



# MONTHLY REPORT

## December 2018

## Health Access

Barriers for patients in the occupied Palestinian territory

 **2,704**

referrals issued to Gaza patients to health facilities outside the Palestinian Ministry of Health

 **57%**

of Gaza patient and companion permit applications to Israeli authorities for exit via Erez approved

**64%** Gaza patients

**50%** Gaza patient companions

 **75%**

of West Bank patient and companion permit applications to Israeli authorities approved.

 **3**

Gaza patient called for security interview, all delayed

### IN FOCUS

*Injured journalist prevented from access to healthcare*

# Part 1 Referrals

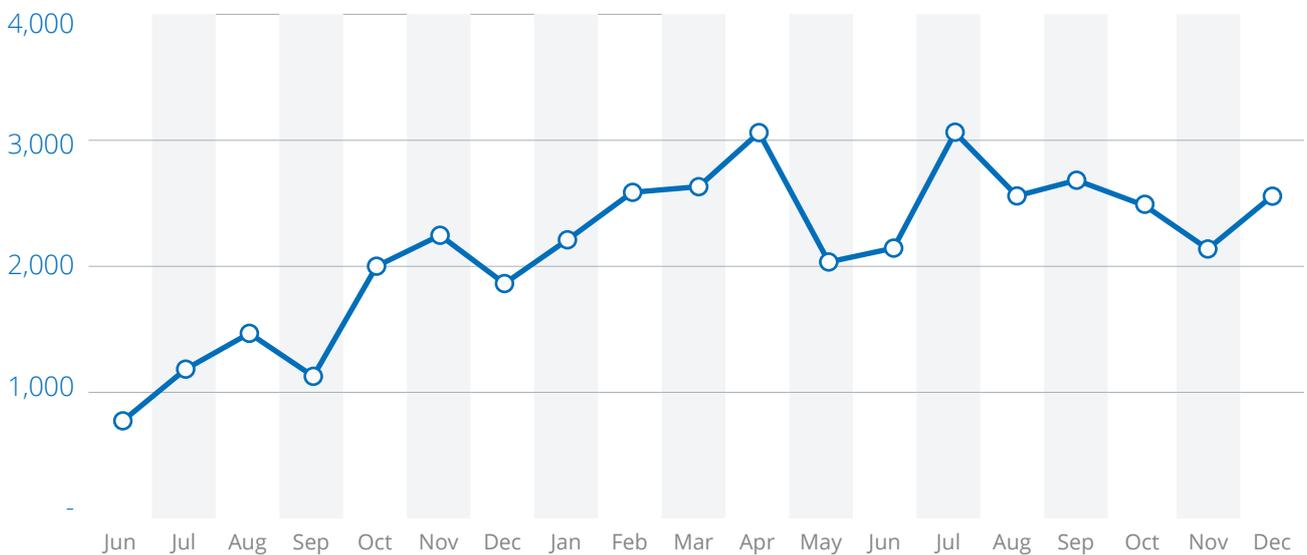
## December Referrals by the Ministry of Health

In December, the Palestinian Ministry of Health approved 2,704 referrals for Gaza patients to non-Ministry of Health facilities, with an estimated cost of 10,766,196 NIS. The average monthly number of referrals for Gaza patients in 2018 has been significantly higher than the monthly average for 2017, with 2,579 referrals per month in 2018 compared to 1,709 per month in 2017. In December, 1,921 (71%) required access through Erez crossing to reach hospitals in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and Israel, while 185 (7%) required access through Rafah terminal to access health care in Egypt.

 **2,704**  
referrals

approved for financial coverage for Gaza patients outside the Palestinian Ministry of Health

**Chart 1:** Total number of referrals approved for Gaza patients, June 2017 - Decembe 2018



# Part 2 ACCESS

## The Gaza Strip

Of 2,335 applications to cross Erez for health care in December, 27% were for children under age of 18 and 17% were for patients aged 60 years or older. 44% of applications were for female patients and 90% of applications were for medical care funded by the Palestinian Ministry of Health.

