

MONTHLY REPORT

February 2019



Health Access

Barriers for patients in the occupied Palestinian territory

 **1,963**

referrals issued to Gaza patients to access health facilities outside the Palestinian Ministry of Health (bimonthly average for January and February)

 **60%**

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

72% Gaza patients

57% Gaza patient companions

 **81%**

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

 **2**

Gaza patients called for security interview, both delayed

IN FOCUS

Poverty, pain and loss of dignity: the impact of illness and barriers to access on a Gaza family

Part 1 Referrals

February Referrals by the Ministry of Health

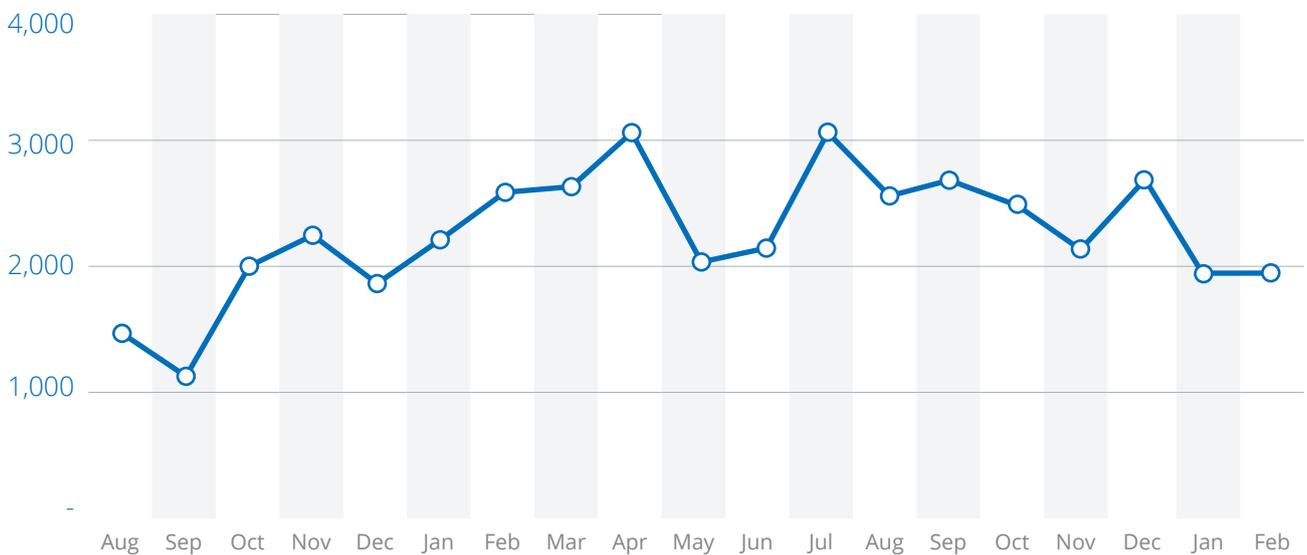
In January and February, the Palestinian Ministry of Health approved 3,925 referrals for Gaza patients to non-Ministry of Health facilities (an average 1,963 referrals per month), with an estimated cost of 57 million NIS (28.5 million NIS per month). This is lower than the average monthly number of referrals for Gaza patients in 2018, which was 2,579 referrals per month. 77% of referrals required access through Erez crossing to reach hospitals in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and Israel, while 4% 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 August 2017 to February 2019.

 **1,963** referrals

approved for financial coverage for Gaza patients outside the Palestinian Ministry of Health (bimonthly average for January and February)

Chart 1: Total number of referrals approved for Gaza patients, August 2017 - February 2019



Part 2 ACCESS

The Gaza Strip

1,637 patient applications to cross Erez for health care was submitted in February, the lowest number of patient permit applications since April 2015 or 24% lower than the monthly average of 2018. 28% were for children under age of 18 and 19% were for patients aged 60 years or older. 46% of applications were for female patients and 89% of applications were for medical care funded by the Palestinian Ministry of Health.

Three fifths (60%) of applications to cross Erez were for appointments in East Jerusalem hospitals, one fifth (20%) were for hospitals in Israel, and one fifth for West Bank hospitals (20%). Augusta Victoria Hospital (29%) and Makassed Hospital (25%), both in East Jerusalem, received more than half of referrals (54%). Permit applications for the top five specialties accounted for more than 65% of referrals: oncology (32%); orthopaedics (10%); haematology (8%); cardiology (8%); and paediatrics (7%). The remaining 35% referrals were for 26 other specialties.

Approved permit applications: 1,182 (600 male; 582 female), or 72% of the 1,637 applications to cross Erez in February 2019 were approved, the highest approval rate since February 2016. Chart 2 shows a 12-month trend for Israeli responses to Gaza patient permit applications. A third (32%) of permits approved were for children under age of 18 and a fifth (21%) were for people aged 60 years or older.

