



MONTHLY REPORT

October 2018

Health Access

Barriers for patients in the occupied Palestinian territory

 **2,578**

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

 **56%**

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

63% Gaza patients

48% Gaza patient companions

 **83%**

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

 **2**

Gaza patient called for security interview,

IN FOCUS

Shortage and lack of essential medicines and equipment impacts patients in the Gaza Strip

Part 1 Referrals

October Referrals by the Ministry of Health

In October, the Palestinian Ministry of Health approved 2,578 referrals for Gaza patients to non-Ministry of Health facilities with an estimated cost of 8,799,529 NIS. The average monthly number of referrals for Gaza patients in 2018 has been significantly higher than the monthly average for 2017, with 2,612 referrals per month in 2018 compared to 1,709 in 2017. In October, 1,812 (70%) required access through Erez crossing to reach hospitals in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and Israel, while 175 (7%) 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 April 2017 to October 2018.

 **2,578**
referrals

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

Chart 1: Total number of referrals approved for Gaza patients, April 2017 - October 2018



Part 2 ACCESS

The Gaza Strip

Of 2,851 applications to cross Erez for health care in October, 30% were for children under age of 18 and 15% were for patients over the age of 60. 44% of applications were for female patients and 93% of applications were for medical care funded by the Palestinian Ministry of Health.

Three-fifths (58%) of applications to cross Erez were for appointments in East Jerusalem hospitals, a fifth (21.5%) were for West Bank hospitals and a fifth (21%) were for hospitals in Israel. Makassed Hospital (30%) and Augusta Victoria Hospital (20%), both in East Jerusalem, received half of referrals. Permit applications for the top five specialties accounted for three-fifths (58%) of referrals: oncology (23%); orthopaedics (9%); cardiology (9%); paediatrics (9%); and haematology (8%). The remaining 42% of referrals were for 25 other specialties.

Approved permit applications: 1,798 (930 male; 868 female), or 63% of the 2,851 applications to cross Erez in October 2018 were approved. Chart 2 shows a 12-month trend of Israeli responses to Gaza patient permit applications. Over a third (36%) of permits approved were for children under age of 18 and almost a fifth (19%) were for people over 60 years of age. The approval rate for those injured in demonstrations near the fence was significantly lower than the overall approval rate in October: 8 of 52 (15% of) applications were approved; 10 (19%) denied; and 34 (65%) delayed.



