



MONTHLY REPORT

July 2021

Health Access

Barriers for patients in the occupied Palestinian territory


7,274

referrals issued to access health facilities outside the Palestinian MoH

1,799 Gaza

5,387 West Bank


74%

of Gaza patient permit applications approved

49%

of Gaza companion permit applications approved


88%

of West Bank patient permit applications approved

79%

of West Bank companion permit applications approved


1

Gaza patients called for security interrogation

IN FOCUS

"My three-year-old son, Ameer, had cancer in his eyes. Now he needs treatment."

Part 1 Referrals

July referrals by the Ministry of Health

In July, the Palestinian Ministry of Health (MoH) issued 7,274 referrals to health care services delivered by non-MoH providers, 6% less than the monthly average (7,768) of the first half of 2021.

Referrals from the West Bank comprised 74% (5,387) of the total, including 791 referrals for patients from East Jerusalem, while the West Bank population comprises approximately 60% of the total population in the oPt. The Gaza Strip makes up around 40% of the population in the oPt, while referrals from Gaza accounted for 25% (1,799) of the total in July. The origin of 88 (1%) of referrals was not reported.

Palestinian MoH referrals to hospitals in the West Bank, outside East Jerusalem, comprised just under half (47%) of all referrals in July; to East Jerusalem hospitals just under two-fifths (37%); to Israeli hospitals 5%; within the Gaza Strip 5% (a decrease from 8% in 2020); to Egypt 5%; and to Jordan 1%.

The top needed specialties for referrals were oncology (26%); urology & nephrology (8%); cardiac catheterization (6%); cardiology (6%); ophthalmology (5%); haematology (4%); medical imaging (4%); and (3%) each for orthopaedics, endoscopy, paediatrics and radiotherapy. The remaining 29% were for 24 other medical specialties.

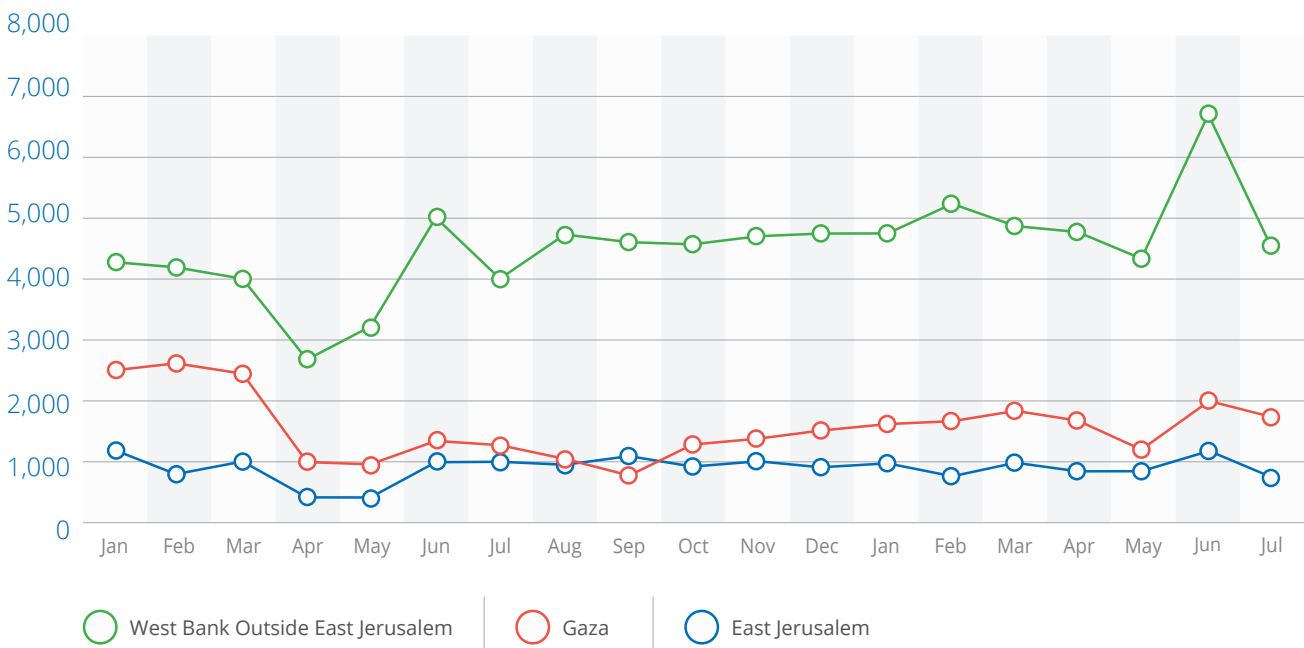
Referrals for patients under 18 years of age comprised 22% (1,605) of the total, while 29% (2,095) were for those aged 60 years or older. Referrals for female patients comprised 47% of the total.

