

# MONTHLY REPORT

## May 2022



## Health Access

Barriers for patients in the occupied Palestinian territory

 **9,113**

referrals issued to access health facilities outside the Palestinian MoH

**2,119** Gaza

**6,869** West Bank

 **59%**

of Gaza patient permit applications approved

**35%**

of Gaza companion permit applications approved

 **82%**

of West Bank patient permit applications approved

**76%**

of West Bank companion permit applications approved

 **1**

Gaza patient called for security interrogation

### IN FOCUS

*5-year-old Ahlam still awaiting critical operation after she was twice prevented access*

# Part 1 Referrals

## April referrals by the Ministry of Health

In May, the Palestinian Ministry of Health (MoH) issued 9,113 referrals to health care services delivered by non-MoH providers, 9% higher than the monthly average (8,308) for 2021. Referrals from the West Bank comprised 75% (6,869) of the total, including 1,090 referrals for patients from East Jerusalem, while referrals for the Gaza Strip accounted for 23% (2,119) of the total. Three referrals were issued for Palestinian patients present in Jordan, while the origin of 122 referrals (1%) was not reported.

Palestinian MoH referrals to hospitals in the West Bank, outside East Jerusalem, comprised 47% of referrals in May; to East Jerusalem hospitals 37%; within the Gaza Strip 6%; to Israeli hospitals 6%; to Egypt 3%; and to Jordan 0.1% (13 referrals).

The top needed specialties for referrals were oncology (29%); cardiac catheterization (7%); urology & nephrology (7%); cardiology (5%); ophthalmology, medical imaging, haematology, and radiation therapy (4% each); and endoscopy and paediatrics (3% each). The remaining 30% were for 26 other medical specialties. Referrals for patients under 18 years of age comprised 21% (1,926) of the total, while 29% (2,637) were for those aged 60 years or older. Referrals for female patients comprised 47% of the total.

