



MONTHLY REPORT

October 2020

Health Access

Barriers for patients in the occupied Palestinian territory

 **6,518**

referrals issued to access health facilities outside the Palestinian MoH

1,165 Gaza

5,268 West Bank

 **319**

Gaza patients exited through Beit Hanoun/Erez for healthcare

267

Gaza patient companions exited through Beit Hanoun/Erez



No comprehensive data available for West Bank patient and companion permit applications

following suspension to functioning of Civil Affairs Office; 985 permits approved for patients to access Augusta Victoria Hospital.

 **2**

Gaza patients called for security interrogation.

1 patient companion stopped at Erez for interrogation on his return

IN FOCUS

Patient delayed access to care since August 2020

Part 1 Referrals

October Referrals by the Ministry of Health

In October, the Palestinian Ministry of Health (MoH) issued 6,518 referrals to health care services delivered by non-MoH providers. West Bank referrals comprised 81% (5,268) of all MoH referrals (the West Bank population comprises approximately 60% of the population in the oPt), including 746 for patients from Jerusalem. Gaza referrals accounting for 18% (1,165), despite the Gaza population comprising approximately 40% of the oPt and despite a temporary coordination mechanism making it possible to apply for permits to access health care outside the Gaza Strip. Meanwhile, the origin of 85 referrals was not reported.

After an almost 40% reduction in West Bank referrals from March to April 2020, by June 2020 West Bank referrals had recovered to the pre-COVID-19 level. In October, there were 5,268 referrals compared to a monthly average of 5,133 referrals for the first quarter of 2020. By contrast, in the Gaza Strip the substantial 58% reduction in the monthly number of referrals from March to April 2020 has still not recovered. In October, there was a slight increase to 1,165 referrals from 783 in September.

The proportion of all Palestinian MoH referrals destined for hospitals in the West Bank, outside East Jerusalem, increased from 40% in the first quarter of 2020 – prior to the COVID-19 outbreak in the oPt – to 50% in October. Referrals within the Gaza Strip decreased from 7% to 3%. Referrals to East Jerusalem hospitals have decreased from 41% to 39%; to Israeli hospitals from 5% to 4%; and to Egypt from 6% to 4%. Referrals to Jordan comprised 0.2% of the total in October.

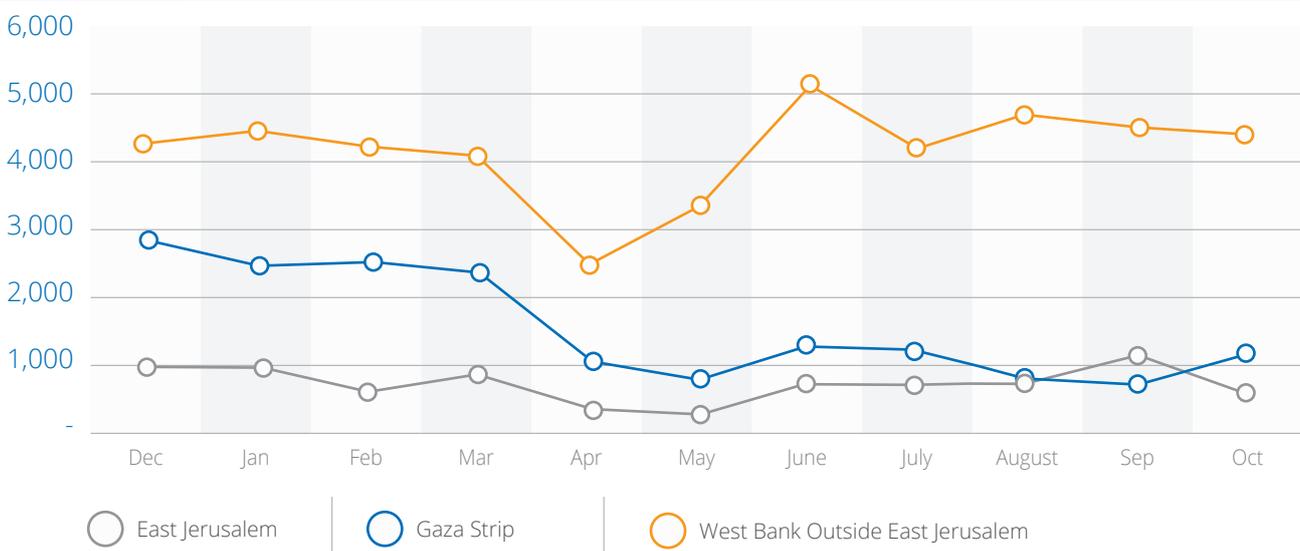
The top needed specialties for referrals were oncology (27%); cardiac catheterization (8%); cardiology (6%); ophthalmology (6%); urology (5%); medical imaging (5%); and radiotherapy (4%). Referrals for patients under 18 years of age comprised 21% (1,372) of the total, while 28% (1,811) were for those aged 60 years or older. Referrals for female patients comprised 46% of the total.

