



MONTHLY REPORT

August 2021

Health Access

Barriers for patients in the occupied Palestinian territory

 **10,065**

referrals issued to access health facilities outside the Palestinian MoH

2,508 Gaza

7,430 West Bank

 **64%**

of Gaza patient permit applications approved

40%

of Gaza companion permit applications approved



West Bank
permit data pending

 **10**

Gaza patients called for security interrogation

IN FOCUS

"I'm a photographer, so my work depends on my sight."

Part 1 Referrals

August referrals by the Ministry of Health

In August, the Palestinian Ministry of Health (MoH) issued 10,065 referrals to health care services delivered by non-MoH providers, 30% higher than the monthly average (7,768) of the first half of 2021.

Referrals from the West Bank comprised 74% (7,430) of the total, including 1,132 referrals for patients from East Jerusalem, while the West Bank population comprises approximately 60% of the total population in the oPt. Referrals for the Gaza Strip (comprising around 40% of the oPt population) accounted for 25% (2,508) of the total in August. The origin of 127 (1%) of referrals was not reported.

Palestinian MoH referrals to hospitals in the West Bank, outside East Jerusalem, comprised just under half (48%) of all referrals in August; to East Jerusalem hospitals just under two-fifths (37%); within the Gaza Strip 6% (a decrease from 8% in 2020); to Israeli hospitals 5%; to Egypt 4%; and to Jordan 0.4% (36 referrals).

The top needed specialties for referrals were oncology (27%); cardiac catheterization (8%); urology & nephrology (6%); cardiology (6%); ophthalmology (5%); haematology (4%); medical imaging (4%); and (3%) each for orthopaedics, endoscopy, and radiotherapy. The remaining 31% were for 25 other medical specialties.

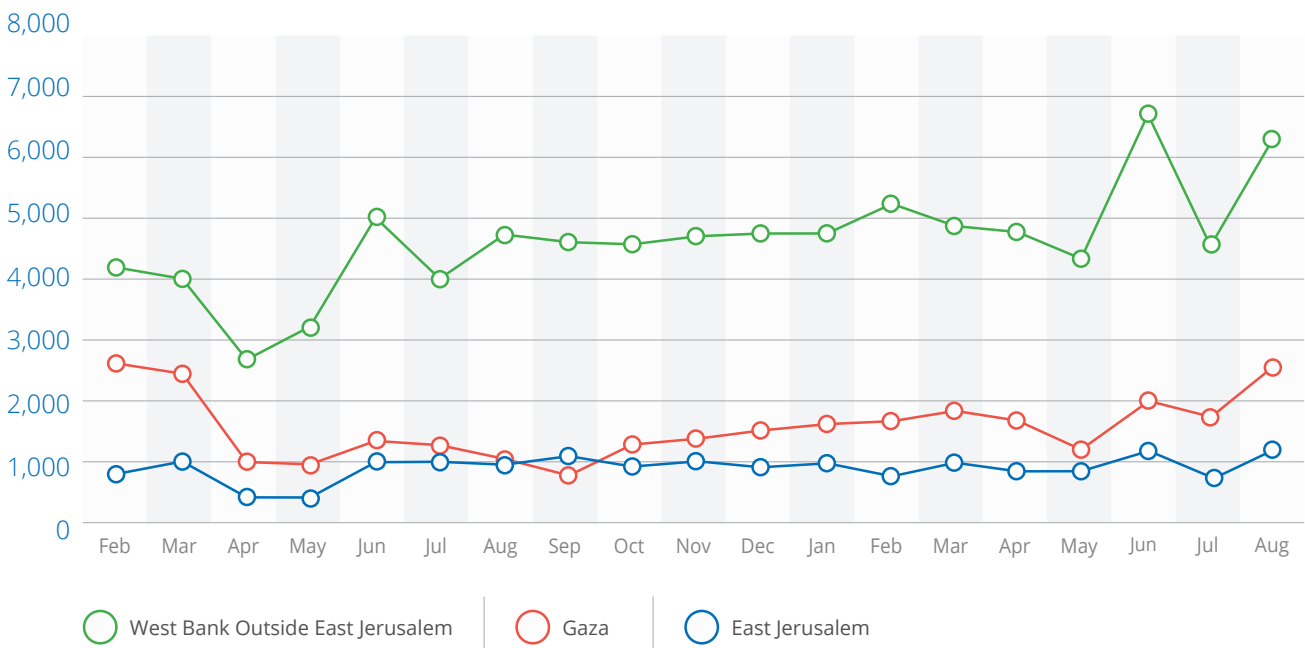
Referrals for patients under 18 years of age comprised 21% (2,073) of the total, while 29% (2,906) were for those aged 60 years or older. Referrals for female patients comprised 46% of the total.

