, 47.2% were approved, 3.1% were denied and 49.7% were delayed, with their application still pending by the time of the patient's hospital appointment date.
- **Security interrogation of patients:** 94 patients (57 males; 37 females) were requested for interrogation by the General Security Services at Erez during July. Five were approved permits to travel for health care.
- **No access to Egypt:** Rafah terminal was closed in both directions. No medical aid and no medical delegates entered Gaza.
- **A 22-year-old man with Gaucher's disease died while awaiting an appointment for security interrogation (see page 5).**
- **A five-year-old boy died awaiting referral out of Gaza**

Humanitarian health workers access through Erez: WHO submitted eight applications for health workers to either exit or enter Gaza in July. All applications were approved.

Part 1: Referrals

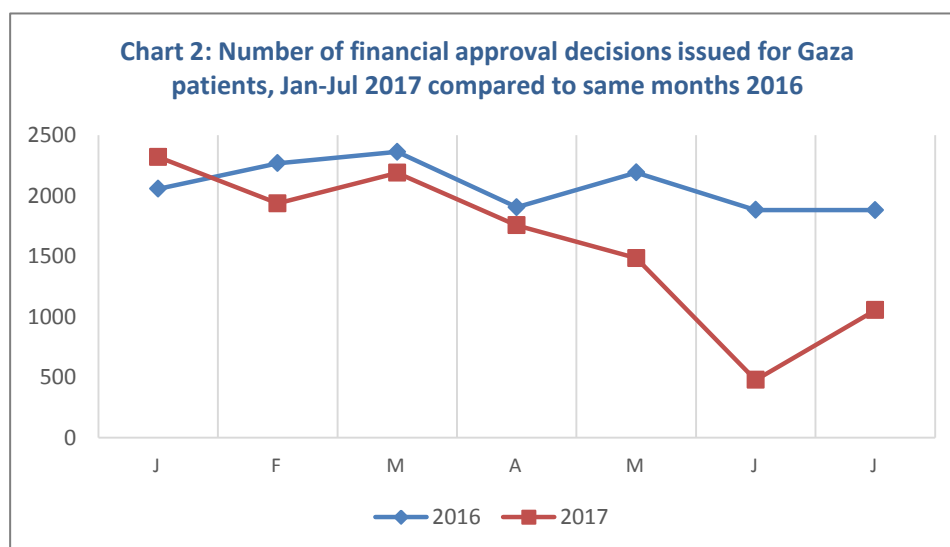
Ministry of Health referrals

There was an increase in the number of referrals issued for Gaza patients in July compared to June. **Chart 1** shows a 12-month trend for referral destinations for Gaza patients from August 2016-July 2017.



New challenges for referral patients

Gaza patients requiring medical referral outside the Gaza Strip have been affected by procedural delays since mid-May, with a decline in the number of financial coverage documents issued for Gaza patients by the Service Purchasing Unit (SPU). In July, 1,055 referral documents were issued for Gaza patients out of 2,143 referral requests from hospitals (an acceptance rate of 49.2%). This number is 44% lower compared to July 2016, but a 121% increase compared



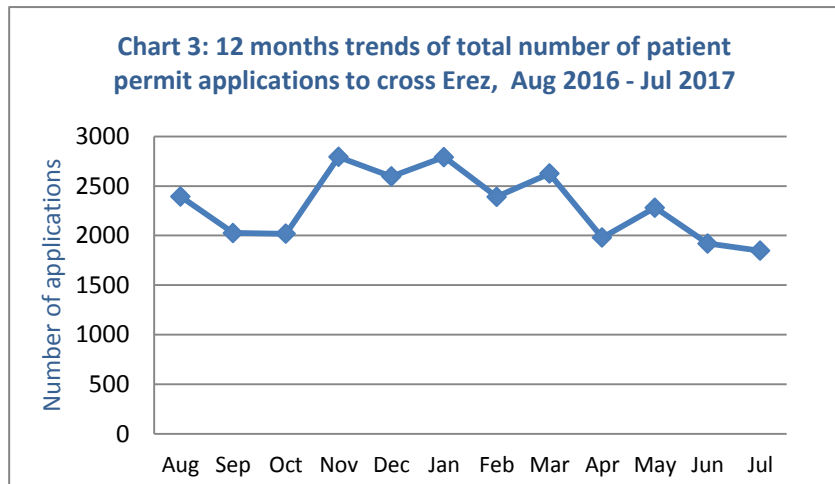
to referral documents issued by the SPU in June 2017, see **Chart 2**. The total number of patient referral requests pending from mid-May until end of July was 2,115.