 **1,165**
Gaza Strip

 **5,268**
West Bank

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

Chart 1 Number of referrals issued by the Palestinian MoH by place of origin, December 2019 to October 2020



Part 2 Access

The Gaza Strip

During October, WHO maintained a temporary coordination mechanism administering permit applications for patients referred by the Services Purchasing Unit of the Palestinian Ministry of Health for health care outside the Gaza Strip. Augusta Victoria Hospital continued processing permit applications until 20 October, while St John Hospital submitted 20 and Physicians for Human Rights Israel submitted 11 permit applications during the month.

Table 1 provides an overview of the permit applications and approvals during October, with 555 permit applications and 403 permit approvals recorded in total. The overall approval rate calculated from the available data was 73%. Disaggregation for applications made by different organizations can be found below.

Organization applied	# of applications	# Approved
WHO	396	283
Augusta Victoria Hospital	128	101
St. John Hospital	20	12
Physicians for Human Rights - Israel	11	7
Total	555	403

WHO, submitted 396 (M: 221; F: 175) patient applications for Gaza patients to exit Erez/Beit Hanoun checkpoint. 283 (71%) were approved, 8 (2%) were denied and 105 (26%) were delayed. 97 (24%) were for children under 18 and 74 (19%) were for people aged 60 years and older. Two-thirds (66%) of applications were for services at East Jerusalem hospitals, predominantly Augusta Victoria Hospital (35% of the total) and Makassed Hospital (29% of the total). More than a quarter (28%) of applications were to the West Bank, 5% to Israeli hospitals and 1% for Jordan.

43% had appointments for oncology, 12% for haematology, 8% for paediatrics, 6% for heart surgery, 5% for general surgery, 4% cardiology, 3% for neurosurgery, 3% for ophthalmology, 2% for nuclear medicine, and the remaining 14% were for 15 other specialties. 95% of patient applications submitted by the WHO were financially covered by the Palestinian Ministry of Health and the remaining 5% were covered by other organizations.

Augusta Victoria Hospital (AVH) submitted 128 requests for Gaza patients, of whom 101 (79%) were approved and 27 (21%) were either pending decision at the end of October, delayed (with no definitive response by the date of their hospital appointment) or denied.

St. John Hospital submitted 20 applications for patients from Gaza. 12 were approved and arrived to the hospital; with 5 of those approved for inpatient admissions and 7 for outpatient appointments.

Physicians for Human Rights Israel (PHRI) made 9 patient permit applications: 8 for adult patients and 1 for a child patient. 7 of the 9 (78%) applications were approved, with 1 adult application denied and the child application delayed. An additional 2 applications were initially submitted but then cancelled by patients.



403

recorded approvals
for patient permits

Security interrogation

In October, 2 patients were requested for security interrogation by Israeli services as a prerequisite to processing their permit applications. One of these patients applied through PHRI, and the other through WHO. A patient companion was stopped at Erez for one-and-a-half hours for interrogation on his return from Jordan, where he had accompanied his son for medical treatment at King Hussein Cancer Center along with his wife. The man was subsequently released and allowed to enter Gaza with his son and wife.

Patient companions

Of the 497 recorded companion permit applications submitted during October, 220 (44%) were approved, 47 (10%) were denied and 230 (46%) were delayed. 491 applications were submitted through the WHO temporary coordination mechanism, while PHRI submitted 6 companion applications during October. Not all partners provided data on companion applications and approvals, though 84% of recorded patient crossings at Beit Hanoun/Erez were with the accompaniment of a companion.

