

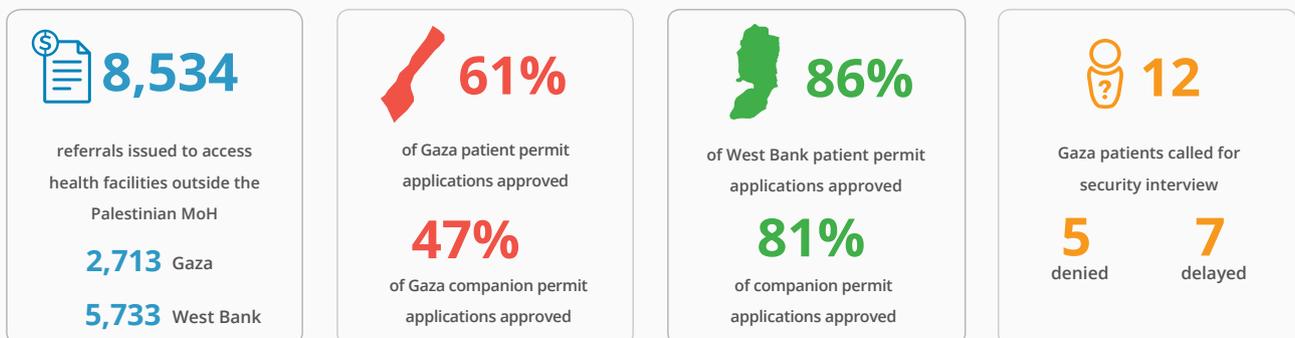


# MONTHLY REPORT

## September 2019

## Health Access

Barriers for patients in the occupied Palestinian territory



### IN FOCUS

*Patient and health worker shot with live ammunition during Gaza's Great March of Return*

# Part 1 Referrals

## September Referrals by the Ministry of Health

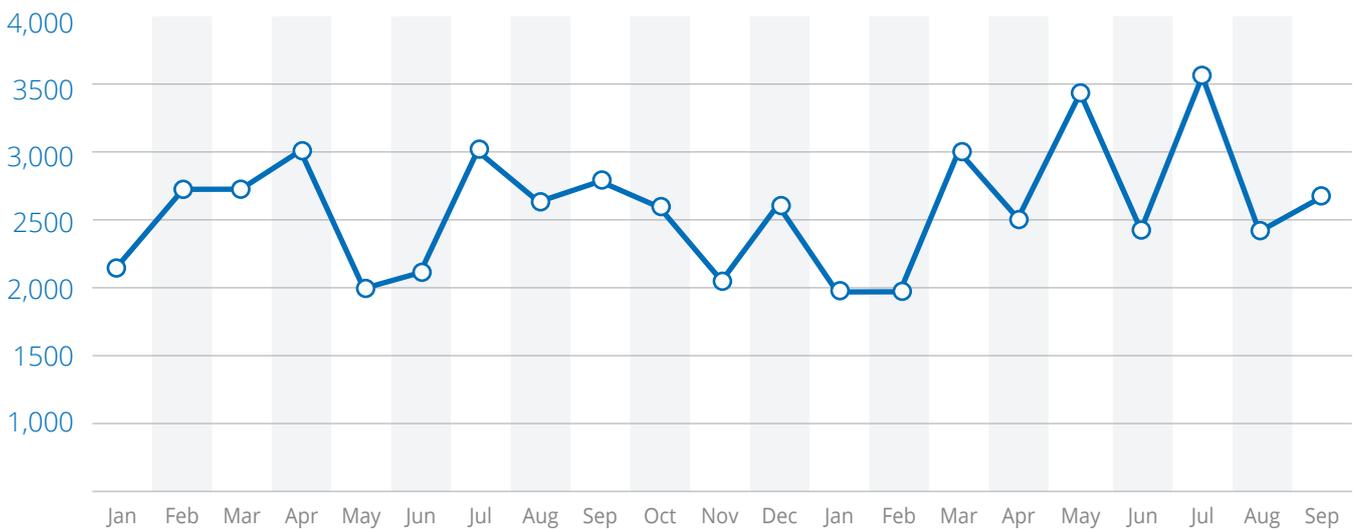
In September, the Palestinian Ministry of Health approved 8,534 referrals. 67% (5,733) of referrals were for West Bank patients, including 1,283 referrals for patients from Jerusalem, while 32% (2,713) of referrals were for Gaza patients. The origins for 85 referrals (1%) were not reported, while three referrals were from Jordan. Female patient referrals comprised 46% of the total. Low referrals to Israeli hospitals persisted, with 92 referrals to Israeli hospitals from Gaza (24% of the 2018 monthly average of 389), and 341 referrals from the West Bank (29% of the 2018 monthly average of 1,185). A relatively higher proportion of referrals to Egypt from Gaza continued, comprising 16% of September Gaza referrals, requiring access through Rafah crossing. In Gaza, 69% of referrals required Israeli-issued permits to exit via Erez/Beit Hanoun crossing, while 48% of West Bank referrals were to facilities in East Jerusalem or Israel, the majority of which require Israeli-issued permits to access care. Chart 1 shows the number of referrals issued to patients in Gaza from January 2018 to September 2019.