2,851

patients applications

to Israeli authorities to cross Erez to access health care



63%

approved



7%

denied

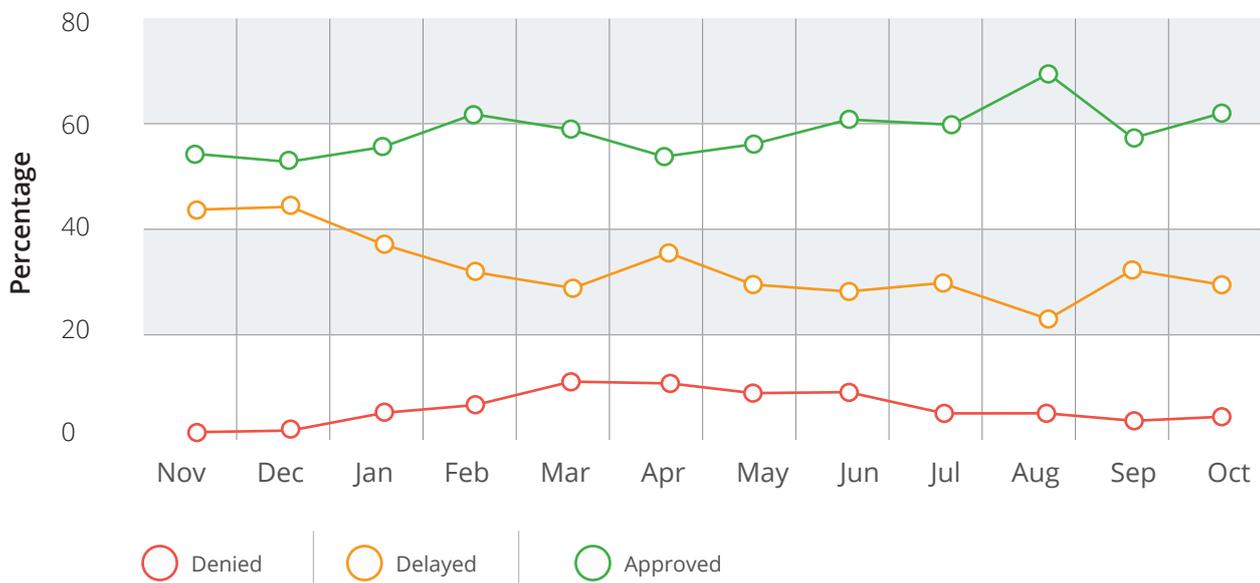


30%

delayed

Chart 2

Israeli responses to Gaza patient permit applications, November 2017- October 2018



Denied care: 188 patient applications (122 male; 66 female), or 7% of the total, were denied permission to cross Erez for health care in October. Those denied included 10 children under the age of 18 years and 17 patients aged 60 years or older. 31% of denied applications were for appointments in orthopaedics, 15% for neurosurgery, 9% for ophthalmology, 8% for general surgery, and 7% for cancer treatment and investigation. More than 95% of denied permit applications were for appointments at hospitals in East Jerusalem or the West Bank.

Delayed care: 865 patient applications (547 male; 318 female), or 30% of the total, were delayed access to care, receiving no definitive response to their application by the date of their hospital appointment. Of these, 201 applications were for children under the age of 18 and 81 applications were for patients aged 60 years or older. 13% of those delayed had appointments in orthopaedics, 12% for nuclear medicine, 11% for oncology, 10% for ophthalmology and 8% for cardiology. The remaining 46% were for 23 other specialties.

Access for those injured during demonstrations 52 applications (1.8% of the total) in October were for permits for those injured during demonstrations needing referral outside Gaza via Erez. As of 31 October, there had been 335 applications to Israeli authorities by those injured in demonstrations to exit Gaza via Erez crossing to access healthcare. Of those applications, 74 (22%) were approved, 117 (33%) were denied and 144 (43%) were delayed.¹

Security interrogation

In October, two patients (both male) were called for security interrogation as a prerequisite to travel for health care: a 40-year-old referred for orthopaedics and a 30-year-old referred for ophthalmology. Neither was approved a permit to exit Gaza.

Patient companions:

In October, there were 3,285 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 October, 1,564 (48%) patient companion applications were approved, 295 applications (9%) were denied and the remaining 1,426 (43%) were delayed, receiving no definitive response by the time of the patient's hospital appointment. Chart 3 shows the trend over the last 13 months for Israeli responses to patient companion applications.