2,508
Gaza Strip

7,430
West Bank

referrals approved financial coverage for health care outside the Palestinian Ministry of Health

Chart 1 Number of referrals issued by the Palestinian MoH by place of origin, February 2020 to August 2021



Part 2 Access

The Gaza Strip


There were 1,484 (M: 771; F: 713) patient permit applications for patients from the Gaza Strip to Israeli authorities in August 2021, the highest number of permit applications since February 2020 (1,760 permit applications), and 34% increase from the monthly average of the first half of the year (1,105).

More than a quarter (28%) of applications were for children under 18 and close to a fifth (18%) were for patients aged 60 years or older. Just under half (48%) were for female patients, while 84% were for referrals funded by the Palestinian MoH. More than half (55%) of applications to cross Beit Hanoun/Erez were for appointments in East Jerusalem hospitals; close to a third (30%) for West Bank hospitals outside East Jerusalem; 14% for Israeli hospitals; and 1 application for a hospital in Jordan. 48% of applications were for appointments at either Augusta Victoria Hospital (28%) or Makassed Hospital (20%), both in East Jerusalem. The top five specialties accounted for 75% of permit applications: oncology (39%); haematology (10%); ophthalmology (9%); cardiology (9%); and paediatrics (8%). The remaining 25% of applications were for 22 other specialties.

A further 97 permit applications for patients and companions were submitted through the Palestinian General Authority of Civil Affairs during August for travel by shuttle to Jordan, which requires approval of Israeli and Jordanian authorities for direct transfer from Beit Hanoun/Erez to the King Hussein Bridge crossing to Jordan, without entry to Israel or the West Bank. Jordanian hospitals issue an open appointment (rather than specifying a date) for these permit applications. Of the 97 applications, 24 (25%) were approved, 4 (4%) were denied and 69 (71%) remained pending at the time of monthly reporting.

Approved permit applications: 955 (M: 447; F: 508) or 64% of the 1,484 patient applications to cross Beit Hanoun/Erez in August 2021 were approved, a 10% decrease from the previous month but similar to the average of the first half of the year (64%).

53% of the approved applications were female patients, with a quarter (26%) for children under 18 and close to a quarter (23%) for patients aged 60 years or older. Just under half (49%) of approved applications were for oncology patients, 12% for haematology, 8% for cardiology, 7% for paediatric and the remaining 24% were for other 20 medical specialties.

