

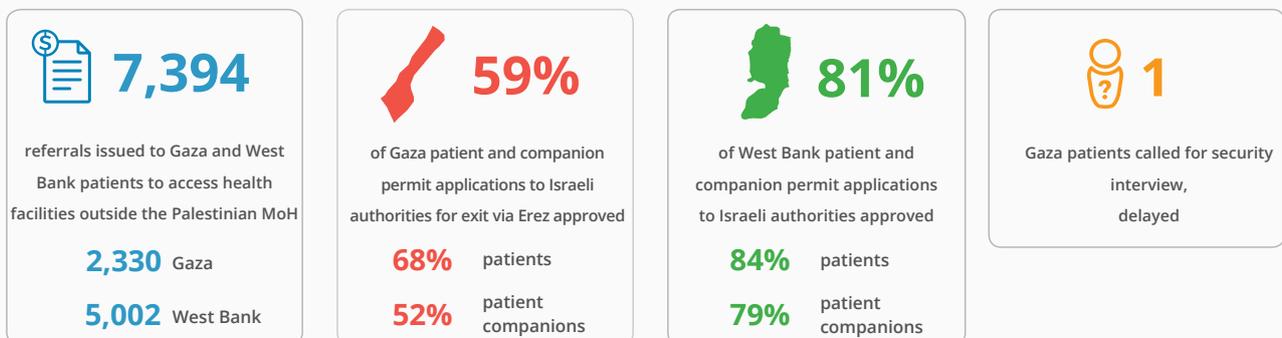


# MONTHLY REPORT

## June 2019

## Health Access

Barriers for patients in the occupied Palestinian territory



### IN FOCUS

Children face barriers to accessing care and separation from parents

# Part 1 Referrals

## March Referrals by the Ministry of Health

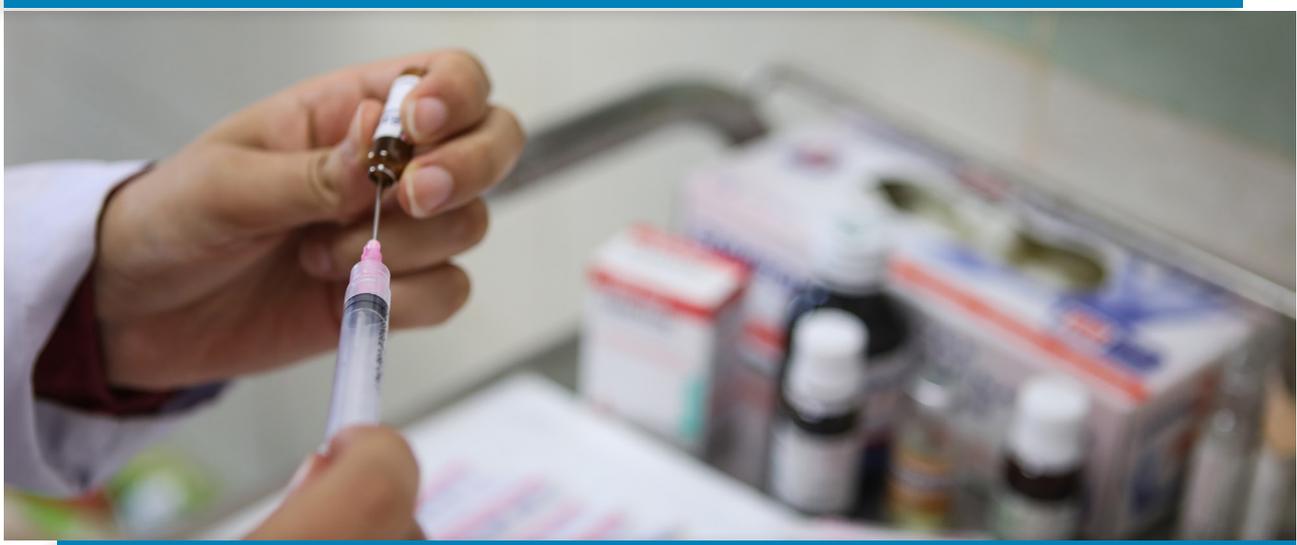
In June, the Palestinian Ministry of Health approved 7,394 referrals. 5,002 (68%) referrals for West Bank patients, including 857 referrals for patients from Jerusalem, while 2,330 (32%) referrals for Gaza patients. The origins for 61 referrals (less than 1%) were not reported. The relatively low number of referrals to Israeli hospitals continued, with 49 referrals for Gaza patients and 343 referrals for West Bank patients, including 17 from Jerusalem. This reflects the Palestinian MoH's decision in March to stop referrals to Israeli hospitals, apart from exceptional cases. For comparison, in 2017 there was an average of 346 referrals for Gaza patients and 1,010 referrals for West Bank patients to Israeli hospitals each month. In June, 73% of Gaza referrals required Israeli-issued permits to reach hospitals in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and Israel, while 12% required access through Rafah terminal to access healthcare in Egypt. In the West Bank, 42% of referrals were to facilities in East Jerusalem or Israel, the majority of which require Israeli-issued permits to access care.

