



MONTHLY REPORT

August 2018

Health Access

Barriers for patients in the occupied Palestinian territory

 **2,656**

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

 **60%**

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

68% Gaza patients

52% Gaza patient companions

 **83%**

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

 **1**

Gaza patient called for security interview, application approved

IN FOCUS

Israeli High Court accepts petition on behalf of Gaza patients

Part 1 Referrals

August Referrals by the Ministry of Health

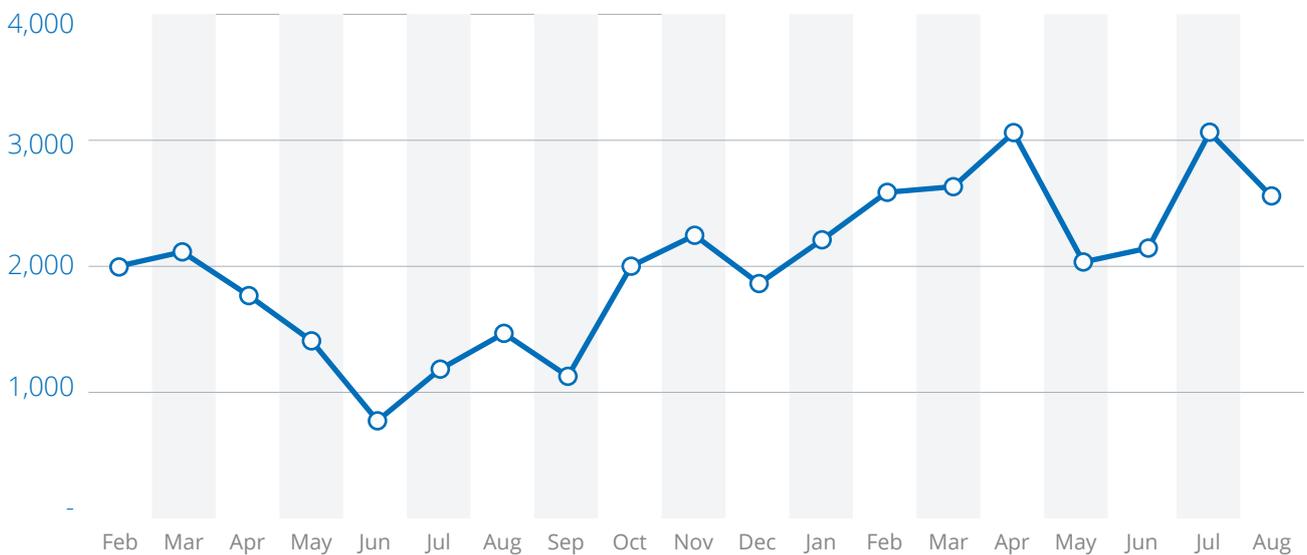
In August, the Palestinian Ministry of Health approved 2,656 referrals for Gaza patients to non-Ministry of Health facilities with an estimated cost of 11,684,345 NIS. The average monthly number of referrals for Gaza patients in 2018 has been significantly higher than the monthly average for 2017, with 2,593 referrals per month in 2018 compared to 1,709 in 2017. 1,823 (69%) required access through Erez crossing to reach hospitals in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and Israel, while 260 (10%) required access through Rafah terminal to access health care in Egypt.

Chart 1 shows the number of referral documents issued to patients in Gaza from February 2017 to August 2018.

 **2,656**
referrals

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

Chart 1: Total number of referrals approved for Gaza patients, Feb 2017 - Aug 2018



Part 2 ACCESS

The Gaza Strip

Of 2,173 applications to cross Erez for health care in August, 28% were for children under age of 18 and 17% were for patients over the age of 60. 44% of applications were for female patients and 91% of applications were for medical care funded by the Palestinian Ministry of Health. 53 applications (2.4% of the total) in August were for permits for those injured during demonstrations needing referral outside Gaza via Erez.