 **1,484**
patient applications

to Israeli authorities to cross Beit Hanoun/Erez to access health care

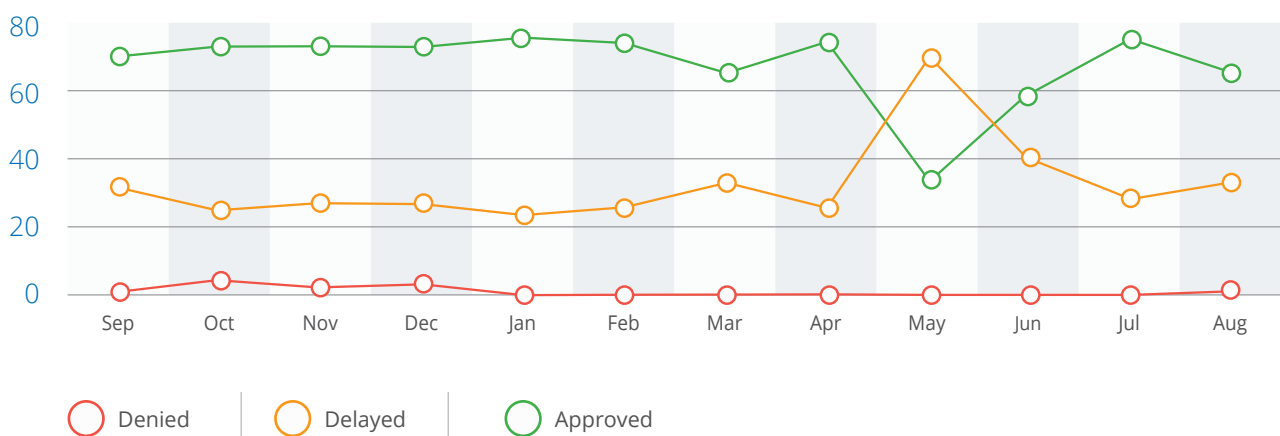
 **64%**
approved

 **1%**
denied

 **35%**
delayed

Chart 2

Israeli responses to Gaza patient permit applications, September 2020 to August 2021



Denied care: 9 (M: 4; F: 5) patients were denied in August: four aged 18 to 40, three aged 40 to 59 years and two patients aged 60 years or older. Three patients had appointments for ophthalmology, three for orthopaedics, one for oncology, one for general surgery and one for rehabilitation. Five were destined for hospitals in East Jerusalem and four in the West Bank outside East Jerusalem.

Delayed care: 520 (M: 320; F: 200) patient permit applications, or 35% of the total, were delayed access to care, receiving no definitive response to their application by the date of their hospital appointment. 33% (171 applications) were for children under the age of 18, while 11% (55) were for patients aged 60 years or older. Close to a quarter (23%) of those delayed had appointments for cancer care (oncology); 20% for ophthalmology; 10% for cardiology; 9% for paediatrics; 7% for orthopaedics; and 7% for haematology. The remaining 24% were for 18 other specialties.

Of delayed applications, 49% were for appointments in East Jerusalem hospitals, 32% for the West Bank, 19% for Israeli hospitals. Most delayed applications (508 or 98%) were 'under study' at the time of appointment.

Security interrogation

In August, 10 (M: 9; F: 1) patients were requested for security interrogation as a prerequisite to processing their permit application. Five of the patients were aged 18-40; and four aged 41-60, and one over 60 years. Four patients had appointments for neurosurgery, and the other six each had an appointment for oncology, haematology, nuclear medicine, cardiology, ophthalmology and urology. One out of the ten patients was approved and nine were delayed, with no definitive response by the date of their hospital appointments.

Patient companions

The Health Liaison Office submitted 1,849 companion permit applications to Israeli authorities to accompany patients in August. These applications include parents or other companions applying to travel with children. Patients are eligible to apply to Israeli authorities for one companion to accompany them for health care outside the Gaza Strip. In August, 738 companion permit applications (40% of the total) were approved, 23 applications (1%) were denied and the remaining 1,088 (59%) were delayed, receiving no definitive response by the time of the patient's appointment.

Patients and companions crossing Beit Hanoun/Erez

The Palestinian General Authority of Civil Affairs reported that 1,029 Gaza patients and 803 companions exited through Beit Hanoun/Erez checkpoint in August to access hospitals outside the Gaza Strip. Of the 1,029 patients, 95 were transferred by back-to-back ambulance with 94 companions. These numbers show that more than a fifth (22%) of patients crossed Beit Hanoun/Erez checkpoint in August without a companion. 19 bodies of deceased patients were returned to Gaza. During the month, Beit Hanoun/Erez checkpoint was open for 27 days for daytime working hours and closed on 4 days (4 Saturdays).