 **2,713**  
Gaza

 **5,733**  
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 to September 2019



# Part 2 Access

## The Gaza Strip

There were 1,916 patient applications to cross Erez for healthcare in September. Almost a third (31%) were for children under 18 and 17% were for patients aged 60 years or older. 47% of applications were for female patients and 92% were for healthcare 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 (23%) for West Bank hospitals and 11% for Israeli hospitals. 3 applications were for patients with appointments to Jordanian hospitals. Augusta Victoria Hospital (32%) and Makassed Hospital (27%), both in East Jerusalem, received almost three-fifths of permit applications (59%). The top five specialties accounted for 67% of permit applications: oncology (34%); haematology (10%); paediatrics (9%); cardiology (8%); and orthopaedics (6%). The remaining 33% were for 25 other specialties.

**Approved permit applications:** 1,170 (593 male; 577 female), or 61% of the 1,916 applications to cross Erez in September 2019, were approved. This approval rate is 5% lower than the average so far for 2019. Chart 2 shows the trend for Israeli responses to Gaza patient permit applications over the past 12 months. A third (33%) of permits approved were for children under 18 and a fifth (20%) were for patients aged 60 years or older.

**1,916**  
patients applications  
to Israeli authorities to cross Erez/  
Beit Hanoun to access healthcare

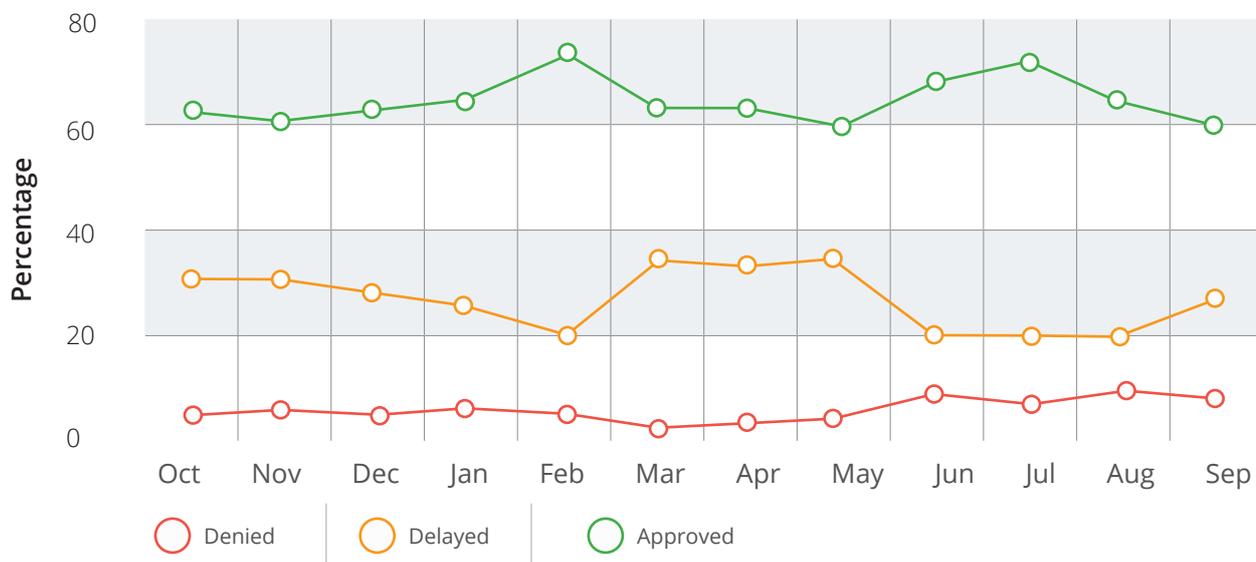
**61%**  
approved

**11.5%**  
denied

**27.5%**  
delayed

Chart 2

Israeli responses to Gaza patient permit applications, October 2018 to September 2019



**Denied care:** 220 patient applications (127 male; 93 female), or 11% of the total, were denied permits to cross Erez for healthcare in September. Those denied included 52 children under 18 and 20 patients aged 60 years or older. More than a fifth (22%) of denied applications were for cancer care (oncology), 15% for orthopaedics, 8% for cardiology, 7% for ophthalmology, 6% for haematology, and 6% for urology. 90% of denied permit applications were for appointments at hospitals in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem.