Patients and companions crossing Beit Hanoun/Erez

The Palestinian General Authority of Civil Affairs reported that 319 Gaza patients and 267 companions crossed Beit Hanoun/Erez checkpoint in October to access hospitals outside the Gaza Strip. The local health authorities at Beit Hanoun reported that 37 patients were transferred out by back-to-back ambulance and 22 transferred back into Gaza. An additional 16 bodies of deceased patients were transferred back to the Gaza Strip by ambulance. During the month, Beit Hanoun/Erez checkpoint was open for 26 days for daytime working hours and closed on 5 days (5 Saturdays).

The Israeli COGAT reported that during October there were 631 humanitarian crossings into Israel for health and non-health reasons via Beit Hanoun/Erez checkpoint.



2

Gaza patients
and 1 companion
interrogated



319

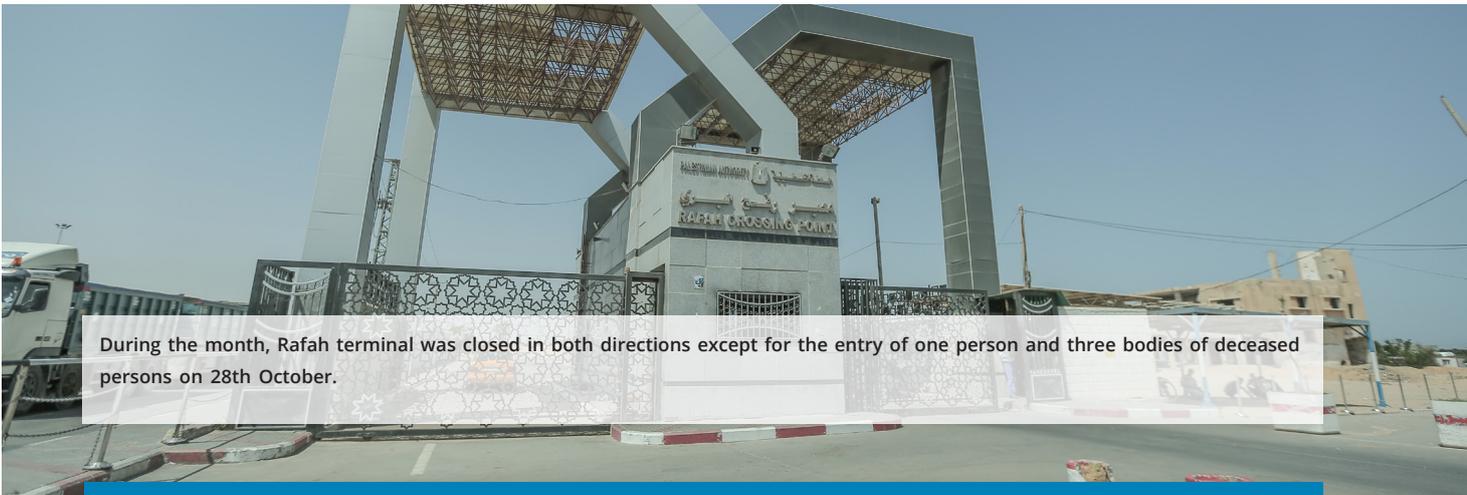
patients
crossed Beit Hanoun/
Erez for healthcare



267

patient companions
patient companions
crossed Beit Hanoun/
Erez

Rafah crossing - Egypt



During the month, Rafah terminal was closed in both directions except for the entry of one person and three bodies of deceased persons on 28th October.

The West Bank

In October, an unknown number of applications were submitted to Israeli authorities for permits for patients and their companions from the West Bank.

In the context of the permits system imposed by Israel, and following suspension of coordination of permit applications between Palestinian and Israeli authorities on 19 May, patients and companions from the West Bank are no longer able to apply through the Palestinian Civil Affairs Office for permits to enter East Jerusalem and Israel and instead have been applying directly to Israeli authorities present in the West Bank and through hospitals. Currently, there is no comprehensive data available for patient and companion permit applications to Israeli authorities.