 **1,637**
patients applications

to Israeli authorities to cross Erez to access health care

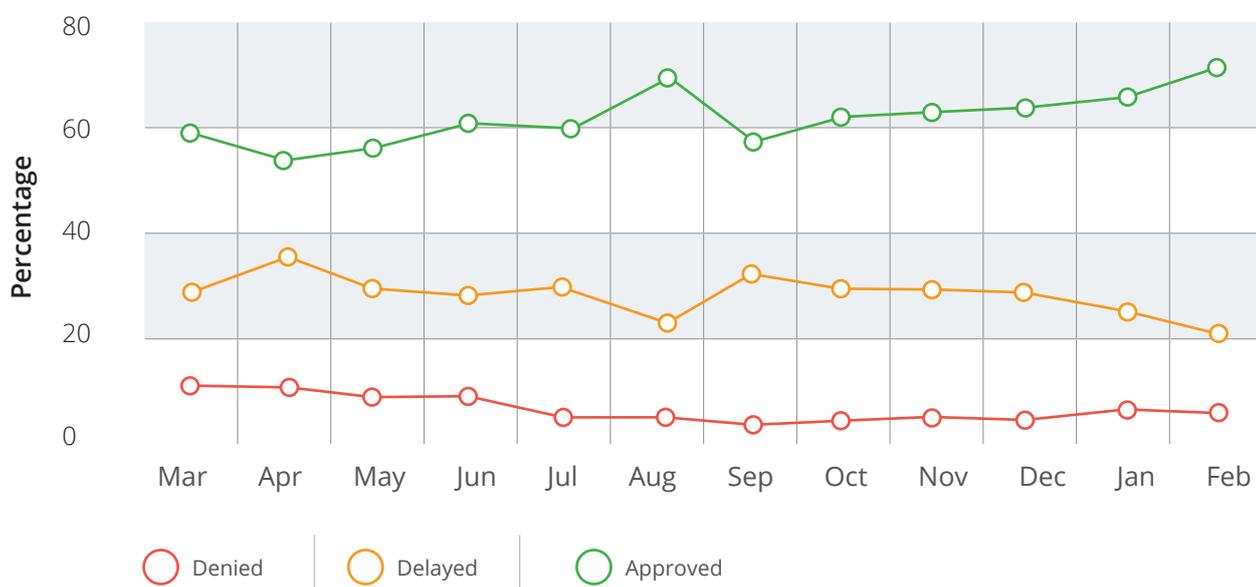
 **72%**
approved

 **7%**
denied

 **21%**
delayed

Chart 2

Israeli responses to Gaza patient permit applications, March 2018- February 2019



Denied care: 118 patient applications (83 male; 35 female), or 7% of the total, were denied permission to cross Erez for health care in February. Those denied included five children under the age of 18 years and 16 patients aged 60 years or older. 28% of denied applications were for appointments in neurosurgery, 24% for orthopaedics, 15% for ophthalmology, and 5% for oncology. 95% of denied permit applications were for appointments at hospitals in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem.

Delayed care: 337 patient applications (203 male; 134 female), or 21% of the total, were delayed access to care, receiving no definitive response to their application by the date of their hospital appointment. Of these, 78 applications were for children under the age of 18 and 41 applications were for patients aged 60 years or older. 17% of those delayed had appointments for orthopaedics and 15% for oncology. The remaining two-thirds (68%) were for 21 other specialties. 273 (81%) of the delayed applications were 'under study' at the time of appointment, while 7 applications were delayed because patients allegedly had relatives staying in the West Bank.

Access for those injured during demonstrations:

25 permit applications (1.5% of the total) in February were for those injured during demonstrations. The approval rate for this group was significantly lower than the overall approval rate in February: 6 applications were approved (24% of the total); 2 denied (8%); and 17 delayed (68%). As of 28 February, according to Gaza's Coordination and Liaison Office, there had been 499 applications to Israeli authorities by those injured in demonstrations to exit Gaza via Erez crossing for health care. Of those applications, 90 (18%) were approved, 139 (28%) were denied and 270 (54%) were delayed.¹

Security interrogation

In February, two patients were called for security interrogation as a prerequisite to travel for health care: a 73-year-old man referred for cardiology and 29-year-old referred for neurology. Both were delayed, receiving no definitive response by the dates of their hospital appointments.

Patient companions:

In February, there were 1,817 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 February, 1,040 (57%) patient companion applications were approved, 179 applications (10%) were denied and the remaining 598 (33%) 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.