**Delayed care:** 526 patient applications (300 male; 226 female), or 27% of the total, were delayed access to care, receiving no definitive response to their application by the date of their hospital appointment. Of these, 153 applications were for children under the age of 18 and 61 applications were for patients aged 60 years or older. More than a quarter (28%) of those delayed had appointments for cancer care (oncology), 11% for haematology, 8% for ophthalmology, 7% for cardiology, 7% for paediatrics, and 5% for nuclear medicine. The remaining 34% were for 20 other specialties. The majority of delayed applications (459 or 87%) were 'under study' at the time of appointment.

## Access for those injured during the Great March of Return

As of 30 September 2019, according to Gaza's Coordination and Liaison Office, there had been 591 patient applications to Israeli authorities for permits to access healthcare through Erez/Beit Hanoun crossing by those injured during the Great March of Return demonstrations since 30 March 2018. The approval rate for this group is significantly lower than the overall approval rate for patient permit applications to exit Gaza, with 18% (104) approved, 27% (161) denied and 55% (326) delayed.

## Security interrogation

In September, 12 (10 male; 2 female) patients aged 18-60 years were called for security interrogation as a prerequisite to processing their permit applications, the highest number of patients requested for security interrogation in any month for more than a year. 4 had appointments for oncology, 2 for nuclear medicine, and one each for neurology, general surgery, haematology, internal medicine, orthopaedics, and vascular surgery. 5 patients were subsequently denied permits to access healthcare and 7 were delayed, receiving no definitive response to their applications by the date of their hospital appointments.

## Patient companions:

In September, there were 2,100 companion 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 allowed to accompany each Gaza patient. In September, 985 patient companion applications (47% of the total) were approved, 360 applications (17%) were denied and the remaining 755 (36%) were delayed, receiving no definitive response by the time of the patient's appointment. Chart 3 shows the trend for Israeli responses to patient companion applications over the last 12 months.