 **1,799**
Gaza Strip

 **5,387**
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, January 2020 to July 2021



Part 2 Access

The Gaza Strip

There were 1,136 (M: 563; F: 573) patient permit applications for patients from the Gaza Strip to Israeli authorities in July 2021, close to the monthly average number of patient permit applications for January to April (1,123), an increase from the severe restrictions on access during and after the 11-day military escalation in May.

Close to a quarter (24%) of applications were for children under 18 and more than a fifth (22%) were for patients aged 60 years or older. Half (50%) were for female patients, while 89% were for referrals funded by the Palestinian MoH. Three-fifths (60%) of applications to cross Beit Hanoun/Erez were for appointments in East Jerusalem hospitals; more than a quarter (27%) for West Bank hospitals outside East Jerusalem; 13% for Israeli hospitals; and 6 applications for hospitals in Jordan. More than half (55%) of applications were for appointments at either Augusta Victoria Hospital (37%) or Makassed Hospital (18%), both in East Jerusalem. The top five specialties accounted for 79% of permit applications: oncology (48%); haematology (10%); cardiology (9%); paediatrics (7%) and ophthalmology (5%). The remaining 21% of applications were for 20 other specialties.

A further 8 permit applications for patients were submitted through the Palestinian General Authority of Civil Affairs during July for travel by shuttle to Jordan. The shuttle system transfers travellers from Gaza who are approved permits both by Israeli and Jordanian authorities to travel directly from Beit Hanoun/Erez to the King Hussein Bridge crossing to Jordan, without permitting entry to Israel or the West Bank. Jordanian hospitals issued approval with appointments for these applications. Of the 8 applications, 3 (38%) were approved, and 5 (63%) remained pending.

Approved permit applications: 839 (M: 389; F: 450) or 73.9% of the 1,136 patient applications to cross Beit Hanoun/Erez in July 2021 were approved, a significant increase from 31% approved in May and 59% in June, and in line with the average approval rate of 72% from January to April.

54% of the approved applications were female patients, with a quarter (24%) for children under 18 and a quarter (24%) for patients aged 60 years or older. Over half (55%) of approved applications were for oncology patients, 11% for haematology, 8% for cardiology, 6% for paediatric and the remaining 20% were for other 20 medical specialties.

1,136
patient applications
to Israeli authorities to cross Beit Hanoun/Erez to access health care

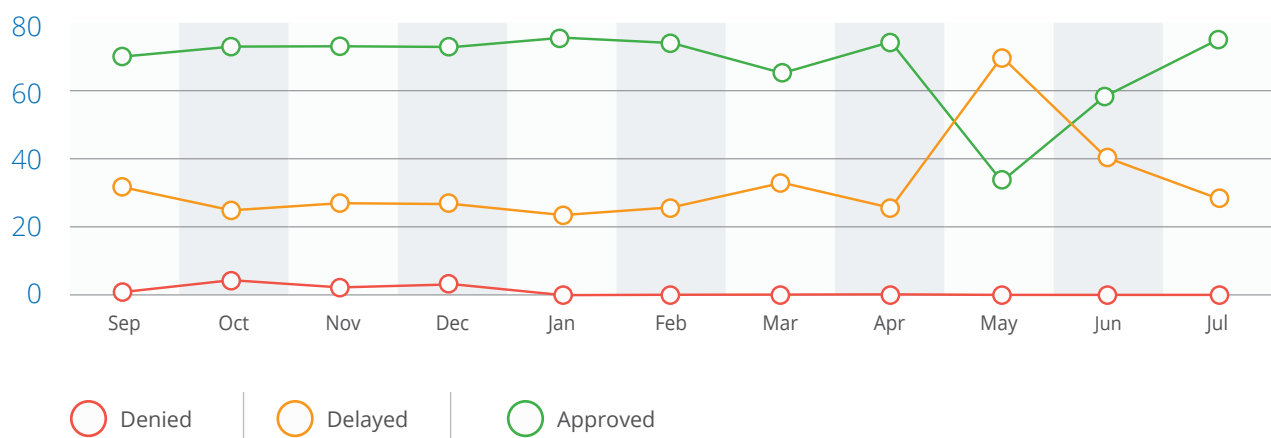
73.9%
approved

0.4%
denied

25.8%
delayed

Chart 2

Israeli responses to Gaza patient permit applications, September 2020 to July 2021 (%)



Denied care: 4 (M: 3; F: 1) patients were denied in July: two aged 40 to 59 years and two patients aged 60 years or older. The patients each had appointments for: oncology (cancer care); heart surgery; orthopaedics, and general surgery. Three were destined for hospitals in the West Bank and one for East Jerusalem.