 **2,330**  
Gaza

 **5,002**  
West Bank

referrals approved for financial coverage for healthcare outside the Palestinian Ministry of Health

**Chart 1:** Total number of referrals approved for Gaza patients, January 2018 - June 2019



# Part 2 Access

## The Gaza Strip

2,127 patient applications to cross Erez for healthcare were submitted in June. 30% were for children under age of 18 and 17% were for patients aged 60 years or older. 45% of applications were for female patients and 93% of applications were for medical care funded by the Palestinian Ministry of Health.

Two-thirds (66%) of applications to cross Erez were for appointments in East Jerusalem hospitals, more than a fifth (22%) for West Bank hospitals and 13% were for hospitals in Israel. Makassed Hospital (30%) and Augusta Victoria Hospital (27%), both in East Jerusalem, received nearly three-fifths of permit applications (57%). The top five specialties accounted for 64% of permit applications: oncology (30%); paediatrics (10%); orthopaedics (8%); cardiology (8%); haematology (8%). The remaining 36% were for 25 other specialties.

**Approved permit applications:** 1,442 (753 male; 689 female), or 68% of the 2,127 applications to cross Erez in June 2019 were approved, 7% higher than the previous month and similar to the average approval in the first quarter of the year. Chart 2 shows a 12-month trend for Israeli responses to Gaza patient permit applications. A third (33%) of permits approved were for children under age of 18 and a fifth (20%) were for patients aged 60 years or older.



**2,127**

patients applications

to Israeli authorities to cross Erez to access healthcare



**68%**

approved



**12%**

denied

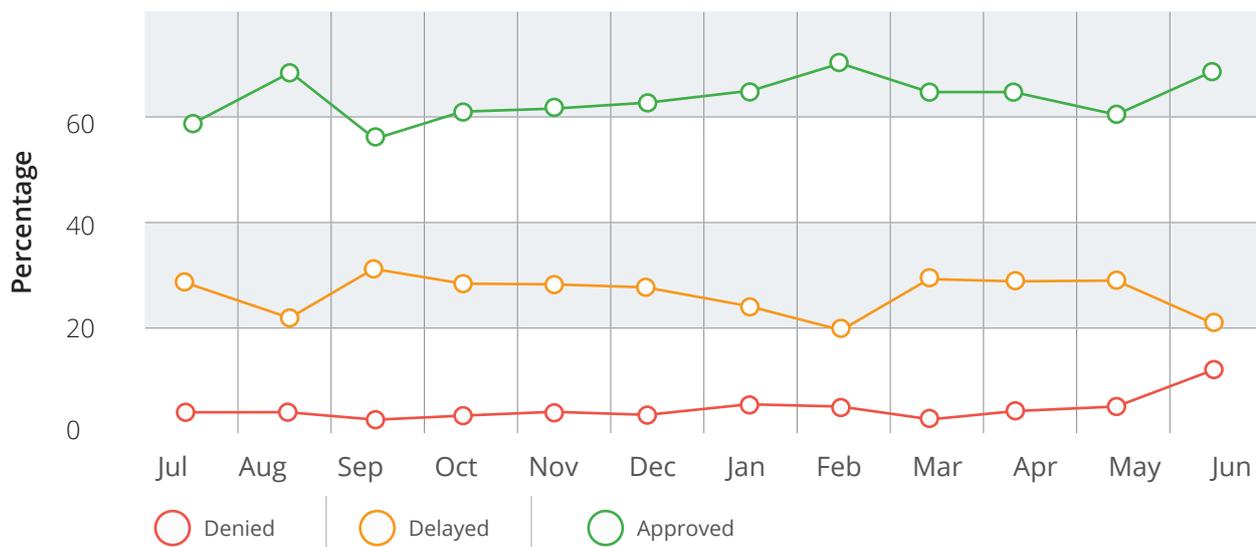


**20%**

delayed

### Chart 2

Israeli responses to Gaza patient permit applications, July 2018 - June 2019



**Denied care:** 256 patient applications (161 male; 95 female), or 12% of the total, were denied permits to cross Erez for healthcare in June. Those denied included 50 children under the age of 18 years and 29 patients aged 60 years or older. 21% of denied applications were for appointments in orthopaedics, 14% for neurosurgery, 11% for oncology, 6% for ophthalmology, and 6% for cardiology. More than 90% of denied permit applications were for appointments at hospitals in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem.

