

MONTHLY REPORT

September 2021



Health Access

Barriers for patients in the occupied Palestinian territory

 **8752**

referrals issued to access health facilities outside the Palestinian MoH

2,050 Gaza

6,572 West Bank

 **54%**

of Gaza patient permit applications approved

35%

of Gaza companion permit applications approved

 **84%**

of West Bank patient permit applications approved

77%

of West Bank companion permit applications approved

 **2**

Gaza patients called for security interrogation

IN FOCUS

Maisa, 37, prevented access to treatment for lung cancer

Part 1 Referrals

September referrals by the Ministry of Health

In September, the Palestinian Ministry of Health (MoH) issued 8,752 referrals to health care services delivered by non-MoH providers, 13% higher than the monthly average (7,768) for the first half of 2021. Referrals from the West Bank comprised 75% (6,572) of the total, including 1,088 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 accounted for 23% (2,050) of the total in September. The origin of 129 (1%) of referrals was not reported.

Palestinian MoH referrals to hospitals in the West Bank, outside East Jerusalem, comprised 47% of referrals in September; to East Jerusalem hospitals 39%; within the Gaza Strip 4% (reduced from 8% in 2020); to Israeli hospitals 4%; to Egypt 5%; and to Jordan 0.6% (51 referrals).

The top needed specialties for referrals were oncology (25%); cardiac catheterization (7%); urology & nephrology (7%); cardiology (6%); ophthalmology (5%); haematology (4%); medical imaging (4%); and (3%) each for orthopaedics, paediatrics, endoscopy, radiotherapy and lab examinations. The remaining 27% were for 22 other medical specialties.

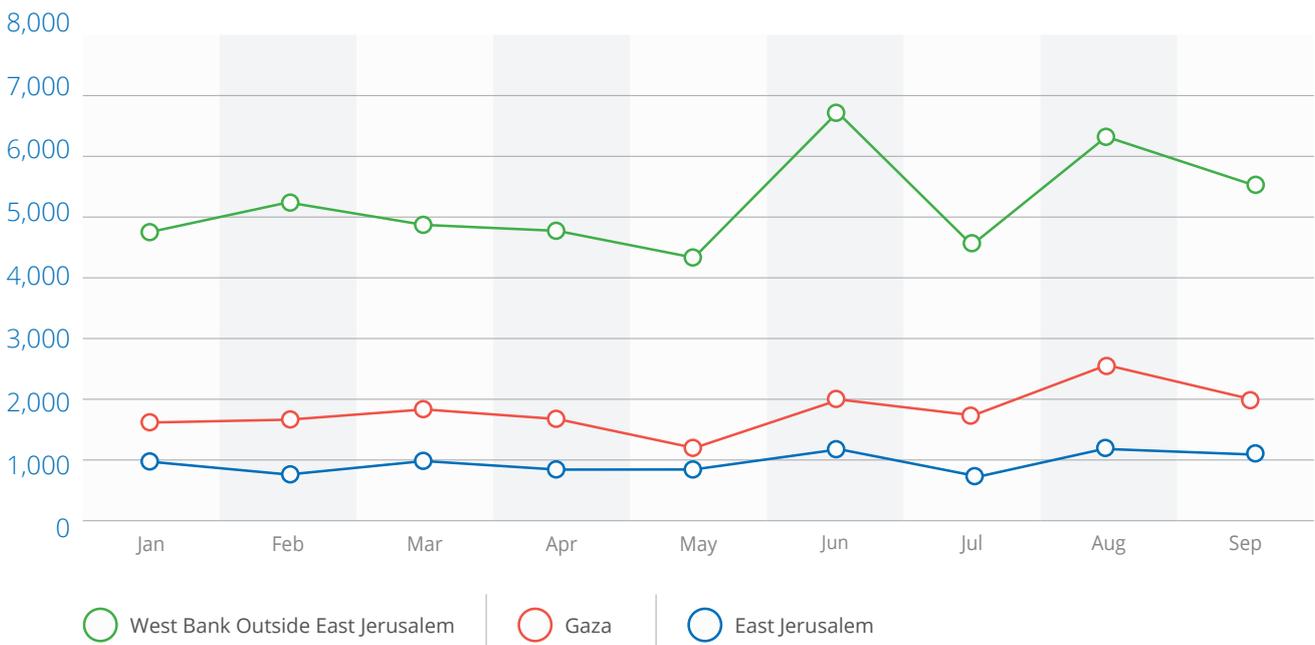
Referrals for patients under 18 years of age comprised 22% (1,915) of the total, while 27% (2,392) were for those aged 60 years or older. Referrals for female patients comprised 46% of the total.