Three in every five (59%) applications to cross Erez were for appointments in East Jerusalem hospitals, just over a fifth (21.5%) were for Israeli hospitals and one in five (19%) were for hospitals in the West Bank. Makassed Hospital (26%) and Augusta Victoria Hospital (26%), both in East Jerusalem, were the receiving hospitals for more than half of referrals. Permit applications for the top five needed specialties accounted for almost two-thirds of referrals (64%): oncology (29%); orthopaedics (12%); paediatrics (8%); haematology (8%); and cardiology (7%). The remaining referrals were for 23 other specialties.

Approved permit applications: 1,484 (781 male; 703 female), or 68% of the 2,173 applications to cross Erez in August 2018 were approved. Chart 2 shows a 12-month trend of Israeli responses to Gaza patient permit applications. A third (32%) of permits approved were for children under age of 18 and almost a fifth (21%) were for elderly people over 60 years of age. Approval rate of permit applications for injured was significantly lower than the overall approval rate, with only three out of 53 applications in August approved (6%), 17 (32%) denied, and 33 (62%) delayed.

2,173
patients applications

to Israeli authorities to cross Erez to access health care

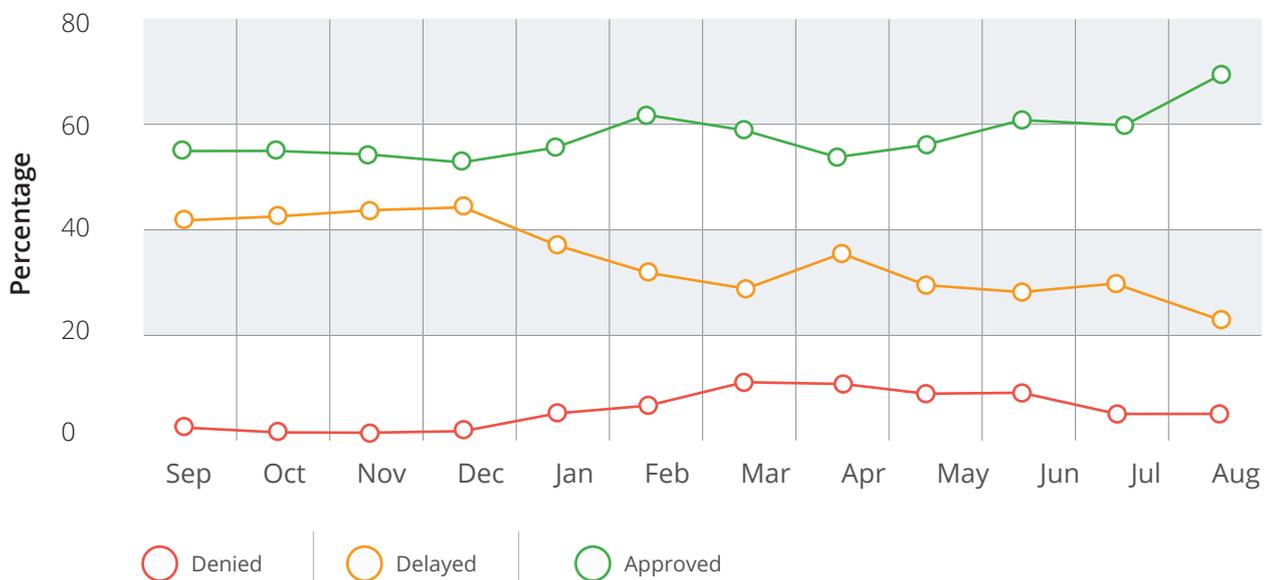
68%
approved

7%
denied

25%
delayed

Chart 2

Israeli responses to Gaza patient permit applications, Sep 2017- Aug 2018



Denied care: 152 patient applications (98 male; 54 female), or 7% of the total, were denied permission to cross Erez for health care in August. Those denied included 7 children under the age of 18 years and 23 patients aged 60 years or older. A fifth (20%) of those denied had appointments for cancer treatment and investigation, 18% for orthopaedics, and 14% for neurosurgery.

Delayed care: 537 patient applications (342 male; 195 female), or 25% of the total, were delayed access to care, receiving no definitive response to their application by the date of their hospital appointment. Of these, 126 applications were for children under the age of 18 and 47 applications were for patients aged 60 years or older. Of the 537 delayed patients, a quarter (24%) had appointments for orthopaedics, 12% for cancer treatment and 7% for ophthalmology. Almost two thirds (67%) of delayed patients submitted their applications more than 15 days prior to their hospital appointment.

