

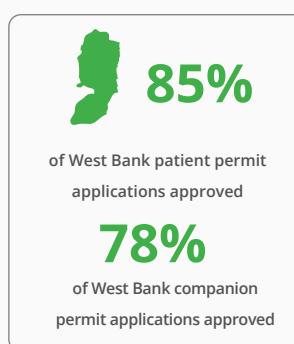
MONTHLY REPORT

March 2022



Health Access

Barriers for patients in the occupied Palestinian territory



IN FOCUS

Gaza child dies following repeated permit delays by Israel

Part 1 Referrals

March referrals by the Ministry of Health

In March, the Palestinian Ministry of Health (MoH) issued 9,797 referrals to health care services delivered by non-MoH providers, 18% higher than the monthly average (8,308) for 2021. Referrals from the West Bank comprised 75% (7,360) of the total, including 1,198 referrals for patients from East Jerusalem, while referrals for the Gaza Strip accounted for 23% (2,270) of the total. Four referral was issued for a Palestinian patients present in Jordan, while the origin of 163 referrals (2%) was not reported.

Palestinian MoH referrals to hospitals in the West Bank, outside East Jerusalem, comprised 50% of referrals in March; to East Jerusalem hospitals 33%; within the Gaza Strip 7%; to Israeli hospitals 6%; to Egypt 3%; to Jordan 0.3% (27 referrals) and 0.04% (4) to Turkey.

The top ten needed specialties for referrals were oncology (24%); cardiac catheterization (10%); cardiology (7%); ophthalmology (5%); medical imaging (5%); urology & nephrology (4%); haematology (4%); radiation therapy (3%); paediatrics (3%); and endoscopy (3%). The remaining 32% were for 26 other medical specialties.

Referrals for patients under 18 years of age comprised 21% (2,017) of the total, while 30% (2,898) were for those aged 60 years or older. Referrals for female patients comprised 45% of the total.

