



## Health Access for Referral Patients from the Gaza Strip

Ref: Eleven  
(Published 10 Jan 2018)

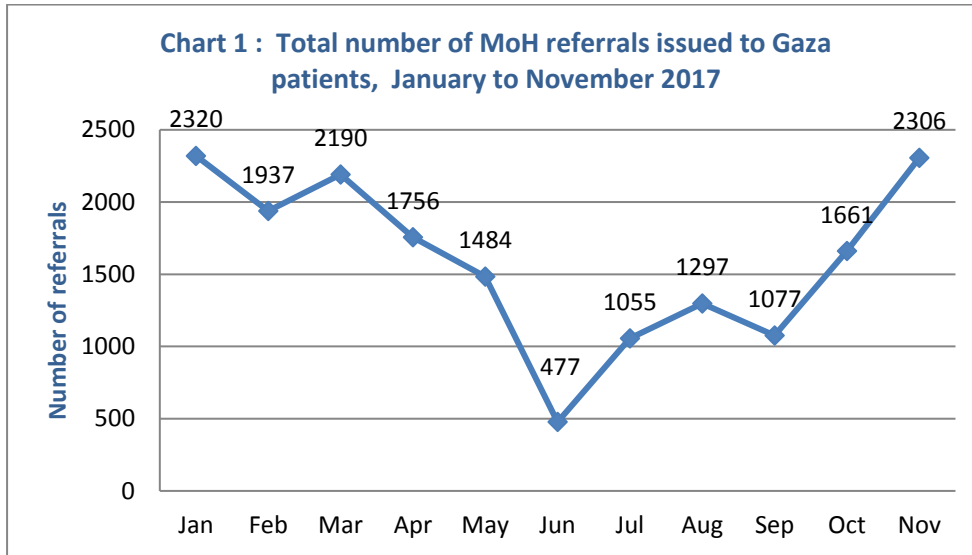
### Summary: November 2017

- **46% of patients unsuccessful in obtaining security permits from Israeli authorities:** In November, there were 2,047 patient applications for permits to exit Gaza through Erez checkpoint for health care. **54%** of applications were approved; **2%** were denied; and **44%** were delayed, receiving no definitive response from Israeli authorities by the date of hospital appointment.
- **More than half of patient companions unsuccessful in obtaining permits to travel out of Gaza:** There were 2,351 permit applications for patient companions to Israeli authorities in November. **43%** were approved, **2%** were denied and **55%** were delayed, still pending by the date of the patient's hospital appointment.
- **Security interrogation of patients:** 58 patients (37 males; 21 females) were requested for interrogation by Israeli General Security Services at Erez during November. Seven were approved permits to travel for health care.
- **Increase in the number of referral documents for Gaza patients seeking financial coverage for health referrals, though delays persist:** 2,306 requests for financial coverage for Gaza patients were approved by the Services Purchasing Unit of the Palestinian Ministry of Health in November, while two-thirds of patient applications took longer than a week to process.
- **Limited access to Egypt:** Rafah terminal was open for three days in both directions and one day for return only. No medical aid and no medical delegates entered Gaza via Rafah during the month.
- **Hamas authorities handed over control of Gaza crossings to the Palestinian Authority.**
- **Increased processing time for permit applications by Israeli authorities:** Palestinians in Gaza were advised that permit applications will take 26 working days to process, a more than twofold increase from 10 working days prior to May 2017.

## Part 1: Referrals

### Ministry of Health referrals

In November, there was an increase in the number of financial coverage documents issued to Gaza patients by the Services Purchasing Unit (SPU). 2,306 financial coverage documents were issued to Gaza patients, which is comparable to the monthly average for the first quarter of 2017. **Chart 1** shows the number of referral documents issued for Gaza patients from January to November 2017.



**Processing time:** In November 2017, approximately a third of applications were approved within one week, with two-thirds of applications taking longer than seven days to process, see **Table 1**. Overall, there has been an increase in the length of time to process referrals: from January to May 2017, 99% of referrals were processed within one week.