**Delayed care:** 429 patient applications (264 male; 165 female), or 20% of the total, were delayed access to care, receiving no definitive response to their application by the date of their hospital appointment. Of these, 115 applications were for children under the age of 18 and 57 applications were for patients aged 60 years or older. 20% of those delayed had appointments for oncology, 13% for orthopaedics, 9% for cardiology, 8% for paediatrics, and 8% for haematology. The remaining 42% were for 19 other specialties. 291 (68%) of the delayed applications were 'under study' at the time of appointment. 68 (16%) requested to send a new medical report, 31 (7%) were requested to reapply, 22 (5%) were pending approval of companion, 5 were requested to make new appointment, 3 applications were delayed because patients allegedly had relatives staying in the West Bank. 45% of the delayed patients submitted their application more than two weeks before the hospital appointment.

## Access for those injured during demonstrations:

As of 30 June 2019, according to Gaza's Coordination and Liaison Office, there had been 562 applications to Israeli authorities by those injured in demonstrations to exit Gaza via Erez crossing to access health care. The approval rate of this group is significantly lower than the overall approval rate for patient applications to exit Gaza, with 18% (100 applications) approved, 27% (150) denied and 55% (312) delayed.

## Security interrogation

In June, a 63-year-old male patient suffering from ischaemic heart disease was called for security interrogation as a prerequisite to traveling for healthcare. He was delayed in his application, receiving no definitive response by the date of his hospital appointment.

## Patient companions:

In June, there were 2,391 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 June, 1,242 patient companion applications (52% of the total) were approved, 416 applications (17%) were denied and the remaining 733 (31%) were delayed, receiving no definitive response by the time of the patient's appointment. Chart 3 shows the trend over the last 12 months for Israeli responses to patient companion applications.



1

patient called for security interrogation

Delayed



2,391

patient companion applications

to Israeli authorities to cross Erez to accompany patients

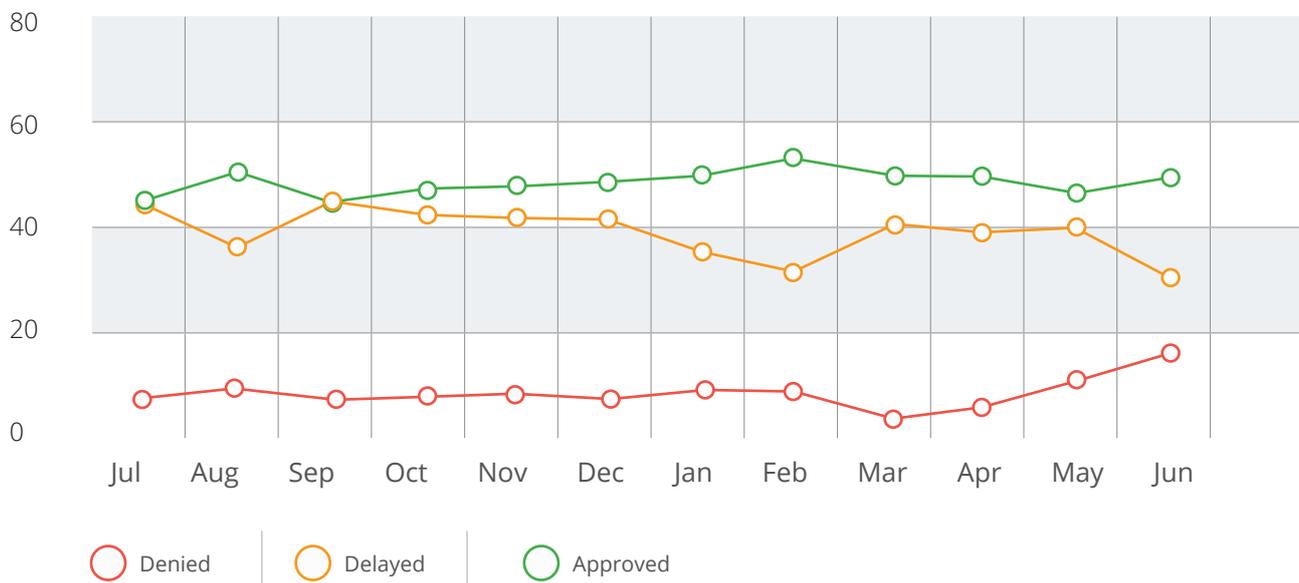
52% approved

17% denied

31% pending

Chart 3

Israeli responses to Gaza patient companion applications, July 2018 - June 2019



## Patients and companions crossing Erez:

The Palestinian General Authority of Civil Affairs reported that 1,733 Gaza patients and 1,463 companions crossed Erez in June to access hospitals outside the Gaza Strip. Of these, 58 patients were transferred by back-to-back ambulance with 50 companions. During the month, Erez crossing was open for 24 days for daytime working hours and closed on 6 days (5 Saturdays and 1 Israeli holiday).