 **12**

patients called for security interrogation

 **5 denied**

 **7 delayed**

 **2,100**  
patient companion applications

to Israeli authorities to cross Erez to accompany patients

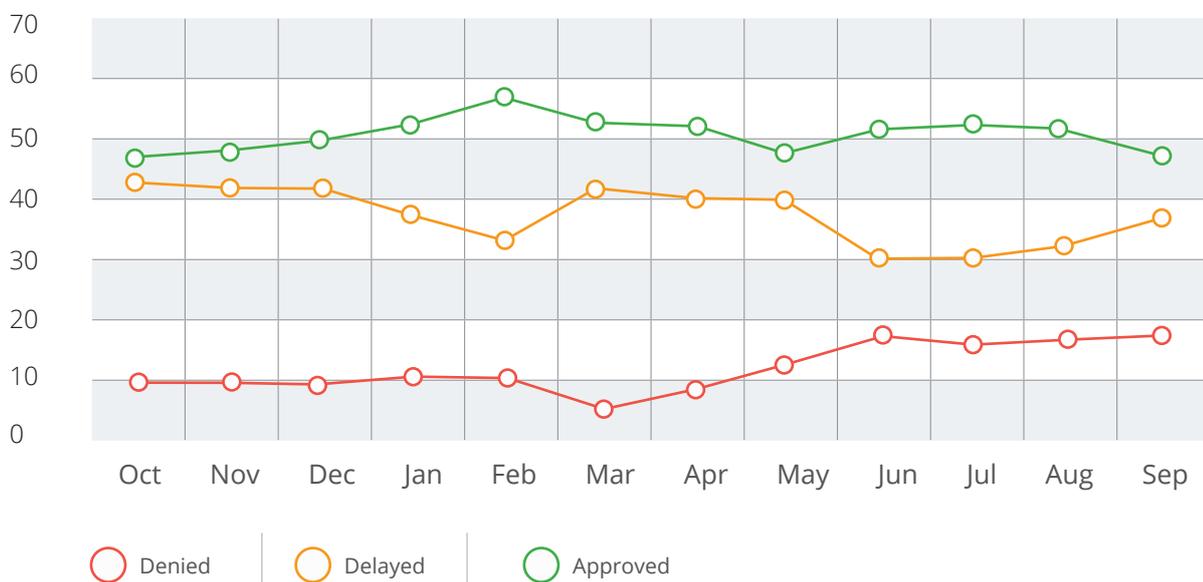
 **47% approved**

 **17% denied**

 **36% pending**

## Chart 3

Israeli responses to patient companion applications, October 2018 to September 2019



## Patients and companions crossing Erez:

The Palestinian General Authority of Civil Affairs reported that 1,610 Gaza patients and 1,351 companions crossed Erez in September to access hospitals outside the Gaza Strip. Of these, 48 patients were transferred by back-to-back ambulance with 58 companions. During the month, Erez crossing was open for 23 days for daytime working hours and closed on 7 days (4 Saturdays, 2 Jewish holidays and 1 day for the Israeli general election).

 **1,610**  
patients  
crossed Erez for health care

 **1,351**  
patient companions  
crossed Erez

## Rafah crossing – Egypt



During September, Rafah crossing was open for humanitarian cases in both directions for 22 days and was closed for 8 days (4 Fridays and 4 Saturdays). According to the terminal authority, 8,419 travelers crossed towards Egypt, among them 1,138 patients crossing for healthcare with 1,009 companions. 109 patients were transferred by ambulance with 130 companions. The number of travelers crossing for health reasons in September was the highest since June 2013, when 4,177 crossed for health reasons. This reflects a new agreement between the Palestinian Authority and Egypt for referral of more Palestinian patients to Egyptian hospitals. 8 bodies of deceased persons were returned to Gaza.

### The West Bank

In September, there were 8,462 applications by West Bank patients to Israeli authorities to access healthcare in East Jerusalem and Israel, with 9,646 patient companion applications. 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, as well as children under 13 years traveling with an approved adult, are exempted from the requirement to obtain a permit to travel – provided they are not traveling on a Saturday, before 8am or after 7pm.

Of 8,462 West Bank patient permit applications, 7,242 (86%) were approved, 1,098 (13%) were denied and 122 (1%) were pending reply at the time of monthly reporting.