2

patient called for security interrogation

Both delayed



1,817

patient companion applications

to Israeli authorities to cross Erez to accompany patients

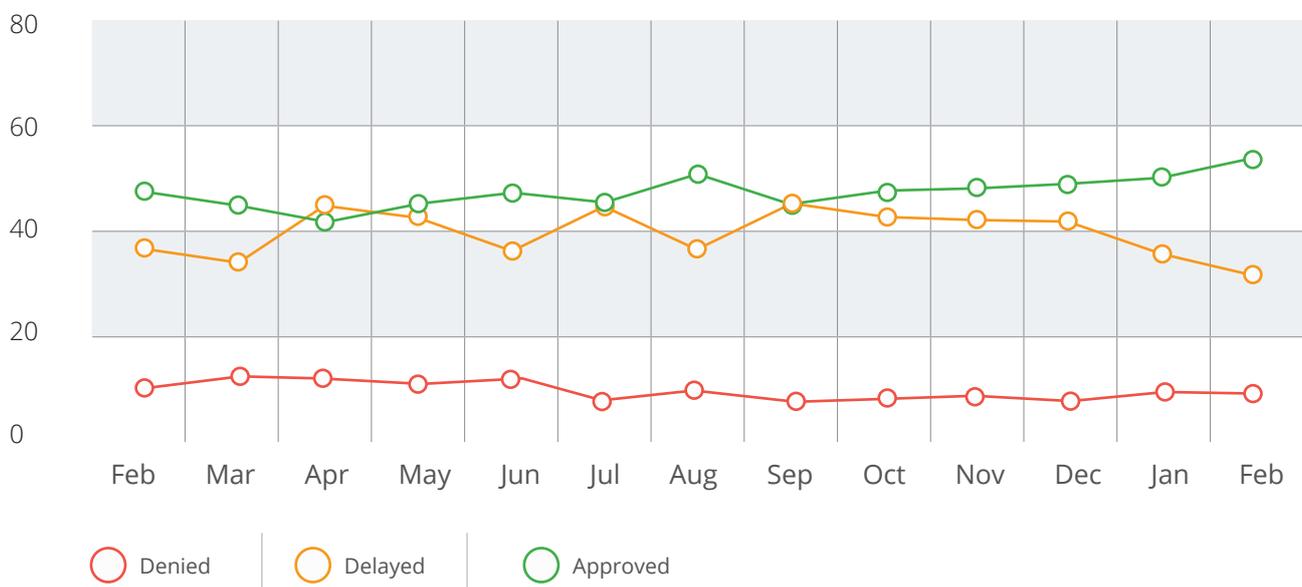
57% approved

10% denied

33% pending

Chart 3

Israeli responses to Gaza patient companion applications, February 2018- January 2019



Patients and companions crossing Erez:

The Palestinian General Authority of Civil Affairs reported that 1,308 Gaza patients and 1,150 companions crossed Erez in February to access hospitals outside the Gaza Strip. Of these, 81 patients were transferred by back-to-back ambulance with 77 companions. During the month, Erez crossing was open for 24 days for daytime working hours and closed on four days (four Saturdays).



1,308

patients crossed Erez for health care



1,150

patient companions crossed Erez

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

Rafah crossing – Egypt



Rafah was open in both directions for 20 days and closed for 8 days (Fridays and Saturdays). There were 6,048 attempted crossings to exit Gaza towards Egypt during February, with 1,021 (17%) denied access and returned by the Egyptian authorities. No data has been made available for the number of patients crossing in February.

The West Bank

In February, there were 16,622 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 16,622 applications, 13,468 (81%) were approved, 2,800 (17%) were unsuccessful and 354 (2%) were pending any reply at the time of monthly reporting.



16,622

patient and companion applications

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



81% approved



17% denied



2% pending

at the time of monthly reporting



In Focus

Poverty, pain and loss of dignity: the impact of illness and barriers to access on a Gaza family



Nadia, a 36-year-old woman from Gaza, was first admitted to the hospital seven years ago suffering with severe headaches, feeling sick and problems with her eyesight. She was diagnosed with a rare neurological condition that causes excess fluid and raised pressure in her brain for no known reason. She needed specialist medical follow up and treatment. In June 2012, Nadia had an operation in Gaza to place a ventriculoperitoneal shunt in her brain. This is a medical device that removes excess fluid from the brain to relieve the pressure that was causing her headaches and sickness and putting her sight at risk.

"It helped for about five months. Then the headache came back, even worse than before the surgery," Nadia says.

The shunt had obstructed, which is a known potential complication. She had to undergo two more surgeries to fix the device, but they didn't help. Nadia needed referral for specialist treatment outside Gaza.

Her first three patient permit applications to access specialist care in the West Bank were successful. She received medical treatment, and doctors wanted to try to give her another kind of medical device called a lumboperitoneal shunt. She could only get the surgery out of Gaza, in East Jerusalem, but this time her application for a permit to exit was denied by Israeli authorities. So far she has lost three hospital appointments.

"My headache is so bad and constantly there. My vision is also affected now, and it means I can't take care of my family," Nadia says.

She lives with her six children and husband in a shared house in dire conditions. Nadia's husband has epilepsy. She was his main carer before she herself became ill. Nadia and her husband are both unemployed. Their eldest daughter helps to support the family with housekeeping, but they struggle to find enough money each month to feed, clothe and house everyone.

Nadia requires four different medicines to treat her condition, but are all currently unavailable in Ministry of Health or UNRWA clinics: "I haven't taken my medicines for 25 days now because I haven't been able to buy them." Struggling with poverty, her family cannot afford to refill gas for cooking or even to buy stationary for their children. Nadia states, "My daughter needs a calculator for her classes but I can't afford to buy her one." Every three months they receive food assistance from UNRWA.

After her permit application to exit Gaza for health care was unsuccessful, Nadia sought the help of Al Mezan Centre for Human Rights to see if they could appeal on her behalf. She is currently awaiting a response from Israeli authorities for her next appointment at Makassed Hospital.