



MONTHLY REPORT

November 2019

Health Access

Barriers for patients in the occupied Palestinian territory

 **7,512**

referrals issued to access health facilities outside the Palestinian MoH

2,393 Gaza

5,033 West Bank

 **59%**

of Gaza patient permit applications approved

45%

of Gaza companion permit applications approved

 **85%**

of West Bank patient permit applications approved

81%

of companion permit applications approved

 **16**

Gaza patients called for security interview

6
denied

10
delayed

IN FOCUS


Huda, a cancer nurse in Gaza: "We feel frustrated and helpless to watch as a patient's health deteriorates."

Part 1 Referrals

November Referrals by the Ministry of Health

In November, the Palestinian Ministry of Health approved 7,512 referrals. 67% (5,033) of referrals were for West Bank patients, including 1,034 referrals for patients from Jerusalem, while 32% (2,393) of referrals were for Gaza patients. The origins of 83 referrals (1%) were not reported, while 3 patients were referred from Jordan. Female patient referrals comprised 46% of the total.

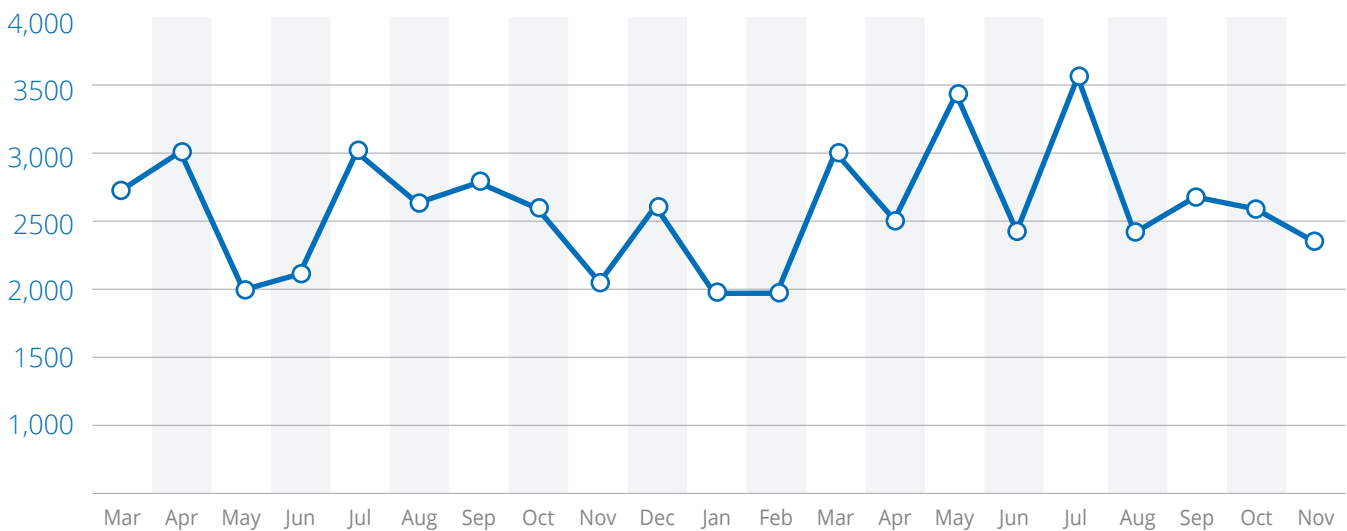
Reduced referrals to Israeli hospitals persisted, with 93 referrals to Israeli hospitals from Gaza (23% of the 2018 monthly average of 389), and 329 referrals for West Bank patients (28% of the 2018 monthly average of 1,185). Referrals from Gaza to Egypt comprised 13% (318) of total Gaza referrals compared to a monthly average of 245 in the first half of the year. Over two-thirds (72%) of Gaza referrals required Israeli-issued permits, while 13% required access through Rafah terminal to reach health facilities in Egypt. In the West Bank, 50% of referrals were to facilities in East Jerusalem or Israel, the majority of which require Israeli-issued permits to access care. Chart 1 shows the number of referral documents issued to patients in Gaza from March 2018 to November 2019.