Security interrogation

A 27-year-old male patient with leukemia was called for security interview by the Israeli General Security Services (GSS). He had been referred for follow up at Augusta Victoria Hospital in East Jerusalem. His permit was approved and he travelled for health care on 9th September.



1
patient called for security
interrogation

0 not approved

Patient companions:

In August, there were 2,491 applications to Israeli authorities by companions for permits 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 August, 1,301 (52%) patient companion applications were approved, 256 applications (10%) were denied and 934 (38%) remained pending on the date of the patient's medical appointment. Chart 3 shows the trend over the last 12 months for Israeli responses to patient companion applications.



2,491
patient companion
applications

to Israeli authorities to cross
Erez to accompany patients

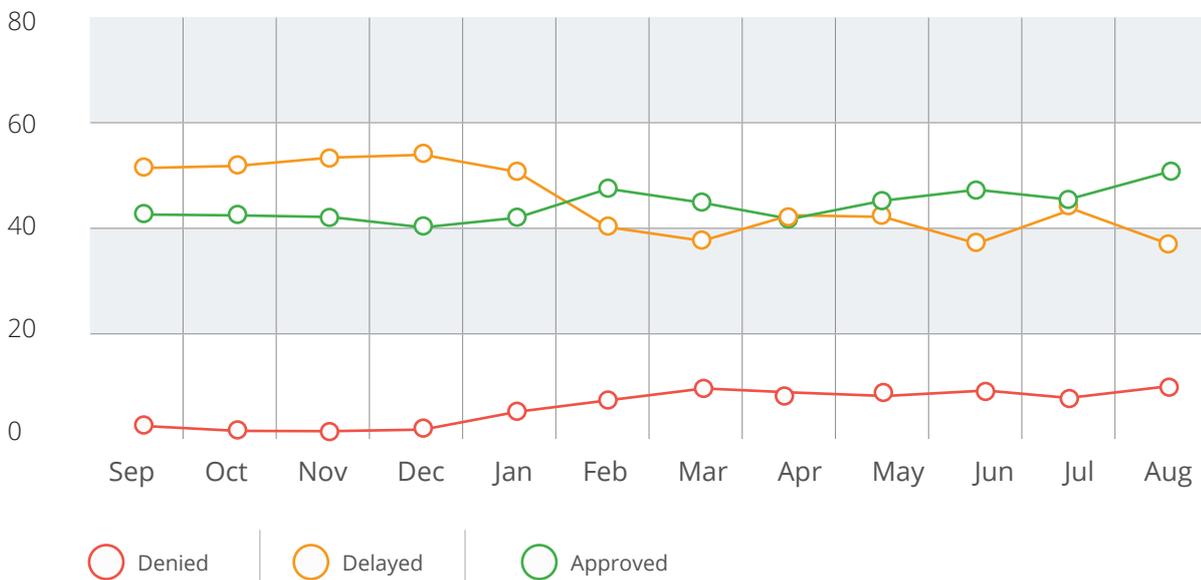
52% approved

10% denied

38% delayed

Chart 3

Israeli responses to Gaza patient companion applications, Sep 2017- Aug 2018



Patients and companions crossing Erez:

The Palestinian General Authority of Civil Affairs reported that 1,530 Gaza patients and 1,308 companions crossed Erez in August to access hospitals outside the Gaza Strip. Of these patients, 72 patients were transferred by back-to-back ambulance with 71 companions. During the month, Erez crossing was open for 27 days for daytime working hours and closed on four days (four Saturdays).