Processing time: Previously, more than 95% of patient referral applications approved by medical committees of the SPU in Gaza and Ramallah received financial coverage from the central SPU in Ramallah. More than 75% were issued financial coverage within seven days of submitting an application. **Table 1** shows the processing time of referral applications by the SPU for July.

Table 1: Processing time for medical referrals by the SPU	
Processing time (days)	Applications (%)
1-7	36
8-14	13
14-21	10
22-31	25
32-45	12
46-60	4

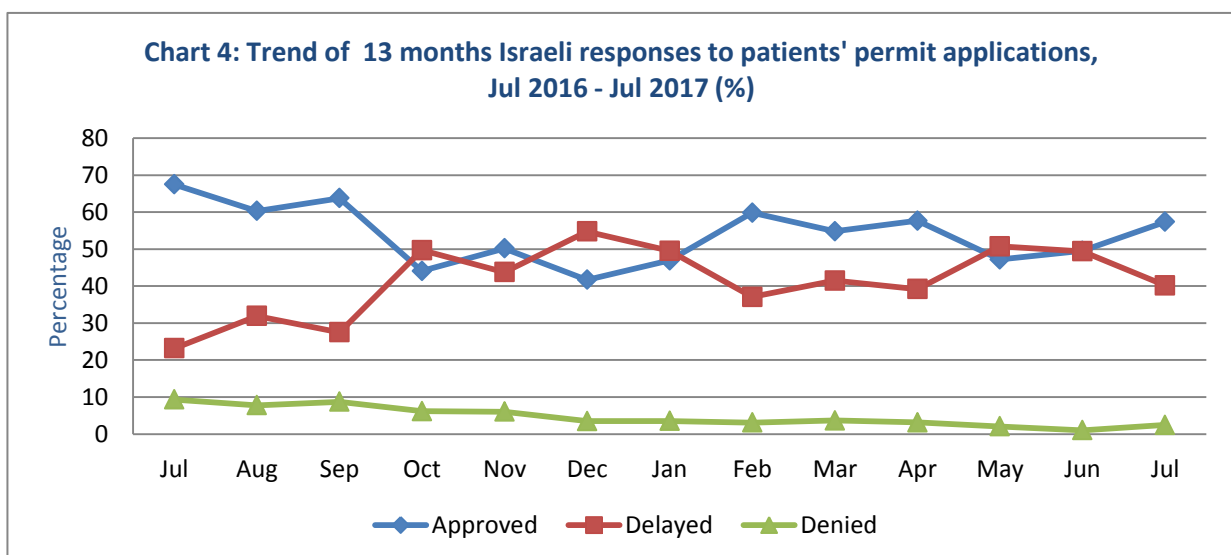
Slight increase in permit approval rates to cross Erez:

In July, there were 1,847 applications from patients for permits to cross Erez for health care, the lowest number of applications since December 2015. **Chart 3** shows the trend for the total number of applications over the last 12 months. 24.6% of patient exit permit requests (455) in July were repeat attempts: Three patients made four applications each, seven patients made three applications each and 211 patient made two applications each to exit for health care. The remaining 75.4% of applications (1,392) represented single attempts by patients during the month.



In July, the majority of permit applications to cross Erez were for access to hospitals in East Jerusalem: these represented 1,045 out of a total of 1,847 permit applications or 56.6% of all applications. 547 referrals (29.6% of the total) were to Augusta Victoria Hospital, a main destination for cancer patients; 426 (23.1%) to Makassed Hospital; 46 (2.5%) to St John Ophthalmic Hospital; 25 (1.4%) to St Joseph Hospital and one referral was made to Princess Basma Centre for Children with Disabilities. The remainder of permit applications to cross Erez were to access hospitals in Israel (26.3%) and the West Bank (17.2%). In Israel, the referral destinations were Hadassah Hospital (179 or 9.7% of the total); Tel-Hashomer Hospital (111 or 6.0%); Ichilov Hospital (60 or 3.3%); Assuta Hospital (41 or 2.2%); Wolfson Hospital (30 or 1.6%); Rambam Hospital (29 or 1.6%); Meir Hospital (14 or 0.8%); with the remaining (21 or 1.1%) to seven other Israeli hospitals. In the West Bank, the referral destinations were An-Najah University Hospital in Nablus (102 or 5.5%); Ramallah Hospital (56 or 3.0%); Nablus Specialty Hospital (34 or 1.8%); Al-Mezan Specialty Hospital in Hebron (22 or 1.2%); the Surgicare Ophthalmic Hospital in Ramallah (19 or 1.0%); with the remaining 81 (4.4%) to 16 other West Bank hospitals.