 **2,050**
Gaza Strip

 **6,572**
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, January to September 2021



Part 2 Access

The Gaza Strip

There were 1,370 (M: 710; F: 660) patient permit applications for patients from the Gaza Strip to Israeli authorities in September 2021.

More than a quarter (27%) of applications were for children under 18 and close to a fifth (19%) were for patients aged 60 years or older. 48% were for female patients, while 88% were for referrals funded by the Palestinian MoH. 54% of applications to cross Beit Hanoun/Erez were for appointments in East Jerusalem hospitals; 34% for West Bank hospitals outside East Jerusalem; 11% for Israeli hospitals; and 4 applications for a hospital in Jordan. 48% of applications were for appointments at either Augusta Victoria Hospital (21%) or Makassed Hospital (27%), both in East Jerusalem. The top five specialties accounted for 73% of permit applications: oncology (39%); haematology (10%); ophthalmology (9%); cardiology (8%); and paediatrics (7%). The remaining 27% of applications were for 22 other specialties.

A further 72 permit applications for patients and companions were submitted through the Palestinian General Authority of Civil Affairs during September 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 72 applications, 10 (14%) were approved, 9 (13%) were denied and 53 (73%) remained pending at the time of monthly reporting.

Approved permit applications: 740 (M: 361; F: 379) or 54% of the 1,370 patient applications to cross Beit Hanoun/Erez in September 2021 were approved, one of two lowest records since April 2019 when the approval rate was 53%. In May 2021, the approval rate dropped to 31% during the military escalation.

51% of the approved applications were female patients, with a quarter (27%) for children under 18 and close to a quarter (23%) for patients aged 60 years or older. Over half (51%) of approved applications were for oncology patients, 12% for haematology, 7% for cardiology, 6% for paediatric and the remaining 24% were for other 18 medical specialties.

 **1,370**
patient applications

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

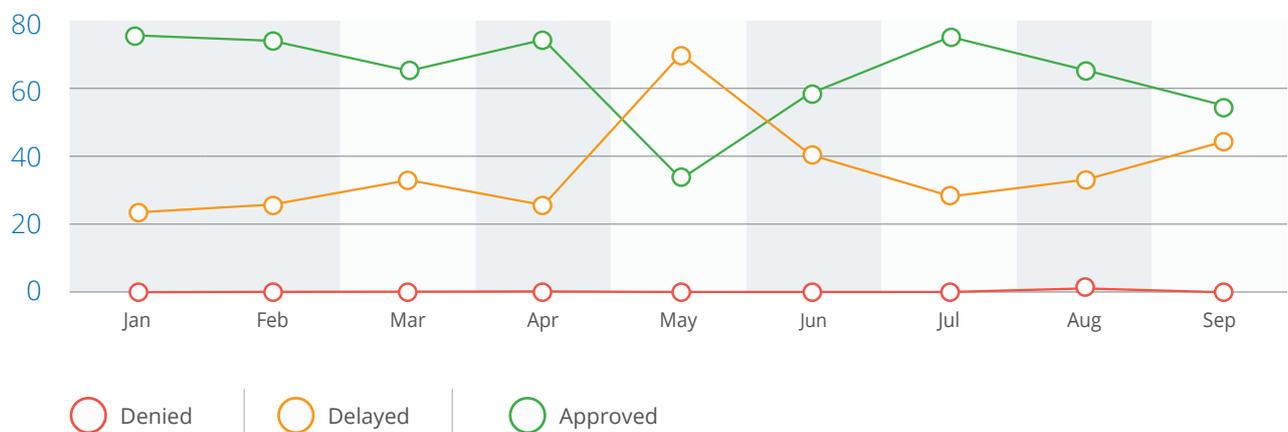
 **54%**
approved

 **1%**
denied

 **45%**
delayed

Chart 2

Israeli responses to Gaza patient permit applications, January to September 2021 (%)



Denied care: 10 (M: 6; F: 4) patients were denied in September: two children under 18 years of age, two aged 18 to 40, four aged 40 to 59 years and two patients aged 60 years or older. One of the denied children was a five-year-old with retinal detachment denied based on an allegation that his father remained outside the Gaza Strip, in either the West Bank or Israel. The other child was a new-born baby with a congenital heart disease. Five patients had appointments for ophthalmology, two for orthopaedics, one for cardiology, one for general surgery and one for chest disease. Seven were destined for hospitals in East Jerusalem, two for the West Bank outside East Jerusalem and one for an Israeli hospital.