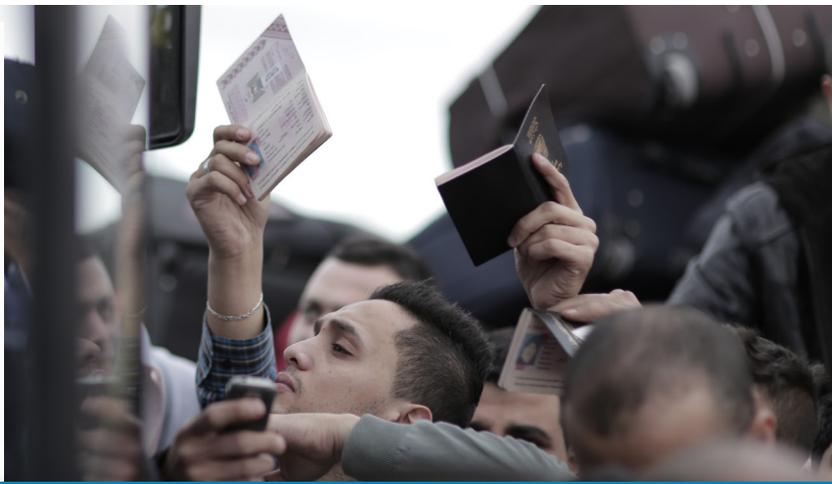
1,530
patients
crossed Erez for health care



1,308
patient companions
crossed Erez

Rafah crossing – Egypt

Rafah border terminal was open in both directions for 20 days in August and was closed for 6 days. According to the terminal authority, 7,373 travelers crossed towards Egypt, among them 150 patients crossing for health care with 150 companions. 108 of these patients crossed the terminal by ambulance. Since mid-April this year, 111 patients injured during the Great March of Return crossed Rafah terminal to access care in Egypt. No medical aid or medical delegates entered Gaza via Rafah terminal during the month.



The West Bank

In August, there were 15,675 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 15,675 applications, 13,015 (83%) were approved, 2,274 (15%) were unsuccessful and 386 (2%) were pending any reply at the time of monthly reporting.



15,675

patient and companion applications

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



83% approved



15% denied



2% pending

at the time of monthly reporting

In Focus

Israeli High Court accepts petition on behalf of Gaza patients



On 26 August 2018, the Israeli High Court accepted a petition from human rights organizations Gisha, Al-Mezan, PHRI and Adala, submitted on behalf of seven patients needing permits to travel out of Gaza via Erez crossing to access health care. The court ruled that the decision by the Israeli Security Cabinet in 2017 to deny Gaza patients access to medical treatment as means of leverage over Hamas was ineffective and illegal. ¹

The seven patients were all women who had applied for permits to access health care in East Jerusalem. Four of the women needed access to treatment for cancer, specifically to radiotherapy and chemotherapy treatments not available in Gaza. The remaining three patients had applied for access to complex neurosurgical treatments, for which the surgical expertise and equipment are unavailable in Gaza hospitals.

Hanan was one of the women for whom the human rights organizations submitted the petition. She is 42, lives in Deir-Al-Balah refugee camp and is a mother of seven children. In November 2017, after Hanan had been suffering with headaches and blurred vision, doctors in Gaza found that she had a kind of brain tumour called a pituitary tumour. Because of where the tumour was located, Hanan needed complex surgery that requires skills and technology that are not available in Gaza. She was referred for care outside Gaza, to a hospital in East Jerusalem.

"I applied for a permit to go to Makassed Hospital in East Jerusalem 6 or 7 times but I was denied each time and lost my appointments. I was getting worse during this time and I couldn't function properly and take care of my children. The last denial came a few days before Eid and I cried because I just wanted to be rid of the pain and the torture I was living. We appealed through Al-Mezan Center for Human Rights and they took the case to the Israeli High Court. I can't describe how I felt when I learned that the case was successful."

When Hanan reached Makassed, the surgeons told her that surgery would be more complicated because the size of the tumour had grown:

"He said there was a high risk the surgery might damage my vision, but I had no other choice than to go ahead with the surgery. I was alone at Makassed Hospital for 8 days, but people in the same room as me helped me when I needed to drink or eat. I stayed a total of 10 days there and in the last two days my sister-in-law finally received a permit and came to help me."

Currently, Hanan is at home in Gaza recovering from her operation. She has not had any marked improvement in her symptoms so far: "I lost vision completely in my right eye and I can hardly see in my left eye. It's hard for me to recognize people at the moment, but my children are helping me a lot."

¹ <http://www.mezan.org/en/post/23196/Victory+for+human+rights+organizations+in+Israeli+Supreme+Court>