1,733

patients crossed Erez for health care



1,463

patient companions crossed Erez

## Rafah crossing – Egypt



During June, Rafah crossing was open for humanitarian cases in both directions for 13 days and for pilgrims to return for 4 days. The crossing was closed for 13 days (4 Fridays, 5 Saturdays, 2 days for Eid Al-Fitr, 1 Egyptian holiday, and 1 day closed by Egyptian authorities).

According to the terminal authority, 5,168 travelers crossed towards Egypt, among them 887 patients crossing for health care with 345 companions. 68 patients were transferred by ambulance with 58 companions. 9 bodies of deceased persons were returned to Gaza. No medical aid or medical delegates entered Gaza via Rafah terminal through the month.

## The West Bank

In June, 15,116 (7,239 patient; 7,877 companion) applications were submitted to the Israeli authorities for West Bank patients and companions 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 7,239 patient applications, 6,087 (84%) were approved, 1029 (14%) were denied and 123 (2%) were pending reply at the time of monthly reporting.

Of the 7,877 patient companion applications, 6,190 (79%) were approved, 1,450 (18%) were denied and 237 (3%) were pending reply at the time of monthly reporting.



**15,116**

patient and companion applications

for Israeli permits to authorities to access healthcare in East Jerusalem and Israel



**81% approved**



**16% denied**



**2% pending**  
at the time of monthly reporting

# In Focus

## Children face barriers to accessing care and separation from parents

*“Can you imagine we sent Yousef, our 3-year-old son, without one of us accompanying him.” Tariq, father of Yousef, Yassin and Lamis. Yousef was a match to be a bone marrow donor for his brother and sister.*



Children from the Gaza Strip continue to face barriers to accessing healthcare due to delays or denials of Israeli-issued permits to exit. Of those able to obtain a permit to travel, almost half (49%) go unaccompanied by a parent due to the restrictions on access for patient companions.

Tariq, 43, and his wife Nahla, 42, live in Gaza City. Two of their children, 4-year-old Yassin and 10-year-old Lamis, have a hereditary immune disorder called chronic granulomatous disease. The couple have lost two sons already to the disease, for which survival can be hugely improved through access to effective treatment, with bone marrow transplant a potential cure. Yassin and Lamis' younger brother Yousef was a match for both children for a bone marrow transplant.

With facilities for this not available within the Palestinian health system, Yousef, Yassin and Lamis were referred to Israeli hospitals. Their referrals were funded by the Palestinian Ministry of Health.

Both Yassin and Lamis eventually underwent successful bone marrow operations with donation from Yousef, Yassin at Tel Hashomer Hospital near Tel Aviv and Lamis at Hadassah Hospital near Jerusalem. Lamis missed two of her 11 hospital appointments due to permit delays, while Yassin missed 14 out of 26 appointments because his permit applications had not been processed by the time of



his hospital appointments. The children's parents have struggled to obtain permits to accompany them. Tariq applied nine times to accompany his children, but was denied a permit every time. Meanwhile, Nahla applied 24 times and was only twice granted a permit to accompany her children in their journey to access healthcare. One of these permits allowed Nahla to accompany Yassin for his transplant, a risky and stressful procedure for any child. Lamis was accompanied by her aunt because her mother was not able to obtain a permit at the time of her transplant. Yousef, at 3 years old, traveled to donate bone marrow without his parents or the support of his immediate family. Responses to permit applications come at very short notice, usually the day before departure.

Tariq commented, “When Yassin or Lamis get a permit to travel for a hospital appointment, we take them to Erez. It breaks my heart when the time comes for us to separate, especially with Yassin [4 years old]. He cries a lot, and so does my wife. I feel destroyed and helpless”. Said the father.

The benefits of family support to children go beyond emotional support, with close involvement in a child's illness improving health outcomes. One person is allowed by Israeli authorities to accompany each sick child, but there is no mechanism to prioritize parent access.

As well as travelling unaccompanied by parents, many applications to access healthcare by children are themselves not successful. In the first half of 2019, a quarter (24% or 901) of the 3,746 permit applications for children under the age of 18 were denied (102) or delayed (799), meaning that children did not receive definitive responses to their permit applications in time for their hospital appointments.

Access to health care is a fundamental human right. All patients require family support when sick and vulnerable, and children especially have a need for the emotional support and protection of their parents during often difficult journeys for medical care. This need must be safeguarded.