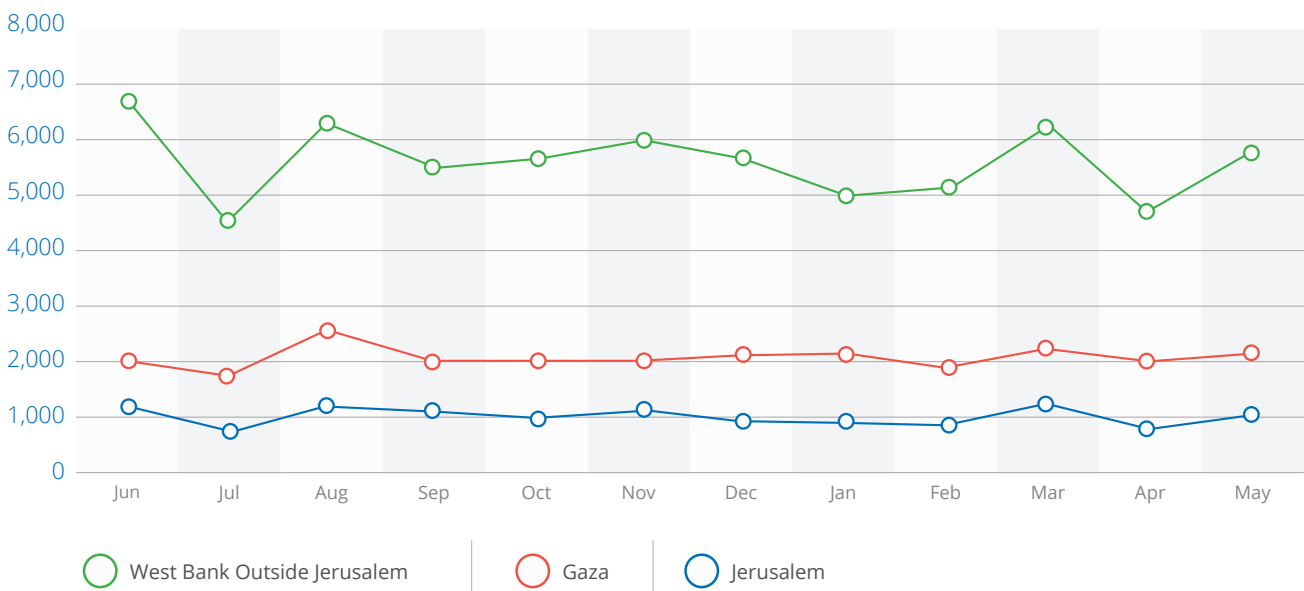
 **2,119**  
Gaza Strip

 **6,869**  
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, June 2021 to May 2022




# Part 2 Access

## The Gaza Strip

There were 1,692 (M: 891; F: 801) patient permit applications for patients from the Gaza Strip to Israeli authorities in May. Around a third (29%) of applications were for children under 18 and close to a fifth (17%) were for patients over 60 years old. 47% were for female patients, while 83% 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; 32% for West Bank hospitals outside East Jerusalem; and 19% for Israeli hospitals. Two fifths (42%) of applications were for appointments at either Augusta Victoria Hospital (22%) or Makassed Hospital (20%), both in East Jerusalem. The top five specialties accounted for 71% of permit applications: oncology (35%); haematology (12%); cardiology (11%); paediatrics (7%); and ophthalmology (6%). The remaining 29% of applications were for 19 other specialties.

A further 108 permit applications for patients and companions were submitted through the Palestinian General Authority of Civil Affairs during May 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 108 applications, 36 (33%) were approved, 23 (21%) were denied and 49 (45%) remained pending at the time of monthly reporting.

**Approved permit applications:** 1,006 (M: 524; F: 482) or 59% of the 1,692 patient applications to cross Beit Hanoun/Erez in May 2022 were approved, 7% lower than the average approval (66%) for the first quarter of the year. The approval rate of patient permit applications varies by sex and age of patients. Men aged 18 to 40 had the lowest approval rate overall in May, at 42%, while women aged 18 to 40 had the lowest approval rate among females at 51%. Women over 60 years had the highest approval rate, at 79% - see Table 1.

 **1,692**  
patient applications

to Israeli authorities to cross Beit Hanoun/Erez to access

 **59%**  
approved

 **0.5%**  
denied

 **40%**  
delayed

**Table 1**

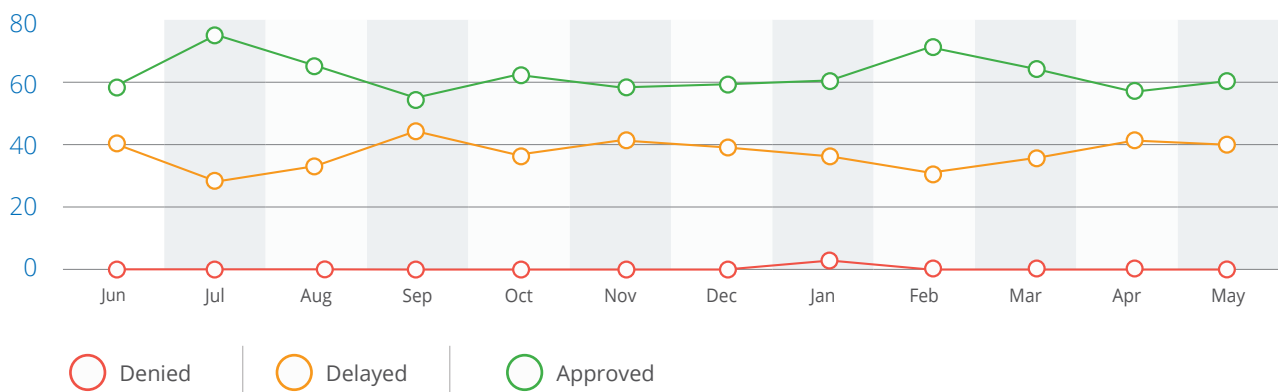
**Approval rate for patient permit applications in May 2022, by age and sex**

| March 2022                   | Number of applications |            | Approved   |            |
|------------------------------|------------------------|------------|------------|------------|
| AGE                          | Male                   | Female     | Male       | Female     |
| 0-3                          | 79                     | 53         | 70%        | 74%        |
| 4-17                         | 209                    | 155        | 65%        | 55%        |
| 18-40                        | 246                    | 202        | 42%        | 51%        |
| 41-60                        | 194                    | 256        | 57%        | 57%        |
| over 60                      | 163                    | 135        | 73%        | 79%        |
| <b>sub-total</b>             | <b>891</b>             | <b>801</b> | <b>59%</b> | <b>60%</b> |
| <b>Total</b>                 | <b>1692</b>            |            |            |            |
| <b>General approval rate</b> |                        |            | <b>60%</b> |            |