In July, the Palestinian Health Liaison and Coordination Office reported that 57.4% (1,060) of applications for patient permits were approved by the time of the patient's hospital appointment, an improvement of 7.9% compared to the previous month but 4.7% lower than the average for 2016 (62.1%), see **Chart 4**. Of those not approved, 45 applicants (2.4%) were denied access and 742 (40.2%) applications were delayed, with their applications still pending at the time of the patient's hospital appointments. 94 patients were requested for Israeli security interrogation.



Of the 1,847 patients applying for permits to cross Erez, 93.4% received referrals from the Ministry of Health, 4.0% were self-funded, 1.5% were supported by Noor Ala Al-Alam charity and the remaining 1.1% by four other organizations.

Denied care:

45 patients (32 male; 13 female) were denied permits to access health care through Erez in July, including three children under the age of 18 years and seven patients aged 60 years or older. Of the 45 denied patients, 27 had appointments in East Jerusalem hospitals, 12 in the West Bank and six in Israeli hospitals. The following specialties were needed by patients denied permits: orthopedics (16); neurosurgery and ENT (5) each; oncology (4); ophthalmology, hematology and cardiology (3) each; nuclear medicine (2); and general surgery, neurology, obstetrics/gynecology and pediatrics (1 each).

Delayed care: 742 patients (408 males; 334 females) experienced delays in accessing health care in July, among them 153 children under the age of 18 and 89 patients aged 60 years or older. Those delayed received no response to their applications by the time of their appointments, losing their scheduled hospital appointments and delaying their access to care. Delayed patients (742) had appointments for: oncology (199); cardiology (85); hematology (65); orthopedics (58); pediatrics (50); neurosurgery (47); ophthalmology (40); internal medicine (34); nuclear medicine and general surgery (30) each; vascular surgery (16); nephrology (15); obstetrics/gynecology (11); neurology, heart surgery and urology (9) each; ENT (7); endocrinology (6); dermatology and maxilla-facial surgery (4 each); infertility and chest disease (3 each); and heart catheterization, laboratory analysis, plastic surgery and pediatric surgery (2 each).

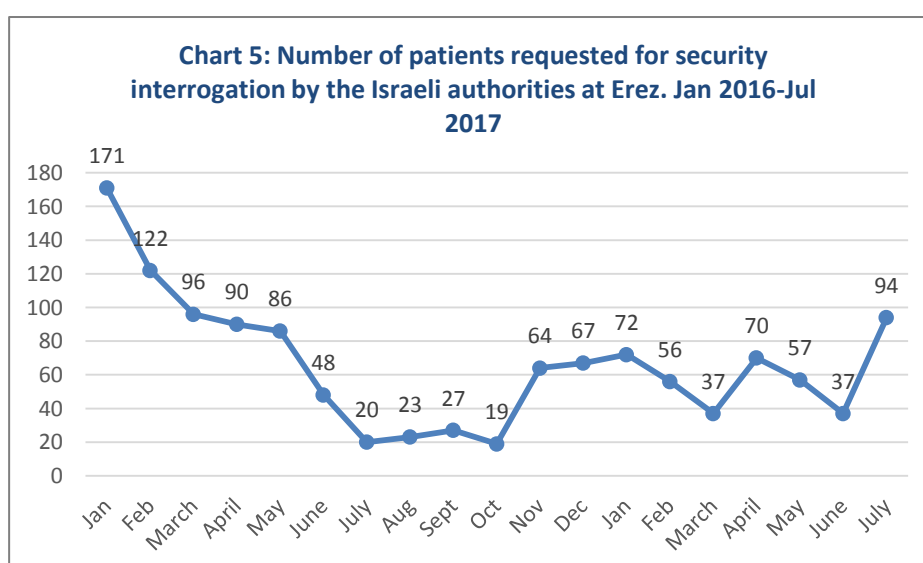
According to new Israeli guidelines effective from 7th May 2017, patients are required to submit non-urgent applications at least 20 working days prior to the date of their hospital appointment. This is a doubling of the previous guidance for patients to submit non-urgent applications ten working days prior to the hospital appointment.

Timeliness of applications: Table 2 shows the processing time for patient permit applications.

Table 2: Processing time of 1,847 patients' permit applications to cross Erez in July 2017			
Number of days application submitted prior to the hospital appointment date	Approved applications (total of 1060)	Denied applications (total of 45)	Delayed applications (total of 742)
1-7 days	22%	13%	11%
8-14 days	29%	33%	26%
15-30 days	40%	36%	53%
more than 30 days	9%	18%	10%

Security interrogation:

94 patients (57 males; 37 females), 10 over 60 years old, were called for security interrogation by the Israeli General Security Services (GSS). There was a peak in the number of patients requested for security interrogation by GSS in January 2016. The numbers declined in 2016, reaching 19 in October, but since this time there has been an fluctuating upward trend. The figure for July represents an increase of over 250% compared to June 2017, see Chart 5.