 **2,393**
Gaza

 **5,033**
West Bank

referrals approved for financial coverage for healthcare outside the Palestinian Ministry of Health]

Chart 1: Total number of referrals approved for Gaza patients, March 2018 to November 2019



Part 2 Access

The Gaza Strip

There were 1,907 patient applications submitted to Israeli authorities to cross Erez for healthcare in November. Almost a third (33%) were for children under 18 and 16% were for patients aged 60 years or older. 46% of applications were for female patients and 91% were for medical care funded by the Palestinian Ministry of Health.

More than three-fifths (61%) of applications to cross Erez were for appointments in East Jerusalem hospitals, more than a quarter (27%) for West Bank hospitals and 11% for Israeli hospitals. More than half of applications (53%) were for appointments at Makassed Hospital (29%) and Augusta Victoria Hospital (24%), both in East Jerusalem. The top five specialties accounted for 69% of permit applications: oncology (32%); paediatrics (11%); cardiology (10%); haematology (9%); ophthalmology (7%). The remaining 31% were for 24 other specialties.

Approved permit applications: 1,122 (577 male; 545 female) or 59% of the 1,907 applications to cross Erez in November 2019 were approved, 6.5% lower than the average approval rate so far for 2019. Chart 2 shows the trend for Israeli responses to Gaza patient permit applications over the past 12 months. Over a third (35%) of permits approved were for children under 18 and a fifth (20%) were for patients aged 60 years or older.

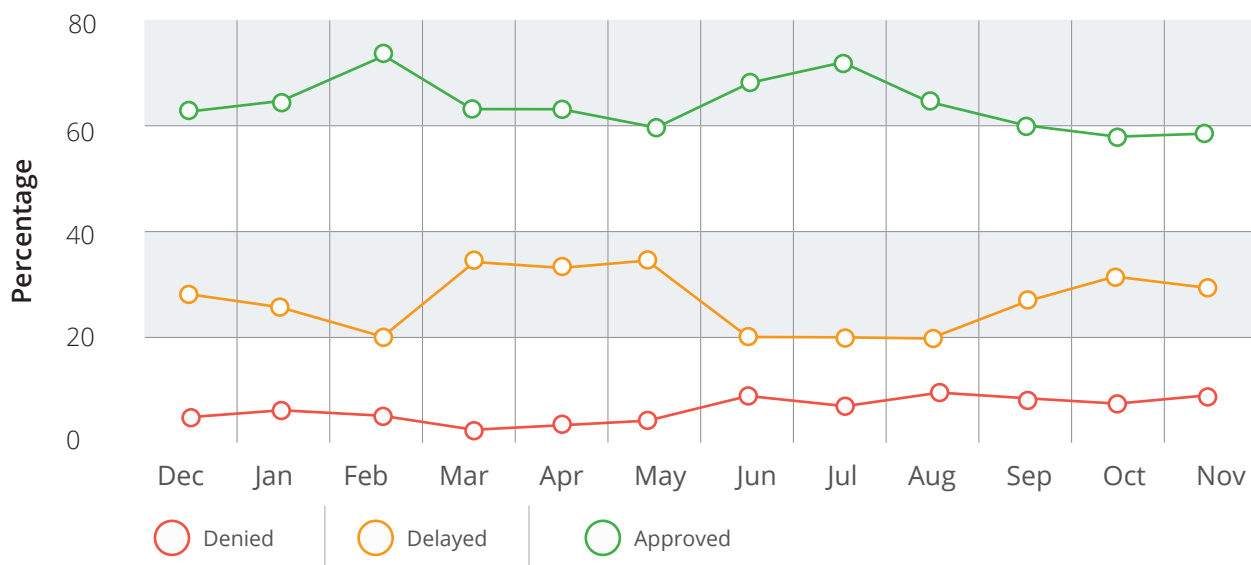
1,907
patients applications
to Israeli authorities to cross Erez/
Beit Hanoun to access healthcare

59%
approved

10%
denied

31%
delayed

Chart 2 Israeli responses to Gaza patient permit applications, December 2018 to November 2019



Denied care: 191 patient applications (111 male; 80 female), or 10% of the total, were denied permits to cross Erez to reach healthcare in November. Those denied included 32 children under 18 and 13 patients aged 60 years or older. A fifth (21%) of denied applications were for appointments in oncology, 12% for ophthalmology, 10% for orthopaedics, 10% for cardiology, and 6% each for neurosurgery, internal medicine, and nuclear medicine. 93% of denied permit applications were for appointments at hospitals in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and 7% were for Israeli hospitals.