Approval rates also vary by referred specialty. In May, specialties with an approval rate higher than the average of 60% included dermatology at 100% (2 cases), intensive care at 71%, haematology at 70%, cancer care (oncology) at 68%, ENT at 67%, paediatric at 66%, nephrology at 66%, and paediatric surgery at 60%. Specialties with an approval rate lower than 50% included fertility treatment (0%), respiratory medicine (7%), neurology (16%), endocrinology (25%), nuclear medicine (26%), obstetrics/gynaecology (31%), maxillo-facial surgery (33%), orthopaedics (39%), urology (46%), and ophthalmology (49%).

## Chart 2

Israeli responses to Gaza patient permit applications, June 2021 to May 2022



**Denied care:** 9 (M: 7; F: 2) patient permit applications, comprising 0.5% of the total for Gaza, were denied in May. These included three adults aged 18 to 40 years, four adults aged 41 to 60 years and two adult over 60 years. They were referred for ophthalmology (3), oncology (2), haematology (1), cardiology (1), pulmonary disease (1), and neurology (1). Seven patients were referred to hospitals in East Jerusalem and two were referred to the West Bank outside East Jerusalem.

**Delayed care:** 677 (M: 360; F: 317) patient permit applications, or 40% of the total, were delayed access to care, receiving no definitive response to their application by the date of their hospital appointment. 27% (180 applications) were for children under the age of 18, while 10% (68) were for patients over 60 years. Of delayed applications, 44% were for appointments in East Jerusalem hospitals, 35% for the West Bank, and 21% for Israeli hospitals. Of the delayed applications, 27% had appointments for cancer treatment (oncology), 12% for cardiology, 9% haematology, 8% for orthopaedics, 7% for ophthalmology, and the remaining 37% were for 18 other specialties. Most delayed applications (598 or 88%) were 'under study' at the time of appointment. 26 applications were delayed based on the assertion by Israeli COGAT that suitable care is available within Gaza. No evidence was provided as a basis for this claim, with patient medical need unrelated to the security justifications for enforcement of permit requirements for patients.

### Security interrogation and arrests

A 27-year-old male patient with oesophageal varices was called for security interrogation in May. He had an appointment for gastroenterology at Makassed Hospital in East Jerusalem. He lost his hospital appointment, with his application remaining under study at the time of the appointment date in May.

### Patient companions

The Health Liaison Office submitted 2,144 companion permit applications to Israeli authorities to accompany patients in May. 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 May, 761 companion permit applications (36% of the total) were approved, 9 applications (0.4%) were denied and the remaining 1,374 (64%) were delayed, receiving no definitive response by the time of the patient's hospital appointment.



1

Gaza patients

called for security interrogation



0

Gaza patients or

companions

arrested



2,144

companion applications

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



35% approved



0.4% denied



64% delayed

## Patients and companions crossing Beit Hanoun/Erez

The Palestinian General Authority of Civil Affairs reported that 1,161 Gaza patients and 877 companions exited through Beit Hanoun/Erez checkpoint in May to access hospitals outside the Gaza Strip. Of the 1,161 patients, 75 were transferred by back-to-back ambulance with 75 companions. These numbers show that **284 (24%) of patients** crossed Beit Hanoun/Erez checkpoint without a companion. The bodies of 19 deceased patients were returned to Gaza across Beit Hanoun/Erez in May. During the month, the checkpoint was open for 17 days for daytime working hours and closed on 14 days (4 Saturdays, 3 days for Israeli holidays and 7 days of additional closure).

 **1,161**  
patients  
exited through Beit  
Hanoun/Erez

 **877**  
companions  
exited through Beit  
Hanoun/Erez

## Rafah crossing - Egypt



In May, there were **6,637** entries and **9,634** exits through Rafah crossing recorded by OCHA oPt. Another **431** 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** (5 holidays and 8 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 154 patients from the Palestinian side to the Egyptian side of the terminal and returned 2 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 May 2022, there were 7,219 permit applications by patients from the West Bank outside Jerusalem to Israeli authorities to access health care in East Jerusalem and in Israel. 3,754 (52%) were for female patients; 1,392 (19%) were for children under the age of 18 years; and 682 (9%) were for patients over 60 years.