10

Gaza patient

called for security interrogation



1,849

companion applications

to Israeli authorities to cross Beit Hanoun/Erez to accompany patients



40% approved



1% denied



59% delayed



1,029

patients

exited through Beit Hanoun/Erez

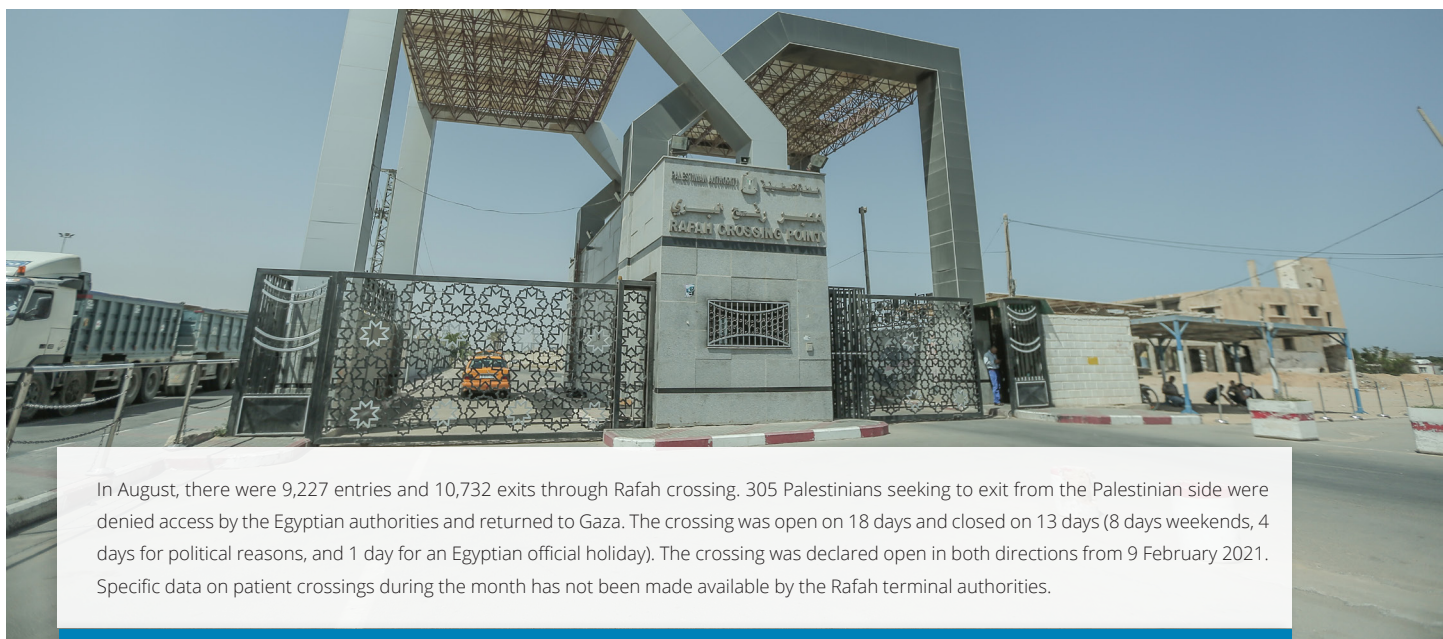


803

companions

exited through Beit Hanoun/Erez

Rafah crossing – Egypt



In August, there were 9,227 entries and 10,732 exits through Rafah crossing. 305 Palestinians seeking to exit from the Palestinian side were denied access by the Egyptian authorities and returned to Gaza. The crossing was open on 18 days and closed on 13 days (8 days weekends, 4 days for political reasons, and 1 day for an Egyptian official holiday). The crossing was declared open in both directions from 9 February 2021. Specific data on patient crossings during the month has not been made available by the Rafah terminal authorities.

West Bank patient and companion permits data pending



West Bank
permit data pending

The West Bank permits data for patients and companions for August 2021 from the Palestinian Civil Affairs Office remains pending.

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.

In Focus

“I’m a photographer, so my work depends on my sight.”

Tamer is a 39-year-old photojournalist from Rafah in the south of the Gaza Strip, working for the Associated Press (AP).