Delayed care: 593 patient applications (345 male; 248 female), or 31% of the total, were delayed access to care, receiving no definitive response to their application by the date of their hospital appointment. Of these, 210 applications were for children under the age of 18 and 72 applications were for patients aged 60 years or older. More than a quarter (26%) of those delayed had appointments for oncology, 12% for paediatrics, 11% for cardiology, 8% for haematology, 7% for ophthalmology, and 6% for orthopaedics. The remaining 30% were for 20 other specialties. The majority of delayed applications (525 or 89%) were 'under study' at the time of appointment.

Access for those injured during the Great March of Return

As of 30 November 2019, according to Gaza's Coordination and Liaison Office, there had been 598 patient applications to Israeli authorities for permits to access healthcare through Erez/Beit Hanoun crossing by those injured during the Great March of Return demonstrations, since 30 March 2018. The approval rate for this group is significantly lower than the overall approval rate for patient permit applications to exit Gaza, with less than 18% (105) approved, 27% (163) denied and 55% (330) delayed.

Security interrogation


In November, 16 (12 male; 4 female) patients, aged 22 to 59 years, were called for security interrogation as a prerequisite to processing of their permit applications. This is the highest number of patients requested for security interrogation since June 2018, when 25 patients were called. 7 patients had appointments for oncology, 2 for ophthalmology, 2 for urology, 2 for nuclear medicine, 1 for cardiology, 1 for general surgery, and 1 for vascular surgery. Six of them were denied and 10 were delayed. A patient companion was arrested on 26 November at Erez after being called for security interrogation as a prerequisite to process his permit application.


Patient companions:


In November, there were 2,065 companion permit applications to Israeli authorities to cross Erez to accompany patients. These applications include parents or other companions applying to accompany children. Only one companion is allowed to accompany each Gaza patient. In November, 938 patient companion applications (45% of the total) were approved, 290 applications (14%) were denied and the remaining 837 (41%) were delayed, receiving no definitive response by the time of the patient's appointment. Chart 3 shows the trend for Israeli responses to patient companion applications over the last 12 months.

 **16**


patients called for security interrogation

 **6 denied**

 **10 delayed**

 **2,065**
patient companion applications

to Israeli authorities to cross Erez to accompany patients

 **45% approved**

 **14% denied**


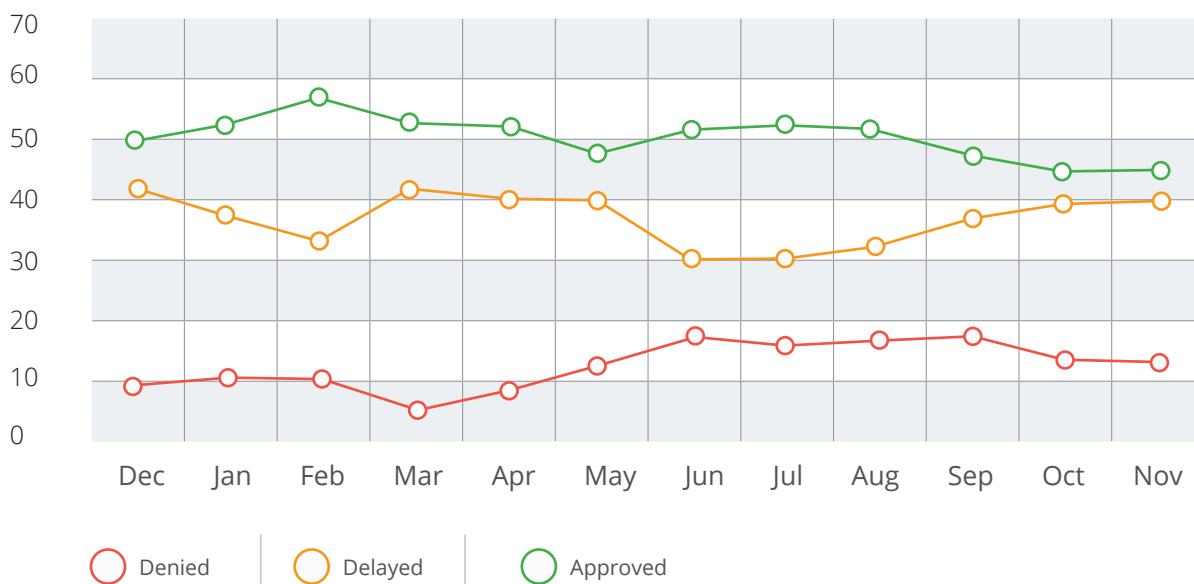
 **41% pending**

Chart 3


Israeli responses to patient companion applications, December 2018 to November 2019