Delayed care: 620 (M: 343; F: 277) patient permit applications, or 45% of the total, were delayed access to care, receiving no definitive response to their application by the date of their hospital appointment. 26% (161 applications) were for children under the age of 18, while 14% (89) were for patients aged 60 years or older. More than a quarter (27%) of those delayed had appointments for cancer care (oncology); 14% for ophthalmology; 8% for orthopaedics; 8% for cardiology; 7% for haematology; and 7% for paediatrics. The remaining 29% were for 18 other specialties.

Of delayed applications, 50% were for appointments in East Jerusalem hospitals, 40% for the West Bank, 9% for Israeli hospitals and two applications to Jordan. Most delayed applications (611 or 99%) were 'under study' at the time of appointment.

Security interrogation

In September, two male patients were requested for security interrogation as a prerequisite to processing their permit application. One is 40 years old with ophthalmic disease and the other is 39 years old with cancer. Both had appointments in Najah Hospital in Nablus, West Bank. Both of their permit applications were delayed, remaining under study at the time of their hospital appointments.

Patient companions

The Health Liaison Office submitted 1,636 companion permit applications to Israeli authorities to accompany patients in September. 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 September, 566 companion permit applications (35% of the total) were approved, 24 applications (1%) were denied and the remaining 1,046 (64%) 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 805 Gaza patients and 615 companions exited through Beit Hanoun/Erez checkpoint in September to access hospitals outside the Gaza Strip. Of the 805 patients, 71 were transferred by back-to-back ambulance with 67 companions. These numbers show that **close to a quarter (23%) of patients** crossed Beit Hanoun/Erez checkpoint in September without a companion. 17 bodies of deceased patients were returned to Gaza. During the month, Beit Hanoun/Erez checkpoint was open for 20 days for daytime working hours and closed on 10 days (4 Saturdays and 6 days for Jewish holidays).