Delayed care: 293 (M: 171; F: 122) patient permit applications, or 25.8% of the total, were delayed access to care, receiving no definitive response to their application by the date of their hospital appointment. 32% (72 applications) were for children under the age of 18, while 14% (42) were for patients aged 60 years or older. Close to a third (29%) of those delayed had appointments for cancer care (oncology); 14% for ophthalmology; 11% for cardiology; 8% for haematology; 8% for paediatrics, and 8% for orthopaedics. The remaining 22% were for 14 other specialties.

Of delayed applications, 52% were for appointments in East Jerusalem hospitals, 32% for the West Bank, 16% for Israeli hospitals and 1 application was for a hospital in Jordan. Most delayed applications (274 or 94%) were 'under study' at the time of appointment.

Security interrogation

In July, a 42-year-old man with retinal detachment was requested for security interrogation as a prerequisite to processing his permit application.

Patient companions

The Health Liaison Office submitted 1,349 companion permit applications to Israeli authorities to accompany patients in July. 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 July, 660 companion permit applications (49% of the total) were approved, 16 applications (1%) were denied and the remaining 673 (50%) 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 891 Gaza patients and 697 companions exited through Beit Hanoun/Erez checkpoint in July to access hospitals outside the Gaza Strip. Of the 891 patients, 71 were transferred by back-to-back ambulance with 70 companions. These numbers show that more than a fifth (22%) of patients crossed Beit Hanoun/Erez checkpoint in July without a companion. 12 bodies of deceased patients were returned to Gaza. During the month, Beit Hanoun/Erez checkpoint was open for 26 days for daytime working hours and closed on 5 days (5 Saturdays).