Patients and companions crossing Erez:

The Palestinian General Authority of Civil Affairs reported that 1,466 Gaza patients and 1,196 companions crossed Erez in November to access hospitals outside the Gaza Strip. Of these, 62 patients were transferred by back-to-back ambulance with 59 companions. During the month, Erez crossing was open for 24 days for daytime working hours and closed on 6 days (5 Saturdays and during a military escalation on 12 November).

 **1,466**
patients
crossed Erez for healthcare

 **1,196**
patient companions
crossed Erez

Rafah crossing – Egypt




During November, Rafah crossing was open for humanitarian cases in both directions for 19 days and was closed for 11 days (5 Fridays, 5 Saturdays and 1 day closed by Egyptian authorities). According to the terminal authority, 6,992 travelers crossed towards Egypt, among them 1,230 patients crossing for healthcare with 495 companions. 92 patients were transferred by ambulance with 106 companions. 4 bodies of deceased persons were returned to Gaza. No medical aid or medical delegates entered via Rafah terminal during the month.


The West Bank


In November, there were 7,925 applications by West Bank patients to the Israeli authorities to access healthcare 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 West Bank patient applications, 6,752 (85%) were approved, 948 (12%) were unsuccessful and 225 (3%) were pending reply at the time of monthly reporting. Of the 8,846 patient companion applications, 7,142 (80.7%) were approved, 1,389 (15.7%) were unsuccessful and 315 (3.6%) were pending reply at the time of monthly reporting.

 **7,925**
patient
applications

for Israeli permits to access
healthcare in East Jerusalem
and Israel


 **85% approved**


 **12% unsuccessful**


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

 **9,646**
patient companion
applications

to access healthcare in East
Jerusalem and Israel

 **81% approved**

 **16% unsuccessful**

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

In Focus

Huda, a cancer nurse in Gaza: “We feel frustrated and helpless to watch as a patient’s health deteriorates.”



Huda is a nurse in the cancer outpatient department at Al Rantisi Hospital in Gaza City. She has been working with cancer patients for 15 years.

The work is not easy and cancer departments in Gaza face severe shortages of drugs and supplies, as well as lack of equipment. In November 2019, almost half (48%) of essential drugs stocks were at zero stock in Gaza’s Central Drugs Store. For chemotherapy drugs, the situation is even worse with 63% of essential drugs at zero stock.

Huda comments, “In addition to suffering the effects of cancer, patients suffer a lack of services, shortages of drugs and denial of their permits to reach services outside Gaza. We don’t have enough psychological support services or intensive care beds. When a woman has an appointment to get chemotherapy and the drug isn’t available, she’s disappointed and upset. It affects us as caregivers as well. Patients referred for care out of Gaza are also denied permits to exit. We feel frustrated and helpless to watch as a patient’s health deteriorates. Chemotherapy drugs require a specific schedule according to the treatment plan and delays mean worse outcomes for patients.»

Cancer patients require care outside the clinic, and Huda shares her personal number so that they have someone to turn to in moments of need or crisis. She contacts local societies to link patients into the mental health and psychosocial support services that are available.

Huda has her own personal experience of cancer, after her husband was diagnosed with testicular cancer over ten years ago. Her personal experience has given her insights into the need for strengthening psychological support for cancer patients and their families. “We were very shocked, but I tried to support my husband and to fight the battle with him. I’ve lived what it means to have a relative fighting cancer and I know the suffering patients go through during their journeys to get treatment. Especially when they have to reach health services outside Gaza.”

Huda is 38-years-old and has three children. She lives with her husband and children in Gaza City. She reflects on the crisis facing the health sector in Gaza, “We are living in a very hard situation. I always dream that cancer patients will have a specialized hospital here and that all the services they need will be available. Patients and health workers deserve a better environment. We deserve our rights.”