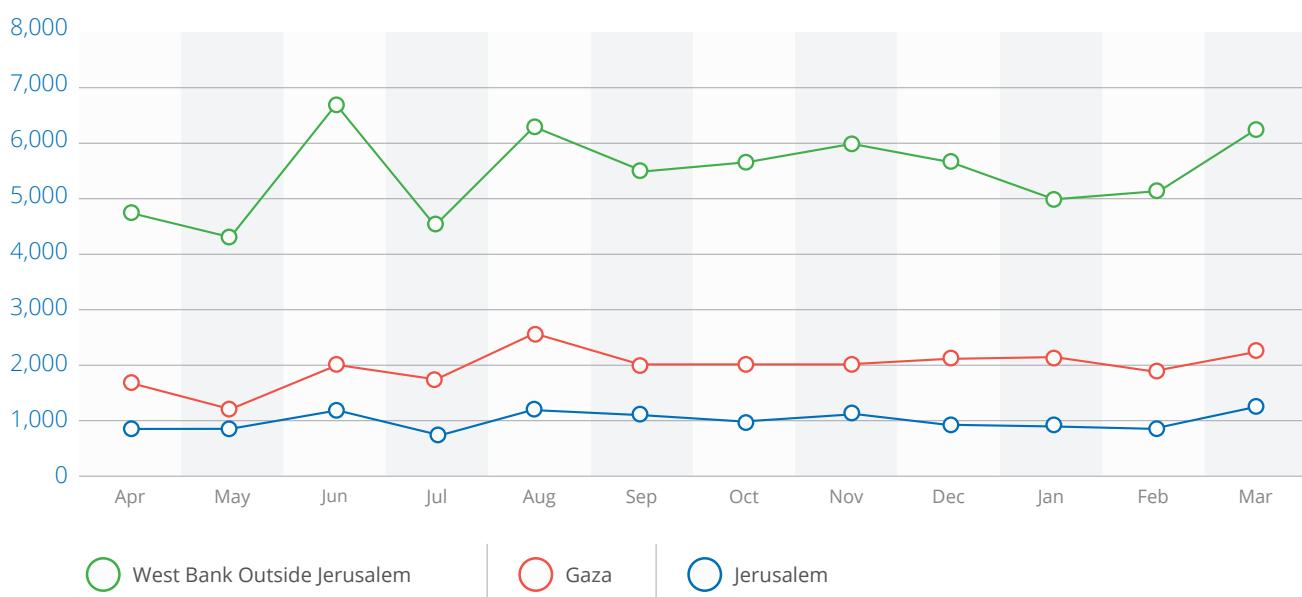
 **2,270**
Gaza Strip

 **7,360**
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, April 2021 to March 2022



Part 2 Access

The Gaza Strip

There were 1,667 (M: 881; F: 786) patient permit applications for patients from the Gaza Strip to Israeli authorities in March 2022.

A third (31%) of applications were for children under 18 and close to a fifth (17%) was for patients over 60 years old. 47% were for female patients, while 81% were for referrals funded by the Palestinian MoH. Approximately half (48%) of applications to cross Beit Hanoun/Erez were for appointments in East Jerusalem hospitals; 33% for West Bank hospitals outside East Jerusalem; and 19% for Israeli hospitals. More than two fifths (42%) of applications were for appointments at either Augusta Victoria Hospital (20%) or Makassed Hospital (22%), both in East Jerusalem. The top five specialties accounted for 69% of permit applications: oncology (32%); cardiology (13%); haematology (10%); ophthalmology (7%); and paediatrics (7%). The remaining 31% of applications were for 22 other specialties.

A further 101 permit applications for patients and companions were submitted through the Palestinian General Authority of Civil Affairs during March 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 formal entry to Israel or the West Bank. Jordanian hospitals issue an open appointment (rather than specifying a date) for these permit applications. Of the 101 applications, 18 (18%) were approved, 4 (4%) were denied and 79 (78%) remained pending at the time of monthly reporting.

Approved permit applications: 1,084 (M: 531; F: 553) or 65% of the 1,667 patient applications to cross Beit Hanoun/Erez in March 2022 were approved, 2% higher than the approval rate for 2021. The approval rate of patient permit applications varies by sex and age of patients. In March, the average approval for male patient permit applications was 60%, while the approval rate for female patient applications was 70%. Men aged 18 to 40 had the lowest approval rate, at 46%. Women aged 18 to 40 had the lowest approval rate among females at 61%, while women over 60 years of age had the highest approval rate of 81% - see Table 1.

 **1,667**
patient applications

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

 **65%**
approved

 **1%**
denied

 **34%**
delayed

Table 1

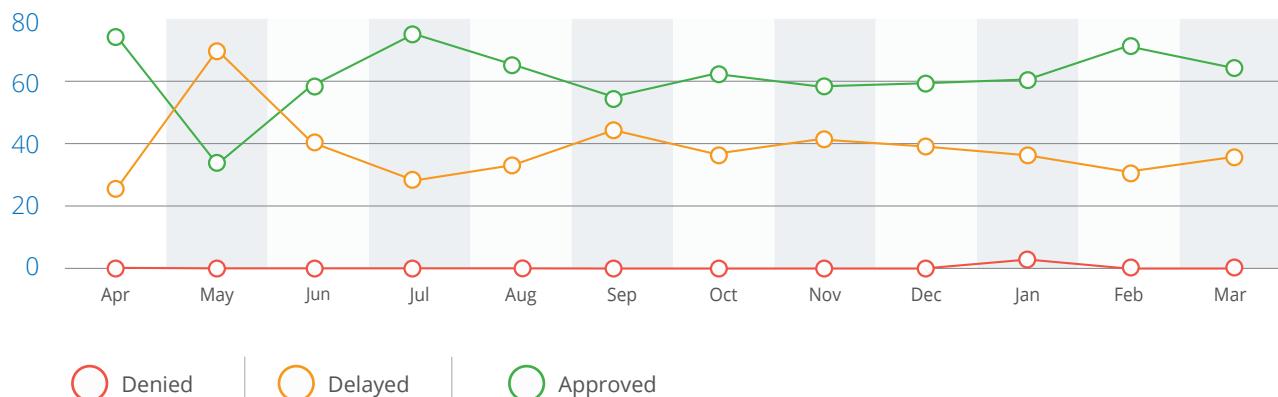
Approval rate for patient permit applications in March 2022, by age and sex