Over half (56%) of applications to cross Erez were for appointments in East Jerusalem hospitals, a fifth (20%) were for West Bank hospitals and a quarter (24%) were for hospitals in Israel. Makassed Hospital (28%) and Augusta Victoria Hospital (23%), both in East Jerusalem, received more than half of referrals. Permit applications for the top five specialties accounted for 60% of referrals: oncology (28%); orthopaedics (10%); cardiology (8%); paediatrics (7%); haematology (7%). The remaining 40% referrals were for 27 other specialties.

**Approved permit applications:** 1,504 (783 male; 721 female), or 64% of the 2,335 applications to cross Erez in December 2018 were approved. Chart 2 shows a 12-month trend for Israeli responses to Gaza patient permit applications. Over a third (34%) of permits approved were for children under age of 18 and a fifth (20%) were for people aged 60 years or older.

 **2,335**  
patients applications  
to Israeli authorities to cross  
Erez to access health care

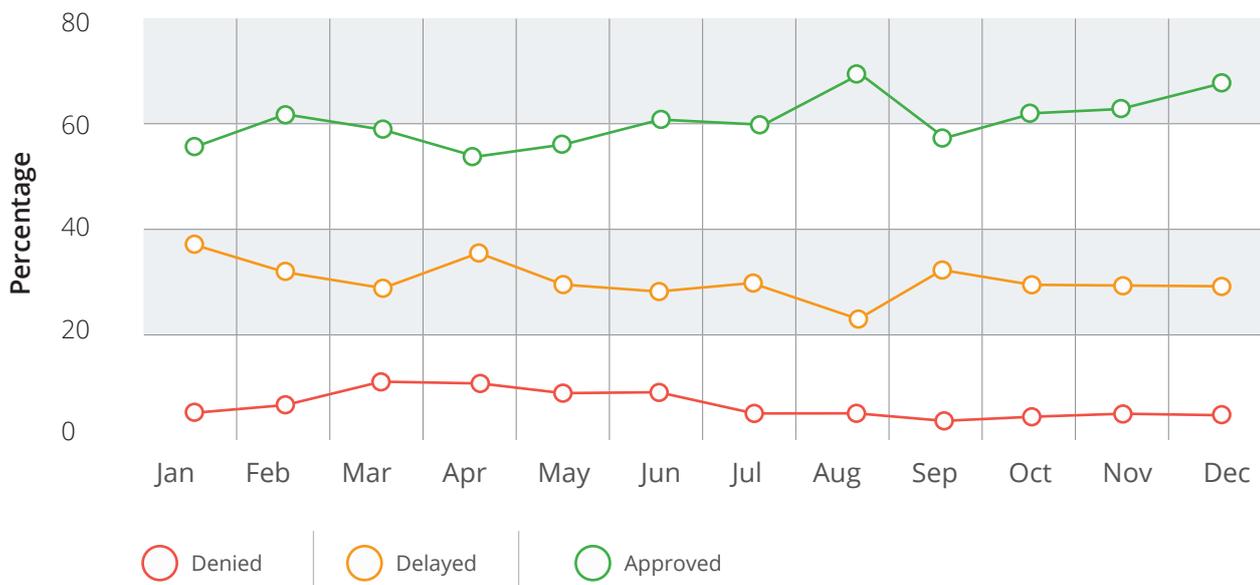
 **64%**  
approved

 **7%**  
denied

 **29%**  
delayed

**Chart 2**

Israeli responses to Gaza patient permit applications, January - December 2018



**Denied care:** 155 patient applications (114 male; 41 female), or 7% of the total, were denied permission to cross Erez for health care in December. Those denied included 5 children under the age of 18 years and 14 patients aged 60 years or older. 30% of denied applications were for appointments in neurosurgery, 30% for orthopaedics, 8% for ophthalmology, 7% for general surgery, and 6% for cancer treatment and investigation. More than 93% of denied permit applications were for appointments at hospitals in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem.

**Delayed care:** 676 patient applications (409 male; 267 female), or 29% of the total, were delayed access to care, receiving no definitive response to their application by the date of their hospital appointment. Of these, 130 applications were for children under the age of 18 and 89 applications were for patients aged 60 years or older. 18% of those delayed had appointments in orthopaedics and 15% for oncology. The remaining two-thirds (67%) were for 26 other specialties. 524 (78%) of the delayed applications were 'under study' at the time of appointment, while 11 applications were delayed because patients allegedly had relatives staying in the West Bank.