The 94 patients had been referred for: oncology (25); cardiology (11); neurosurgery (10); orthopedics (9); nuclear medicine (8); internal medicine (6); nephrology, hematology, and general surgery (4 each); ophthalmology (3); urology, vascular surgery and Obstetrics/Gynecology (2 each); and ENT, endocrinology, infertility and maxillo-facial surgery (1 each).

A 22-year-old man with Gaucher's disease died while awaiting an appointment for security interrogation

From January to July this year, 423 patients (277 males: 146 females) and 60 companions were requested for a security interrogation by the Israeli authorities at Erez as a precondition to processing their health permit applications. Only 10% of patients were approved after interrogation, with 3% were denied and the remaining 87% delayed, with no response by the time of their hospital appointments. Patients requested for security interrogation are exposed to additional delays and stress.

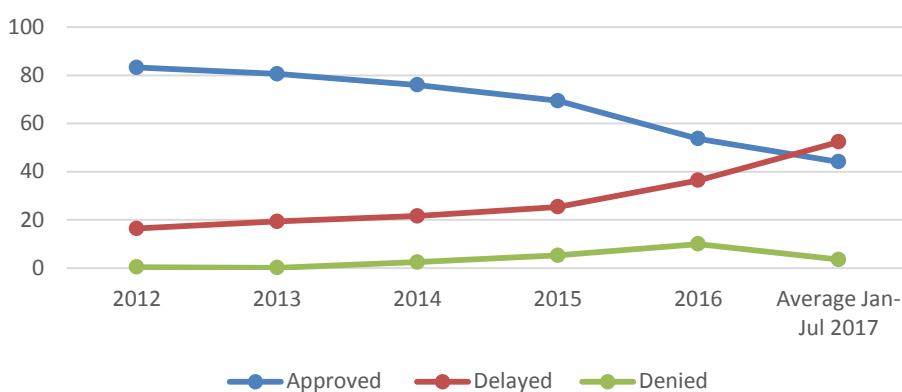


Yousef Zourub, a 22-year-old man from Rafah with Gaucher disease had complications following a severe episode of pneumonia that required advanced surgery outside Gaza. He had an appointment at Makassed Hospital in East Jerusalem on 16th July 2017. Three permit applications were submitted for him for three consecutive hospital appointments. On 26th March Yousef's application was pending and he lost his hospital appointment on that date. His application was also delayed for another appointment on 5th May. Following his application for the appointment on 16th July, Israeli General Security Services requested that Yousef attend for security interrogation at Erez. The appointment for security interrogation came too late and Yousef died on 16th June 2017 at the European Gaza Hospital.

Patient companions:

In July, 2,013 applications for permits to cross Erez for relatives accompanying patients, including parents or other companions for children, were submitted to Israeli authorities. Only one first-degree relative is permitted to accompany a Gaza patient and permits are conditional on security clearance for all men under the age of 55 and all women under 45 years of age. In July, 47.2% were approved, 3.1% were denied and 49.6% had received no answer by the date of the patient's medical appointment. Since 2012, there has been a steady decline in the approval rate for patient companions, see **Chart 6**.

Chart 6: Rates for individuals from Gaza approved, delayed or denied permits to accompany patients for treatment outside Gaza, 2012-2017 (%)



Patients and companions cross Erez: The Palestinian General Authority of Civil Affairs reported that 975 Gaza patients and 863 companions crossed Erez in July to access Palestinian or Israeli hospitals. Of these, back-to-back ambulances transferred 68 patients, with 66 companions. During the month, Erez crossing was open for 25 days for daytime working hours and closed on five days (Saturdays).

Rafah crossing – no access to Egypt

According to Palestinian officials at Rafah terminal, the Rafah border terminal was closed for exit in July for the fourth consecutive month since April 2017, including for patients. The terminal was exceptionally opened for a Ministry of Interior delegation of 13 members to travel to Egypt and return during the month. No medical aid or medical delegates entered Gaza via Rafah during July. Since the beginning of 2017, the terminal was open for only 10 days during January, February and March, allowing 1,200 patients to exit for medical treatment. Before the July 2013 closure, more than 4,000 Gaza residents crossed Rafah terminal to Egypt each month for health-related reasons.