Of health service providers, August Victoria Hospital reported the approval of 934 permit applications for patients living in the West Bank to reach its services during October.

St John Hospital gave a total of 1,944 appointments to patients residing in the West Bank in October. The hospital reported that 829 (43%) of appointments were reached, with 213 appointments for in-patients and 616 for out-patients.

Physicians for Human Rights Israel (PHRI) reported requesting permits for 3 patients and 3 companions. Two patient applications were approved (one adult, one child), along with their companions. One patient application was delayed (adult), along with their companion. The patient appointments were for oncology (1), general surgery (1) and neurology (1). Two patient visitor permit applications were also submitted by PHRI, both of which were approved.

The Israeli COGAT reported that during October there were 44,538 humanitarian crossings for health and non-health reasons, along with 338 ambulance crossings, from the West Bank to Israel.



No comprehensive data available for West Bank patient and companion permit applications following suspension to functioning of Civil Affairs Office

934 patient permits were recorded as approved for travel to Augusta Victoria Hospital. A further 829 West Bank patients were reported to have reached St. John Hospitals in East Jerusalem.

In Focus

Palestinian cancer patient made to concede Jerusalem identity card to apply for treatment



Hala¹ is 56 years old and lives in the Gaza Strip. In June 2019, she was diagnosed with breast cancer.

Hala underwent surgery and initial medical treatment in Gaza, but then she needed radiotherapy, a treatment that is unavailable in the Gaza Strip. She received an appointment for treatment at Augusta Victoria Hospital, one of the major Palestinian centres for cancer treatment located in East Jerusalem. She would need an Israeli-issued permit to travel.

Although Hala has lived in the Gaza Strip for the past 15 years, she was born and grew up in East Jerusalem. Palestinians in different parts of the occupied Palestinian territory are given different forms of identity card by Israel that provides them different entitlements under the occupation laws. For example, Palestinians issued an East Jerusalem residents' identity card are entitled to access Israeli medical insurance and can travel throughout Israel without a permit. Jerusalem residency for Palestinians, however, is conditional on demonstrating a continued 'centre of life' (place of work or residence) in the city. Without this, Palestinian Jerusalemites can lose their rights to remain – even to visit – the city of their birth. Between 1967 and 2018, Israel has revoked the residency status of more than 14,500 Palestinians from the city. Including dependent children, the estimated number of Palestinians who have lost residency rights in East Jerusalem rises to approximately 86,000².

Hala has lived in the Gaza Strip since 1984. For the past 15 years, in the context of the strict closure and blockade of the Gaza Strip, she has not visited her family in Jerusalem, and they have been unable to visit her. When Hala applied for a permit to exit the Gaza Strip to reach East Jerusalem for medical treatment, she reports being told that Israel classified her status as Israeli because of her Jerusalem ID card. Assuming this meant she could exit the Gaza Strip, Hala went to Beit Hanoun/Erez checkpoint to try to reach Jerusalem.

At Beit Hanoun/Erez checkpoint, Hala was told to return to Gaza and to change her identity card to a Palestinian one to travel. Hala reports this was the first time that she had heard about the Israeli 'centre of life' law as it applied to Palestinians from East Jerusalem. She said, "I told the Israeli officer at Erez that I am a cancer patient and I need radiotherapy now. He told me my Jerusalem identity card was not valid and that I must change it. I was shocked and returned back to Gaza."

In Gaza, Hala went to the Ministry of Interior to change her identity card. She continued, "I was forced to change my identity card. I was born a Jerusalem citizen and it is my right to remain one. This piece of card allowed me to travel to see my family. If it were not for my sickness, I would not change it! ... I need this treatment that is not available in Gaza, and I am from Jerusalem, from Wadi Al-Joz. I should be able to remain a citizen in the city of my birth."

Hala has now completed procedures to change her identity card. She is now again engaged in the process to apply for a permit for a hospital appointment on 17 January 2020. Hala lives in Gaza City with her husband and eight children, who all hope dearly that she will finally be able to travel in the new year to access the health care she needs.

¹ Hala is a pseudonym

² Al Haq, 2017. Residency revocation: Israel's forcible transfer of Palestinians from Jerusalem.