AGE	Number of applications		Approved	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
0-3	75	67	73%	73%
4-17	218	157	63%	73%
18-40	234	221	46%	61%
41-60	199	212	59%	72%
over 60	155	129	73%	81%
sub-total	881	786	60%	70%
Total	1667		65%	
General approval rate				65%

Similarly, approval rates vary by referred specialty. In March, specialties with an approval rate higher than the average of 65% included Intensive care at 86%, haematology at 80%, heart surgery at 75%, cancer care (oncology) at 75%, ENT at 72%, paediatrics at 69%, and vascular surgery at 67%. Specialties with an approval rate lower than the average of 65% included cardiology 63%, obstetrics/gynaecology 62%, general surgery 61%, internal medicine 56%, nuclear medicine 55%, neurosurgery 54%, ophthalmology 51%, orthopaedics 50%, urology 47%, nephrology 42%, and neurology 22%.

Chart 2

Israeli responses to Gaza patient permit applications, April 2021 to March 2022 (%)



Denied care: 11 (M: 10; F:1) patient permit applications, comprising 0.7% of the total for Gaza, were denied in March,. These included four children under 18; three adults aged 18 to 40; and four adults aged 41 to 60 years. Two patients were referred for general surgery; two for cardiology; and one each for oncology, ophthalmology, respiratory medicine, internal medicine, ENT, neurology and neurosurgery. Eight patients were referred to hospitals in East Jerusalem and three were referred to the West Bank outside East Jerusalem.

Delayed care: 572 (M: 340; F: 232) patient permit applications, or 34% of the total, were delayed access to care, receiving no definitive response to their application by the date of their hospital appointment. 27% (157 applications) were for children under the age of 18, while 12% (67) were for patients over 60 years. Of delayed applications, 44% were for appointments in East Jerusalem hospitals, 37% for the West Bank, and 19% for Israeli hospitals. Most delayed applications (542 or 95%) were 'under study' at the time of appointment. 2 applications were delayed based on allegation of relatives staying illegally in Israel or West Bank.

Security interrogation and arrests

16 (M: 15; F: 1) patients were called for security interrogation in March, the largest number of patients requested for interrogation since January 2020. Five were 18-40 years, ten were 41-60 years, and one was over 60 years of age. Four had an appointment for ophthalmology; three for cancer care (oncology); three for cardiology; and one each for general surgery, heart surgery, internal medicine, neurosurgery, orthopedics and urology. Eight of these patients had applied to reach hospitals in East Jerusalem and eight to hospitals in the West Bank. Five patients of the sixteen (31%) were approved permit after interrogation, eight remained pending under study, and three remained waiting appointments for security interrogation.

Patient companions

The Health Liaison Office submitted 2,076 companion permit applications to Israeli authorities to accompany patients in March. 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 March, 814 companion permit applications (39% of the total) were approved, 23 applications (1%) were denied and the remaining 1239 (60%) were delayed, receiving no definitive response by the time of the patient's hospital appointment.