His sight has been deteriorating since he was diagnosed with a congenital eye condition in 2017. Tamer has required extensive treatments and investigations, not all available in the Gaza Strip. He received initial treatment in Gaza and Egypt, including corneal transplant and cataract operations. Due to the complexity of interventions needed, in February and September 2019 Tamer attempted twice to reach the eye clinic at Hadassah Ein Karim Hospital in Jerusalem but both times he was denied a permit by Israel to reach the hospital.

On the same day that Tamer’s second permit application was denied, he experienced a sudden worsening of his vision while traveling from Gaza City to his home in Khan Younis, in the south of the Gaza Strip. He was diagnosed with detachment of the retina at the back of his eye and needed urgent specialist intervention. The next month, October 2019, Tamer was approved a permit by Israel and Jordan for travel by direct shuttle to Jordan, for treatment in Amman. He traveled, but without any companion to accompany him.

“I needed somebody to guide me because my limited vision. People helped me along the way and in Jordan I asked strangers to help me until I reached the hospital. There the AP [Associated Press] manager in Jordan arrived and he helped me a lot during my stay.”

During his time in Jordan, Tamer saw his mother for the first time in nearly 20 years. She is Palestinian and lives in the town of Al-Lydd (Lod), to the west of Jerusalem. Because she has Israeli citizenship, she has not been able to visit her family in Gaza. Tamer had last seen his mother in Akka (Akko/Acre) in 2000.



Table 1
History of Tamer's applications for an Israeli medical permit and outcomes

| Date of application | Hospital | Response |
|---------------------|--------------------|------------|
| 21/02/2019 | Hadassah Ein Karim | ⊗ Denied |
| 09/09/2019 | Hadassah Ein Karim | ⊗ Denied |
| 07/10/2019 | Jordan by Shuttle | ✓ Approved |
| 04/01/2021 | Hadassah Ein Karim | ✓ Approved |
| 08/02/2021 | Hadassah Ein Karim | ✓ Approved |
| 14/02/2021 | Hadassah Ein Karim | ✓ Approved |
| 01/03/2021 | Hadassah Ein Karim | ✓ Approved |
| 22/03/2021 | Hadassah Ein Karim | ✓ Approved |
| 18/04/2021 | Hadassah Ein Karim | ✓ Approved |
| 26/04/2021 | Hadassah Ein Karim | ⊙ Delayed |
| 24/05/2021 | Hadassah Ein Karim | ⊙ Delayed |
| 13/06/2021 | Hadassah Ein Karim | ⊙ Delayed |
| 27/06/2021 | Hadassah Ein Karim | ⊙ Delayed |
| 01/08/2021 | Hadassah Ein Karim | ⊙ Delayed |

In Jordan, Tamer had laser treatment to his right eye and surgery in his left. From January 2020, he received his first permit approval to reach Hadassah Ein Karim Hospital in Jerusalem, and he traveled to the hospital six times between 4 January and 18 April.

“At Hadassah, they told me I would need surgery for my right eye as well, but it would only be possible after my left eye improved... I had smooth access to Hadassah up until [April]... After that, I lost five appointments. My last application for 1 August was not approved in time for my appointment.”

Tamer talked about how his illness and the uncertainty of accessing treatment has affected his health and his family life during these past years.

“I want to go back to what I had before, even half the vision I had before. I've gained weight and it hurts to stay at home and not be able to move like I used to. I'll apply as many as needed to get a permit to reach treatment but waiting is unbearable. The AP

[Associated Press] is trying and won't stop until we get good news. I need the treatment; I can't stay at home like this. I've had to bear this for three years.

My children are young, and my wife has supported me through all this. The kids see their father stay home rather than the active father they knew before – who was working, who took them out, who took them down to the beach. I'm not able to do any of those things with them now.”

As a photojournalist, Tamer worries about his work and his future.

“I'm so afraid of losing my sight. If I lose that, I won't be able to work. I'm a photographer, so my work depends on my sight. I convey a message from behind the camera, but I can't tell that message now.”

Tamer's employer is trying to coordinate with Israeli authorities for his security clearance to travel.