**Access for those injured during demonstrations:** 49 permit applications (2% of the total) in December were for those injured during demonstrations. The approval rate for this group was significantly lower than the overall approval rate in December: 4 applications were approved (8% of the total); 9 denied (18%); and 36 delayed (73%). As of 31 December, according to Gaza's Coordination and Liaison Office, there had been 435 applications to Israeli authorities by those injured in demonstrations to exit Gaza via Erez crossing for health care. Of those applications, 82 (19%) were approved, 130 (30%) were denied and 223 (51%) were delayed.<sup>1</sup>

## Security interrogation

In December, three patients were called for security interrogation as a prerequisite to travel for health care: a 55-year-old man with rheumatoid arthritis, a 28-year-old man with pulmonary oedema and a 37-year-old woman with cardiac arrhythmia. None of these patients' applications was approved.

## Patient companions:

In December, there were 2,601 permit applications to Israeli authorities to cross Erez to accompany patients. These applications include parents or other companions applying to accompany children. Only one companion is permitted to accompany each Gaza patient and permits are conditional on security clearance. In December, 1,294 (50%) patient companion applications were approved, 219 applications (8%) were denied and the remaining 1,088 (42%) were delayed, receiving no definitive response by the time of the patient's application. Chart 3 shows the trend over the last 12 months for Israeli responses to patient companion applications.

 **3**

patient called for security interrogation

 **All delayed**

 **2,601**  
patient companion applications

to Israeli authorities to cross Erez to accompany patients

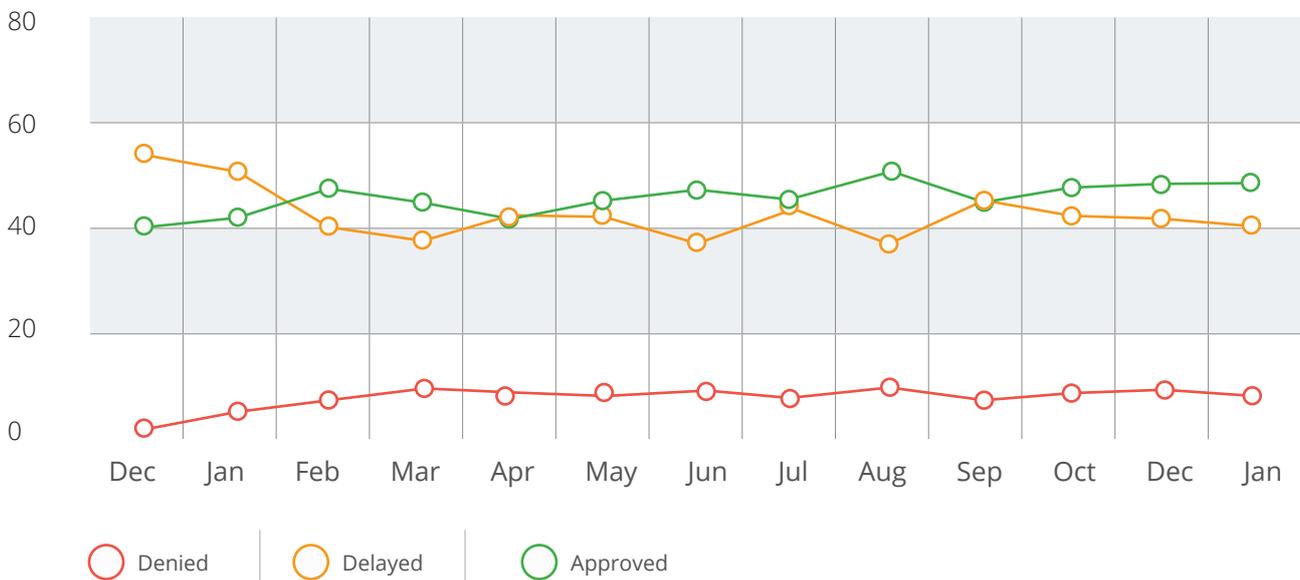
 **50% approved**

 **8% denied**

 **42% delayed**

**Chart 3**

**Israeli responses to Gaza patient companion applications, January - December 2018**



## Patients and companions crossing Erez:

The Palestinian General Authority of Civil Affairs reported that 1,612 Gaza patients and 1,385 companions crossed Erez in December to access hospitals outside the Gaza Strip. Of these, 79 patients were transferred by back-to-back ambulance with 77 companions. During the month, Erez crossing was open for 26 days for daytime working hours and closed on five days (five Saturdays).