16
Gaza patients
called for security interrogation

0
Gaza patients or
companions
arrested

2,076
companion applications

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

39% approved

1% denied

60% delayed

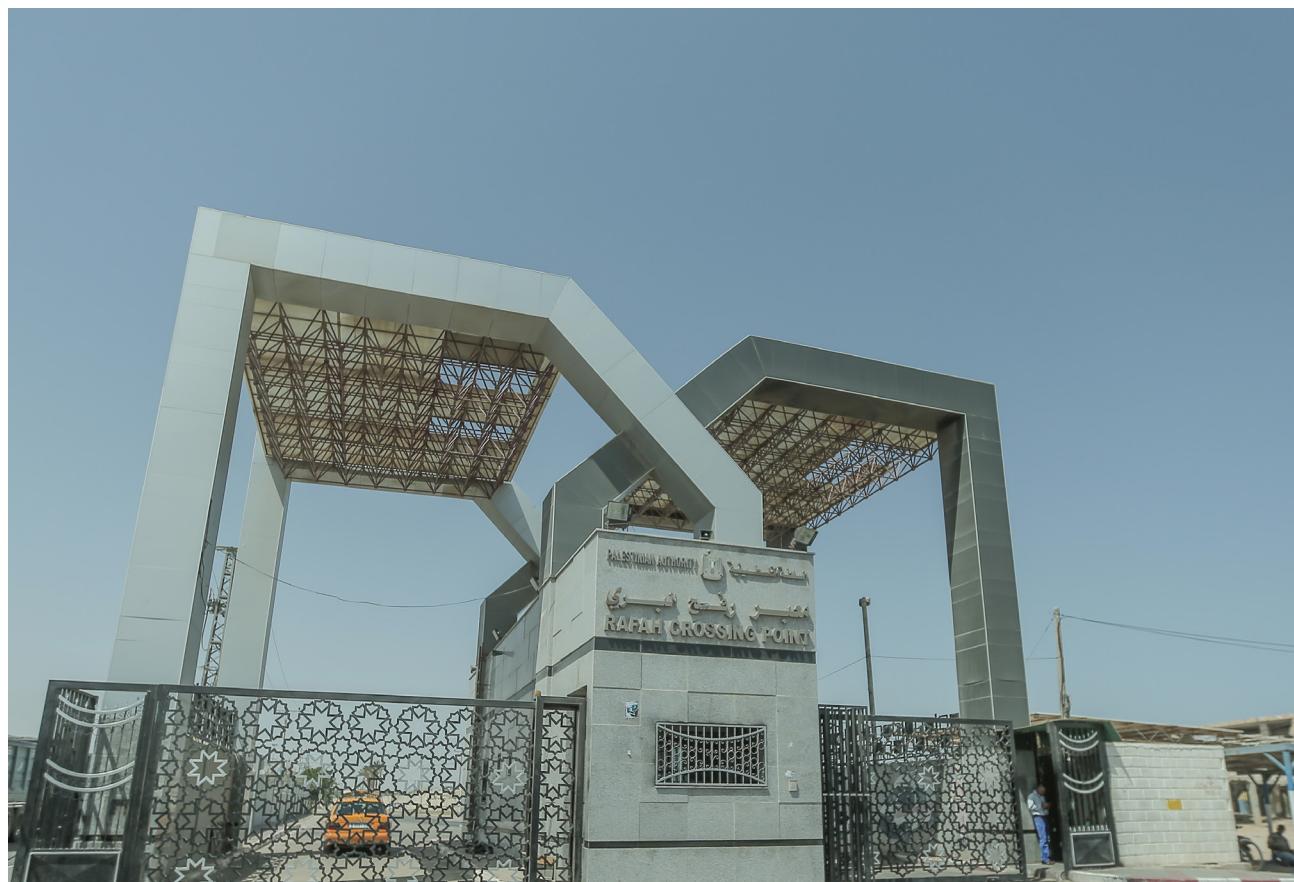
Patients and companions crossing Beit Hanoun/Erez

The Palestinian General Authority of Civil Affairs reported that 1,210 Gaza patients and 927 companions exited through Beit Hanoun/Erez checkpoint in March to access hospitals outside the Gaza Strip. Of the 1,210 patients, 81 were transferred by back-to-back ambulance with 81 companions. These numbers show that **close to quarter 283 (23%) of patients** crossed Beit Hanoun/Erez checkpoint without a companion. The bodies of 19 deceased patients were returned to Gaza in March. During the month, Beit Hanoun/Erez checkpoint was open for 27 days for daytime working hours and closed on 4 days (4 Saturdays).