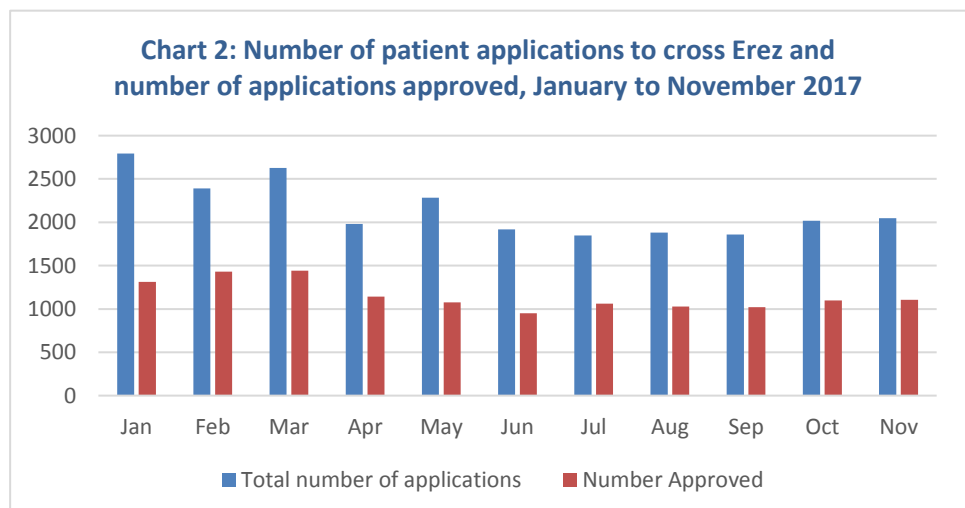
**Table 1: Processing time for medical referrals by the SPU November 2017**

Processing time (days)	Applications (%)
1-7	32%
8-14	15%
15-21	11%
22-31	9%
>31	33%

## Part 2: ACCESS

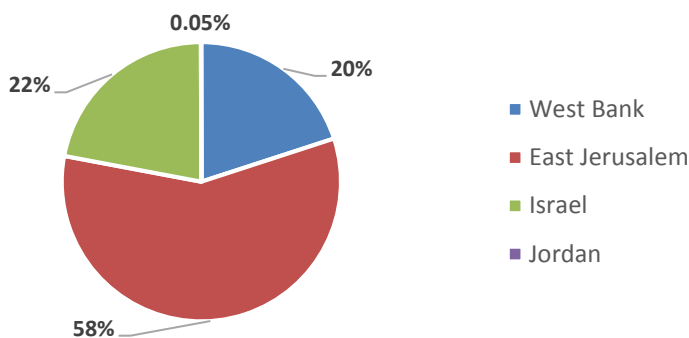
### Israeli security permits and interrogations

**Number of applications:** There has been a decline in the number of applications to cross Erez for health care since the beginning of 2017, with the lowest number in July (1,847 applications). 2,047 patient applications were submitted in November, around a fifth (21%) lower than the monthly average for the first quarter (2,603), with an increase in the average number submitted each month from July to October (1,901), see **Chart 2**.

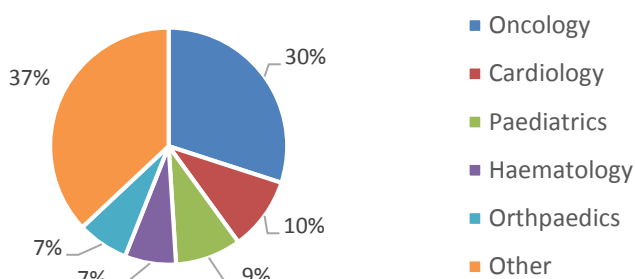


Of the 2,047 patient applications, approximately one in three (31%) were for children under age 18, and one in five (18%) were for patients aged 60 years and older. 47% of applications were for female patients and 94% of applications were for medical care funded by the Palestinian Ministry of Health. 58% of applications were for appointments in East Jerusalem hospitals; 22% were to Israeli hospitals; and 20% were to hospitals in the West Bank. One application was to Jordan, see **Chart 3**.