Of 9,646 West Bank patient companion applications, 7,775 (81%) were approved, 1,623 (17%) were denied and 248 (3%) were pending reply at the time of monthly reporting.

 **8,462**  
patient  
applications

for Israeli permits to access  
healthcare in East Jerusalem  
and Israel

 **86% approved**

 **13% unsuccessful**

 **1% pending**  
at the time of monthly  
reporting

 **9,646**  
patient companion  
applications

to access healthcare in East  
Jerusalem and Israel

 **81% approved**

 **17% unsuccessful**

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

## In Focus

### Patient and health worker shot with live ammunition during Gaza's Great March of Return

**Sabreen** is a 28-year-old first responder and team leader of the Nabed Al-Hayat team, working east of Rafah in the south of the Gaza Strip. Sabreen established the independent team on 6 April 2018, soon after the beginning of Gaza's Great March of Return. Her team of 13 at the start of demonstrations included Abdullah al-Qutati, who was shot and killed on 10 August while working to provide help to those injured. Today, the team comprises 12 first responders, though different team members have had to take leaves of absence from volunteering due to injuries sustained while working to deliver healthcare. The team works closely with the Ministry of Health field medical point.

On 27 September 2019, Sabreen was treating a child who had suffered gas inhalation close to the Gaza fence. While receiving care, the child was shot with live ammunition in his back, which penetrated into his abdomen. Sabreen remembers, "At first, I collapsed with grief and started crying. Then I straight away resumed providing first aid to him [the child] until he was transferred to the medical point. We were about 100 meters from the fence... He was under my care and I couldn't believe they would shoot a child while a paramedic was treating him. After that, a journalist standing near me had a call from the Israeli side to convey a message to me that I should leave the place and that they would shoot warning bullets to our side. While leaving, they shot about ten bullets around me." The child, 13 years old, was transferred to the European Gaza Hospital and admitted to the intensive care unit after surgery.



Approximately 20 minutes after the child was shot, at around 6:10pm, Sabreen saw four injured persons close to the fence in need of assistance. She went forward to help and had begun to treat one of the persons when she was shot with live ammunition. The bullet went through her right forearm, severing a nerve in her hand, and into her abdomen. She had heavy bleeding from her liver and was rushed to hospital. At hospital, Sabreen was taken straight to the operating theatre to stop the bleeding. After the surgery, the doctors told her family that the bullet had lodged next to her spine and that intervening to remove it would risk additional health problems. Sabreen stayed at the hospital for four days under observation before she was discharged.

Since her injury, Sabreen has become dependent on her husband and mother to move around. She can only stand with difficulty and needs to walk slowly, requiring help for most of her daily tasks. She suffers numbness in both her legs and has also lost some movements and feeling in her right hand.

Sabreen says, "It's not my first injury. I was shot in my head with live ammunition a few months ago which affected my sight... I feel I am targeted as a paramedic and in Gaza we have never been truly protected. In spite of all the risks, I choose to be a first responder at the fence. I believe it is our responsibility to treat those who need our help and our skills."

Sabreen's doctors have sought to refer her out of Gaza for a second opinion regarding potential surgery. However, Sabreen has been denied a permit.

Sabreen is married with a 7-year-old daughter who is at primary school. "After my injury, I haven't been able to properly care for my daughter. Now my husband or my mother have to care for her. Sometimes my daughter has had to miss school when her father is at work. Really, it is so hard for me as a mother to be unable to care for my daughter as I want to. I never felt as disabled as when I was unable to help her."

Sabreen sustained the 44th and 45th live ammunition injuries among health workers in the Gaza Strip since the start of the Great March of Return. From 30 March 2018 to 30 September 2019, three health workers have been killed and 832 injured in 550 recorded incidents against health staff and facilities in the Gaza Strip.

<sup>1</sup><https://www.cancerresearchuk.org/health-professional/cancer-statistics/statistics-by-cancer-type/thyroid-cancer/> 1 .2019 ,Cancer Research UK survival#heading-One