 **1,210**
patients
exited through Beit Hanoun/Erez

 **927**
companions
exited through Beit Hanoun/Erez

Rafah crossing – Egypt



In March, there were **11,646** entries and **11,392** exits through Rafah crossing. Another **524** Palestinians seeking to exit from the Palestinian side were denied access by the Egyptian authorities and returned to Gaza. The crossing was open on **23** days and closed on **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 ambulance service of the Ministry of Health in Gaza reported that their ambulance transferred 112 patients from the Palestinian side to the Egyptian side of the terminal and returned 11 bodies of deceased persons during the month.

The West Bank

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.

Patients: In March 2022, there were 7,767 permit applications by patients from the West Bank outside Jerusalem to Israeli authorities to access health care in East Jerusalem and in Israel. 3,502 (45%) were for male patients and 4,265 (55%) were for female patients. 1,492 (19%) were for children under age of 18 years and 849 (11%) were for patients aged 60 years or older. 70% of patient applications were for appointments in East Jerusalem Hospitals and 30% in Israeli hospitals or clinics. Of the 7,767 West Bank patient applications in March, 6,608 (85%) were approved, 887 (11%) were unsuccessful (denied) and 272 (4%) were pending reply at the time of monthly reporting.

Companions: In March 2022, there were 9,187 patient companion permit applications to Israeli authorities from the West Bank outside East Jerusalem, to access health care in East Jerusalem and Israel. 46% were for male companions and 54% were for female companions. 91% of companion permit applications were for companions aged from 18-59 years. Of the 9,187 West Bank companion applications, 7,152 (78%) were approved, 1,685 (18%) were unsuccessful and 350 (4%) were pending reply at the time of monthly reporting.

 **7,767**
patient permit
applications

for Israeli permits to access healthcare in East Jerusalem and Israel

 **85% approved**

 **11% unsuccessful**

 **4% pending**
at the time of monthly reporting

 **9,187**
patient companion
applications

to access healthcare in East Jerusalem and Israel

 **78% approved**

 **18% unsuccessful**

 **4% pending**
at the time of monthly reporting

In Focus

Gaza child dies following repeated permit delays by Israel

Fatma Al-Masri was a 19-month-old girl from Khan Younis in the Gaza Strip. She died on 25 March 2022 after she was delayed access to lifesaving cardiac surgery for nearly three months.

Fatma was born with a congenital heart condition known as an atrial septal defect. She needed curative surgery at Makassed Hospital in East Jerusalem and was required by Israel to obtain a permit to reach her hospital appointment. Her family applied three times for permits to reach hospital appointments on 28 December 2021, 13 February 2022, and 5 April 2022. She also received hospital appointments for 6 and 27 March, though at this stage no permit application was submitted by the Palestinian Health Liaison Office. Fatma's father was told this was because there would not enough time for processing of the permit application.



Table 2 Fatma's hospital appointments and permit applications

Appointment Date	Permit application date	Destination	Israeli Response
28/12/21	26/12/21 (urgent)	Makassed Hospital	Under study
13/02/22	31/01/22	Makassed Hospital	Under study
06/03/22	No application	Makassed Hospital	N/A
27/03/22	No application	Makassed Hospital	N/A
05/04/22	22/03/22	Makassed Hospital	Under study (Response after Fatma's death)

Since December 2021 and her first hospital appointment for heart surgery, Fatma's health had been gradually deteriorating as her heart began to fail despite medical treatment and follow up by doctors in the Gaza Strip.

"I was out the day Fatma died. My brother called and asked me to come home because Fatma was tired. They called an ambulance, which arrived before I got home. She died before she reached the hospital. We were in shock. I felt like I had died," Fatma's father said. "Everyone in the family loved Fatma dearly, she was so precious to all of us. Especially to my wife and me. She came to us after five years of fertility treatment. Our hearts are broken."

On 4 April, ten days after Fatma's death, her family received a text message telling them that Fatma's application for a patient permit remained under study.