**Chart 3: Main destinations and number of patients applications to cross Erez, November 2017**



**Chart 4: The top five specialties accounted for two-thirds of applications to cross Erez, Nov 2017**



The top five specialties accounted for more than three in five of all referrals. The top five referral specialties were oncology 30%, cardiology 10%, paediatrics 9%, haematology 7% and orthopaedics 7% (Chart 4).

**Approved permit applications:** A total of 1,106 or just over half (54%) of the 2,047 applications to cross Erez in November 2017 were approved. Since the beginning of the year, the rate of approval for patient applications for security permits to exit Gaza has been consistently low, with an average acceptance rate of 54% from January to November 2017.

**Denied care:** 40 patients (29 male; 11 female), or 2% of the total, were denied permits to access health care through Erez in November, including three children under the age of 18 years and three patients aged 60 years or older.

**Delayed care:** 901 patient applications (514 male; 387 female), or 44% of the total, were delayed, among them 192 applications for children under the age of 18 and 93 applications for patients aged 60 years or older. Patients who are delayed received no definitive acceptance or rejection to travel for health care by the time of their hospital appointment. This results in delayed access to care, as patients must reapply for new hospital appointments. Many patients are receiving care for conditions that risk serious deterioration with successive delays.

**Security interrogation:** 58 patients (37 male; 21 female), seven over 60 years old, were called for security interrogation by the Israeli General Security Services (GSS). Two-fifths (23) of these patients were referred for cancer treatment or investigation. After interrogation, seven patients were approved and 51 remained pending.

**Patient companions:** There were 2,351 applications to Israeli authorities by relatives for permits to cross Erez with patients. These include parents or other companions applying to accompany children. In November, 452 permit applications for patients under 18 years were approved out of 647 applications of the age group. Only one first-degree relative is permitted to accompany a Gaza patient and permits are conditional security clearance. In November, 1,007 (43%) patient companion applications were approved; 58 (2%) were denied and 1,286 (55%) were pending by the date of the patient's medical appointment.

**Patients and companions cross Erez:** The Palestinian General Authority of Civil Affairs reported that 970 Gaza patients and 875 companions crossed Erez in November to access Palestinian or Israeli hospitals. 70 patients were transferred by back-to-back ambulances, with 64 companions. During the month, Erez crossing was open for 26 days for daytime working hours and closed on four days (four Saturdays).

#### **New Israeli guidelines for permit applications and security clearance**

The Israeli Coordination and Liaison Administration for the Gaza Strip issued new guidelines for permit applications and security clearances, which came into effect mid-November 2017. These indicate that:

- Security clearance for UN employees will take 55 working days and employees will receive nine months clearance.
- Security clearance for Gaza residents to exit to Israel and the West Bank will take 26 working days and security permission and denial will be valid for six months.
- Security clearance for Gaza residents to exit abroad will take 70 working days, and security permission and denial will be valid for six months.

Patients applying to access health care in Israel and the West Bank now need to submit their permit applications 26 business days prior to their hospital appointment. This is an increase from the previous requirement of 20 working days issued in May 2017, which was already a doubling of the prior requirement of 10 working days. The previous period of clearance for patients was three months.

#### **Rafah crossing – Egypt**

The Rafah border terminal was open in both directions for three days and open for return only for one day during the month of November, allowing 1,868 people to exit and 3,115 to enter Gaza, including patients. No medical aid or medical delegates entered Gaza via Rafah during the month. Since the beginning of 2017, the terminal was open for exit for 19 days, of which two days were for the exit of pilgrims only. It was open for entry for 11 days and was opened for political delegates for four days. Long periods of closure make Rafah terminal unpredictable for patients seeking health care outside Gaza. Before the July 2013 closure, more than 4,000 Gaza residents crossed Rafah terminal to Egypt each month for health-related reasons.



#### **Hamis authorities hand over control of Gaza crossing to the Palestinian Authority in November 2017**

As part of the reconciliation process facilitated by Egypt, the Palestinian Authority became the sole Palestinian border authority at Rafah terminal and Beit-Hanoun (4/4) checkpoint close to Erez as of 1<sup>st</sup> November 2017. Both Beit-Hanoun checkpoint and Rafah terminal had been under control of local authorities since 2007.