 **2**
Gaza patient
called for security interrogation

 **1,636**
companion applications
to Israeli authorities to cross
Beit Hanoun/Erez to accompany
patients

 **35% approved**

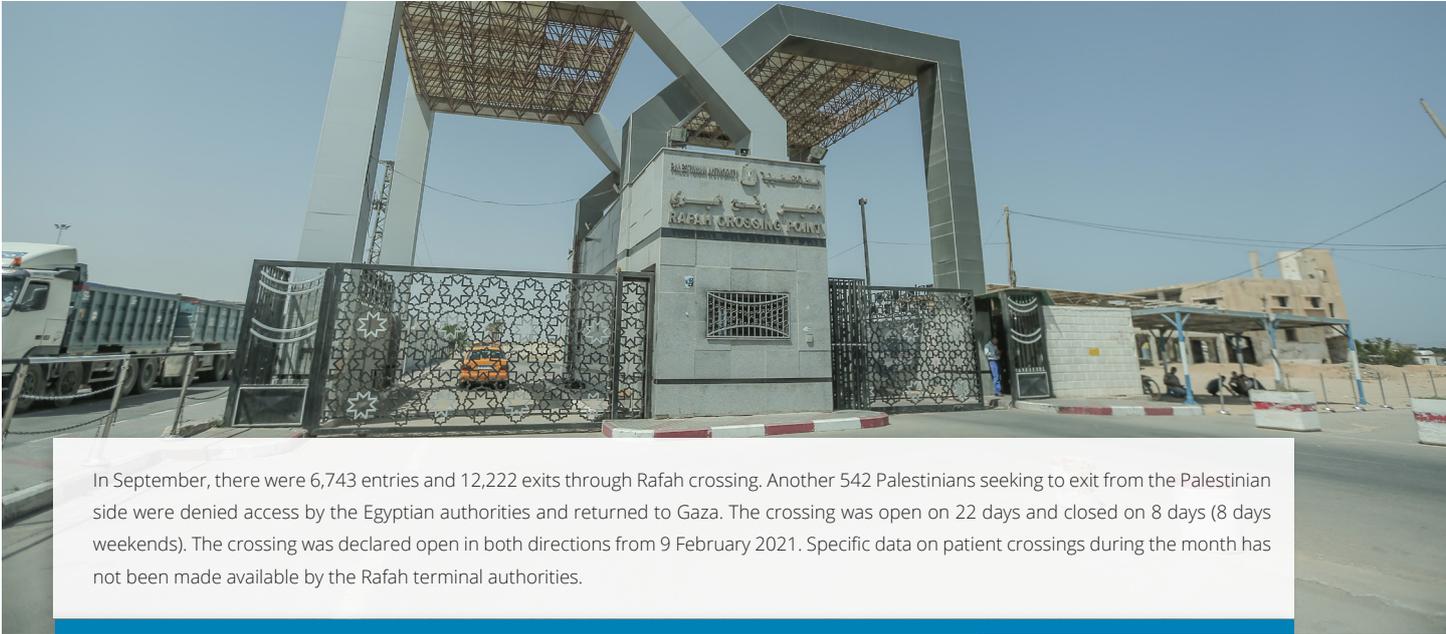
 **1% denied**

 **64% delayed**

 **805**
patients
exited through Beit
Hanoun/Erez

 **615**
companions
exited through Beit
Hanoun/Erez

Rafah crossing – Egypt



In September, there were 6,743 entries and 12,222 exits through Rafah crossing. Another 542 Palestinians seeking to exit from the Palestinian side were denied access by the Egyptian authorities and returned to Gaza. The crossing was open on 22 days and closed on 8 days (8 days weekends). 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.

The West Bank

In September 2021, there were 6,408 permit applications by patients and 7,251 by patient companions from the West Bank outside East Jerusalem 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, 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 6,408 West Bank patient applications, 5,407 (84%) were approved, 679 (11%) were unsuccessful (denied) and 322 (5%) were pending reply at the time of monthly reporting.

Of the 7,251 West Bank companion applications, 5,582 (77%) were approved, 1,182 (16%) were unsuccessful and 487 (7%) were pending reply at the time of monthly reporting.

 **6,408**
patient permit
applications

for Israeli permits to access
healthcare in East Jerusalem
and Israel

 **84% approved**

 **11% unsuccessful**

 **5% pending**
at the time of monthly
reporting

 **7,251**
patient companion
applications

to access healthcare in East
Jerusalem and Israel

 **77% approved**

 **16% unsuccessful**

 **7% pending**
at the time of monthly
reporting

In Focus

Maisa, 37, prevented access to treatment for lung cancer

Maisa is 37 years old and from Deir Al Balah refugee camp in the Middle Area of the Gaza Strip. She was diagnosed with lung cancer in July 2021.

Since July, Maisa applied three times for a permit to reach An-Najah Hospital in the West Bank, to receive cancer treatments that are not available in the Gaza Strip. None of her applications has been approved, and she has still not been able to receive the treatment she needs.

As a mother of seven, Maisa described how she likes to teach her children and support them with their homework. She said, "I like to tell my children stories and I love to help them with drawing and decorating their notebooks." She also likes to write: "When I feel stressed, I write about my troubles but I never share my writing with others. I feel a relief after writing and then I throw away what I wrote." In recent months, however, Maisa has had less energy to do the things she loves.

Maisa's health has been worsening. She said, "Now I struggle to climb the stairs to our apartment on the fourth floor. It makes me breathless and causes me pain in my chest, and I missed some appointments at the hospital because of difficulty getting in and out of the house. My daughters and my husband are having to take care of me. My daughters divide their time between studying, taking care of me, and looking after the house. I used to enjoy visiting my brothers in Gaza City, but recently we haven't been able to visit. My family become afraid when I get tired going out."

Maisa worries about how her children are affected by her illness. "The worst is when I suffer pain and my young children look at me. They want to help but they can't and I see the sadness in their eyes. It adds to my pain."

Mohammed, Maisa's husband, commented "I want to help my wife and I'm trying to do my best in this dire situation, but I feel helpless. I want her to get the treatment she needs as soon as possible. I would sell our car to cover the expenses if needed, but the treatment just isn't available in Gaza. We would travel to Egypt if we can't reach the West Bank, but there are so many delays. Maisa has waited too long, she needs this treatment now."