 **1,612**  
patients  
crossed Erez for health care

 **1,385**  
patient companions  
crossed Erez

<sup>1</sup> Data provided by the Palestinian Coordination and Liaison Office, Gaza

# Rafah crossing – Egypt



Rafah border terminal was open in both directions for 22 days in December and was closed for 9 days (Fridays and Saturdays). According to the terminal authority, 4,997 travellers crossed towards Egypt, among them 98 patients crossing for health care with 107 companions. All patients and companions crossed the terminal by ambulance. Of the 98 patients, 10 were injured in the Great March of Return, which raises the total number of those injured in demonstrations seeking health care in Egypt to 245 since mid-April this year. No medical aid or medical delegates entered Gaza via Rafah terminal during the month.

## The West Bank

In December, there were 12,721 applications by West Bank patients and patient companions to Israeli authorities to access health care in East Jerusalem and Israel. Restrictions on the movement of Palestinians from the West Bank to Israel and East Jerusalem are less severe for certain sections of the population. Many women older than 50 years of age and men older than 55 years of age exempted from the requirement to obtain a permit to travel – provided they are not traveling on a Saturday or before 8am.

Of the 12,721 applications, 9,485 (75%) were approved, showing a 7% drop from the average of the year, 1818 (14%) were unsuccessful and 1418 (11%) were pending any reply at the time of monthly reporting.



**12,721**

patient and companion applications

to Israeli authorities to access health care in East Jerusalem and Israel



**75% approved**



**14% denied**



**11% pending**  
at the time of monthly reporting

## In Focus

### Injured journalist prevented from access to healthcare



The tear gas canister hit Attia Darwish, a 31-year-old photojournalist, in the face under his left eye when he was covering demonstrations near the Gaza fence for a local newspaper.

“I was taking photos when my phone rang, and I tried to take the call. Suddenly, I felt a blow to my face and fell down,” Attia said.

The ambulance picked him up within minutes and took him to a trauma stabilization point close to the fence. After initial assessment and first aid, Attia was rushed to Shifa hospital in Gaza for treatment.

He had multiple facial fractures and severe bleeding at the back of his eye, putting his sight at risk. He had surgery to remove shrapnel from the wound, fix his lower jaw and replace fragmented bones in his face with metal plates. Attia received initial treatment for his eye injury, but needed review and specialist care outside Gaza.

“As a photographer, I depend on my eyes to do my job. Now, I can hardly see with my left eye. Getting proper treatment is something critical for me,” Attia said.

Attia had a medical referral from the Palestinian Ministry of Health to go for an appointment to St John’s Eye Hospital in Jerusalem. He applied to Israeli authorities for a permit to exit Gaza for treatment, but when the date of his hospital appointment came his permit application was still under review.

Attia despaired of getting a permit to exit Gaza via Erez crossing with Israel and asked the Services Purchasing Unit in the Ministry of Health to refer him instead for treatment to Egypt. On the day of his travel, however, Rafah crossing point to Egypt was closed for exit.

“I cannot feel the left side of my face. I can only eat soft food and I’m suffering with the pain. The cold weather makes it even worse. When I was in hospital, one of the doctors said I either need a bone graft or an artificial implant. But neither of those is available in Gaza.”

When WHO spoke with Attia, he still had not received his permit to leave Gaza to Jerusalem. His case is not an exception. Of 435 permit applications to Israeli authorities by those injured during the Great March of Return demonstrations, only 19% have been approved. Those unable to access the health care they need face a higher risk of complications and poorer health outcomes.