62% of patient applications were for appointments in East Jerusalem Hospitals and 38% in Israeli hospitals or clinics. Of the 7,219 West Bank patient applications in May, 5,919 (82%) were approved, 1,075 (15%) were unsuccessful (denied) and 225 (3%) were pending reply at the time of monthly reporting.


**Companions:** In May 2022, there were 8,436 patient companion permit applications to Israeli authorities from the West Bank outside East Jerusalem, to access health care in East Jerusalem and Israel. 4,439 (53%) were for female companions, while 92% of companion permit applications were for companions aged from 18-59 years. Of the 8,436 West Bank companion applications, 6,415 (76%) were approved, 1,721 (20%) were unsuccessful and 300 (4%) were pending reply at the time of monthly reporting.

 **7,219**  
patient permit  
applications

for Israeli permits to access  
healthcare in East Jerusalem  
and Israel


 **82% approved**


 **15% unsuccessful**


 **3% pending**  
at the time of monthly  
reporting

 **8,436**  
patient companion  
applications

to access healthcare in East  
Jerusalem and Israel

 **76% approved**

 **20% unsuccessful**

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

## In Focus

### 5-year-old Ahlam still awaiting critical operation after she was twice prevented access

**Ahlam** is a 5-year-old girl born in Beit-Lahia in the north of the Gaza Strip.

Since she was six months old, Ahlam's family noticed she was not as responsive as other children her age and suspected that a problem with her hearing. They took her to two charitable organizations in the Gaza Strip, Atfaluna and Hamad Hospital in Gaza City, who examined her hearing and diagnosed Ahlam with partial hearing loss.

A year ago, Ahlam started to face further problems with her ears. Her grandmother explained.

"Ahlam had discharge from both her ears, which had a foul smell. We took her to Beit Hanoun Hospital, where they diagnosed her as having an infection in her ear and treated her with antibiotics. Initially it helped and she improved, but then she kept getting the infection again and again."



Ahlam was seen by ear, nose and throat (ENT) specialists at Beit Hanoun Hospital, who advised her family that she should have surgery (removal of a part of bone near the ear called the mastoid process) to prevent complications of repeated middle ear infections. Because of lack of appropriate equipment in the Gaza Strip, she was referred to St Joseph Hospital in East Jerusalem. Although the hospital is within the occupied Palestinian territory, Ahlam would need a permit to exit Gaza and reach her appointment.

In December 2021, the family received financial coverage from the Palestinian Ministry of Health for surgery in Egypt. However, they could not afford to travel for the treatment.

“We did not travel to Egypt because we do not have money for that,” Ahlam’s grandmother explained. “Ahlam’s father works as a labourer in the fields. He earns 20 shekels a day [just under \$6 a day]. We get some support from a Qatari programme for poor families [in the Gaza Strip]. It is expensive to travel to Egypt and the Ministry of Health referral doesn’t cover all associated costs. We requested to change the destination to Jerusalem.” Ahlam lives with her father, mother and 3-year-old brother in a room in the house of her extended family.

From January to May, Ahlam received three hospital appointment for St. Joseph Hospital in East Jerusalem. For the first appointment, the family was advised there was not sufficient time for processing of a permit request by Israeli authorities and so did not apply for a permit. For appointments in April and May, the family received no response from Israeli authorities to their permit application by the date of Ahlam’s hospital appointment – meaning she was unable to travel for care.

**Table 2** Ahlam’s hospital appointments and permit applications

| Appointment Date | Permit application date | Destination                    | Israeli Response      |
|------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------|
| 23/01/2022       | Nil                     | St. Joseph Hospital- Jerusalem | No application        |
| 06/04/2022       | 22/03/2022              | St. Joseph Hospital- Jerusalem | Under study (delayed) |
| 18/05/2022       | 13/04/2022              | St. Joseph Hospital- Jerusalem | Under study (delayed) |
| 27/07/2022       | 07/07/2022              | St. Joseph Hospital- Jerusalem | Awaiting response     |

Ahlam now has an appointment scheduled for 27 July at St Joseph Hospital. She and her family are waiting to find out if their application for a permit will finally be approved.