2 patient called for security interrogation

Both delayed



3,285 patient companion applications

to Israeli authorities to cross Erez to accompany patients

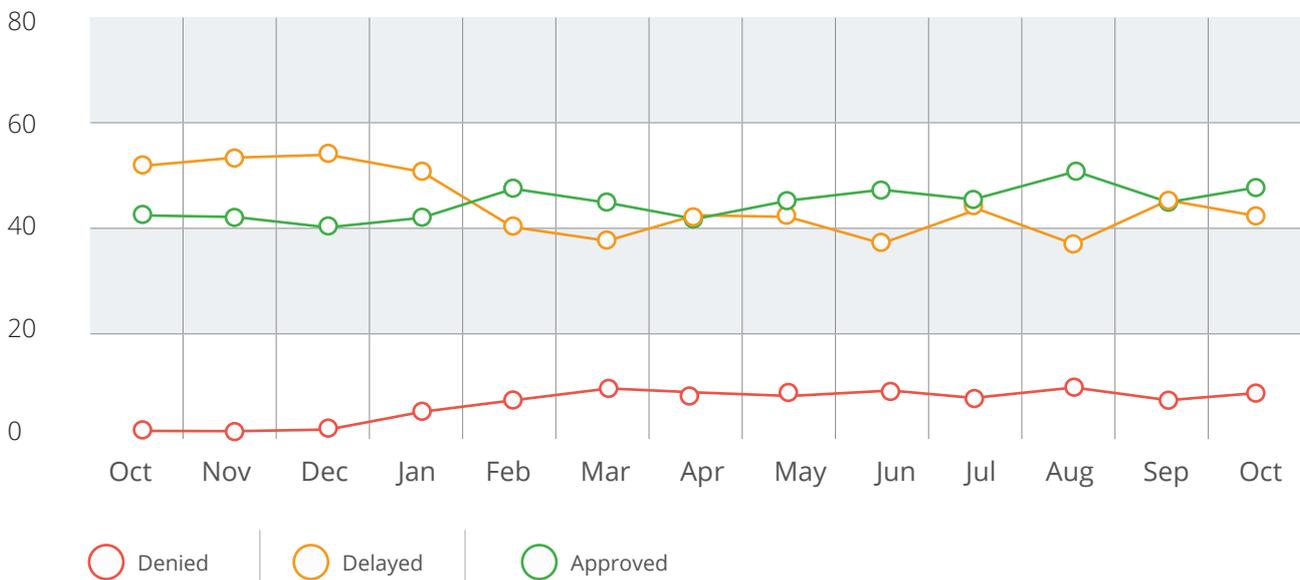
48% approved

9% denied

43% delayed

Chart 3

Israeli responses to Gaza patient companion applications, October 2017- October 2018



Patients and companions crossing Erez:

The Palestinian General Authority of Civil Affairs reported that 1,708 Gaza patients and 1,478 companions crossed Erez in October to access hospitals outside the Gaza Strip. However, data was lost for one day (31 October) due to technical problems. Of the 1,708 patients, 105 were transferred by back-to-back ambulance with 91 companions. During the month, Erez crossing was open for 24 days for daytime working hours and closed on seven days (four Saturdays, one Jewish holiday and two days' closure).



1,708 patients crossed Erez for health care



1,478 patient companions crossed Erez

¹ Data provided by the Palestinian Coordination and Liaison Office, Gaza

Rafah crossing – Egypt



Rafah border terminal was open in both directions for 23 days in October and was closed for 8 days (four Fridays and four Saturdays). According to the terminal authority, 5,635 travellers crossed towards Egypt, among them 134 patients crossing for health care with 140 companions. 70 patients with 76 companions crossed the terminal by ambulance. Of the 134 patients, 58 were injured in the Great March of Return, which raises the total number of those injured in demonstrations seeking health care in Egypt to 214 since mid-April this year. No medical aid or medical delegates entered Gaza via Rafah terminal during the month.

The West Bank

In October, there were 19,617 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. Women older than 50 years of age and men older than 55 years of age, as well as children up to the age of 10 or 11 traveling with parents with permits, are exempted from the requirement to obtain a permit to travel – provided they are not traveling on a Saturday or before 8am.

Of the 19,617 applications, 16,288 (83%) were approved, 2,833 (14%) were unsuccessful and 496 (3%) were pending any reply at the time of monthly reporting.

 **19,617**
patient and companion
applications

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

 **83% approved**

 **14% denied**

 **3% pending**
at the time of monthly
reporting

In Focus

Shortage and lack of essential medicines and equipment impacts patients in the Gaza Strip



Rami, 40, sits in the hospital bed stretching his right leg with a piece of white fabric to avoid stiffness in the joints. He cannot walk. He has a severely comminuted right femur fracture caused by the gunshot injury he received in October, during the mass demonstrations in the Gaza Strip. Rami's leg is temporarily stabilized with an external fixator. But to stimulate bone growth and avoid long-term disability he needs a circular frame that is currently unavailable in Gaza.

Due to the chronic shortage of medicines and medical equipment even the largest Gaza hospital, Shifa, cannot provide Rami and many other patients with much-needed health services.

Confined to bed, Rami has been waiting for treatment for over a month now. A father of six, he is almost crying: "My leg is not fixed well, and I can feel it's moving. I need a proper fixator for my leg to heal. If I am disabled, I won't be able to support my family."

"If we do not receive a circular external fixator for Rami as soon as possible we will offer him a referral for treatment outside Gaza," says Dr Mahmoud Matar, an orthopedic surgeon at Shifa hospital. But to receive health care abroad, Palestinians must apply for Israeli security permits. The approval rate for those injured in demonstrations near the fence is significantly lower than the overall approval rate.

"Do you know what is the hardest feeling is for me as a doctor?" Dr Matar says. "To be unable to serve the patients. It is an internal disaster. Every time I can't provide needed care for my patients, I feel like a criminal."

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