1

Gaza patients

called for Security interrogation



1,349

companion applications

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



49% approved



1% denied



50% delayed



891

patients

exited through Beit Hanoun/Erez

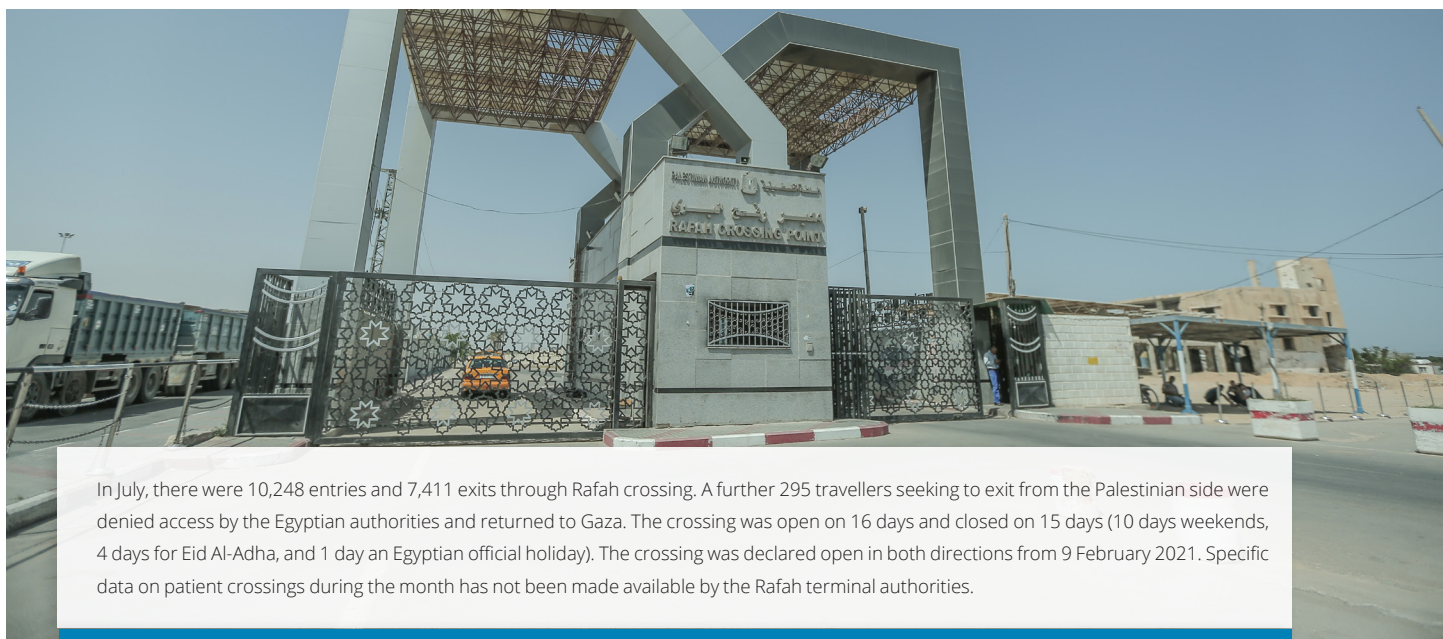


697

companions

exited through Beit Hanoun/Erez

Rafah crossing – Egypt



In July, there were 10,248 entries and 7,411 exits through Rafah crossing. A further 295 travellers seeking to exit from the Palestinian side were denied access by the Egyptian authorities and returned to Gaza. The crossing was open on 16 days and closed on 15 days (10 days weekends, 4 days for Eid Al-Adha, and 1 day 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.

The West Bank

In July 2021, there were 7,712 permit applications by patients and 8,116 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 7,712 West Bank patient applications, 6,805 (88%) were approved, 631 (8%) were unsuccessful (denied) and 276 (4%) were pending reply at the time of monthly reporting.


Of the 8,116 West Bank companion applications, 6,415 (79%) were approved, 1,350 (17%) were unsuccessful and 351 (4%) were pending reply at the time of monthly reporting.

 **7,712**
patient permit
applications

for Israeli permits to access
healthcare in East Jerusalem
and Israel


 **88% approved**


 **8% unsuccessful**


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

 **8,116**
patient companion
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 **79% approved**

 **17% unsuccessful**

 **4% pending**
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In Focus

My three-year-old son, Ameer, had cancer in his eyes. Now he needs treatment.

Three-year-old Ameer is a refugee living in Khan Younis in the south of the Gaza Strip. In August 2019, he was diagnosed with a cancer in his right eye called a retinoblastoma. He had surgery outside the Gaza Strip at the time to remove the cancer, and received an ocular prosthesis – a custom-made ball that fits the socket to keep the shape of the eye. In January 2020, the cancer was found to have spread to Ameer's left eye, and he had further surgery.

From March 2020, the prosthesis Ameer had for his left eye came out. After failed attempts to put the prosthesis back, doctors in the Gaza Strip provided a temporary solution with silicon – though this caused irritation and inflammation. In 2021, Ameer was referred to a clinic for eye prostheses at St John's Eye Hospital in East Jerusalem.

Since February, Ameer's family has made seven applications to Israeli authorities for permits to exit the Gaza Strip. Six of those permit applications were not approved in time for the appointments, while on one occasion the hospital had to cancel. One appointment was scheduled for 16 May, during the escalation of violence and aerial bombardment of the Gaza Strip.

"My children were really scared during the attacks," said Ameer's mother. "I was scared too, but I couldn't cry in front of them. In those times I told myself it was good we didn't get a permit to leave. Imagine if I had been in the hospital in Jerusalem with my kids here under the airstrikes. It was a blessing that we were all together during those difficult days."

Ameer's family desperately wants him to receive care within the occupied Palestinian territory. During his initial treatment, Ameer had been referred to Egypt but difficult travel, long hospital stays and costs of copayments for care left his family facing heavy debts. Ameer's mother explained:

"We stayed two months in Egypt the first time and 40 days the second time. We had to pay the costs of medical imaging, blood analysis and other treatments. We also needed to rent an apartment during the time there. In total we paid US\$3,500. We took out loans to pay but now we are swamped with large debts. My husband works at a small restaurant, the salary is around US\$10-15 per day to feed our whole family. In Egypt I was taking care of Ameer, but I worried about my four other children back in Gaza. My other kids love Ameer, and they take care of him and protect him."

Ameer and his mother received permits for an appointment on the 18 of August at St. John Hospital in Jerusalem. Ameer stayed one night at the hospital and he received prosthetic eyes. Ameer returned to Gaza and he needs a follow up visit after six months on 14 February next year.

