

MONTHLY REPORT

March 2023



Health Access

Barriers for patients in the occupied Palestinian territory



March data on referrals was not available

 **82%**

of Gaza patient permit applications approved

50%

of Gaza companion permit applications approved

 **75%**

of West Bank patient permit applications approved

76%

of West Bank companion permit applications approved

 **37**

Gaza patient called for security interrogation

IN FOCUS

Khalid, a patient with kidney failure, repeatedly denied access to reach hospital in East Jerusalem

Access


The Gaza Strip

There were 1,641 (M: 881; F: 760) permit applications for patients from the Gaza Strip to Israeli authorities in March, similar to the monthly average for 2022 (1,691). Close to a third (31%) of applications were for children under 18 and a fifth (21%) were for patients over 60 years old. Just less than a half (46%) were for female patients, while 83% were for referrals funded by the Palestinian MoH. Half (50%) of applications to pass Beit Hanoun/Erez checkpoint were for appointments in East Jerusalem hospitals; 30% were for hospitals in the West Bank outside East Jerusalem; and 20% were for Israeli hospitals. 44% of applications were for appointments at either Augusta Victoria Hospital (27%) or Makassed Hospital (17%), both in East Jerusalem. The top five specialties accounted for 75% of permit applications: oncology (37%); cardiology (13%); haematology (10%); paediatrics (8%); and ophthalmology (7%). The remaining 25% of applications were for 20 other specialties.

A further 169 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 hospital appointment date, for these permit applications. Of the 169 applications, 57 (34%) were approved within the month, 2 (1%) were denied and 110 (65%) remained pending at the time of monthly reporting.

Approved permit applications: 1,352 (M: 696; F: 656), or 82%, of the 1,641 patient applications to cross Beit Hanoun/Erez were approved in March 2023.

The approval rate for patient permit applications varies by sex and age of patients, see Table 1. In March, of the different demographic groups, men aged 18 to 40 had the lowest approval rate at 62%, men aged 41-60 had an approval rate of 75% while boys aged 0-3 had the highest (92%) and the approval rate for female patients (86%) was higher than for male patients (79%).

 **1,641**
patient applications

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

 **82%**
approved

 **4%**
denied

 **14%**
delayed

Table 1

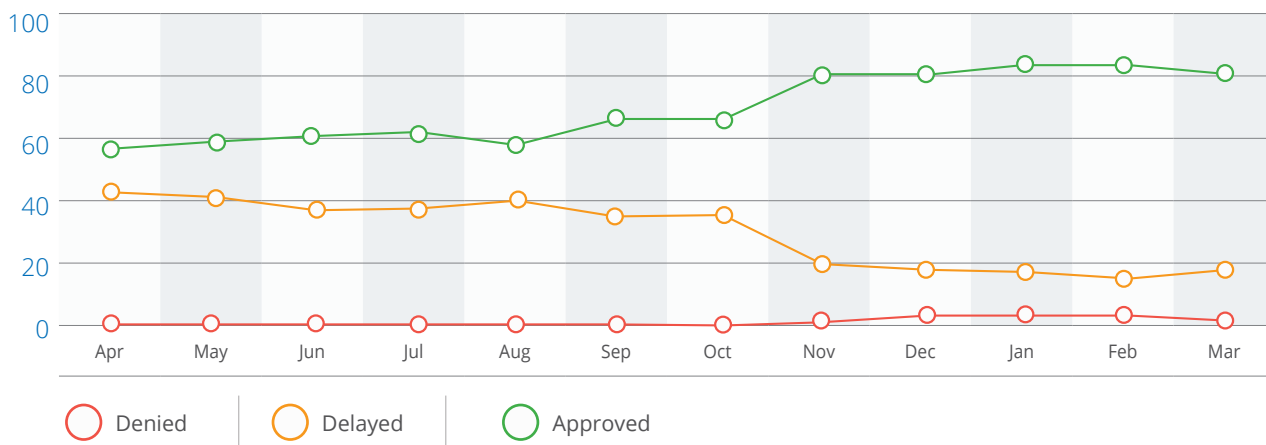
Approval rate for patient permit applications in March 2023, by age and sex

February 2023 AGE	Number of applications		Approved	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
0-3	85	61	92%	85%
4-17	199	156	85%	88%
18-40	208	189	62%	80%
41-60	198	204	75%	87%
over 60	191	150	90%	91%
sub-total	881	760	79%	86%
Total	1,641		82%	
Overall approval rate for patient applications			82%	

Approval rates also vary by referral specialty. In March, specialties with an approval rate similar to the average (82%) or higher with more than 20 applications included paediatrics (138) at 94%, oncology (609) at 88%, haematology (169) at 86%, ENT (26) at 85%, and cardiology (207) at 83%. Meanwhile, specialties with an approval rate lower than 82% and more than 20 applications included internal medicine (45) at 80%, ophthalmology (121) at 76%, orthopaedics (76) at 74%, neurosurgery (37) at 70%, general surgery (39) at 69%, urology (32) at 53% and neurology (30) at 43%.

Chart 1

Israeli responses to Gaza patient permit applications, April 2022 to March 2023



Denied care: 61 (M: 38; F: 23) patient permit applications, 4% of the total for Gaza, were denied in March. These included eight applications for children under 18 years, 30 for adults aged 18 to 40 years, 20 for adults aged 41 to 60 years and 3 for adults over 60 years of age.

Delayed care: 228 (M: 147; F: 81) patient permit applications, or 14% of the total, were delayed access to care, receiving no definitive response to their application by the date of their hospital appointment. Of delayed applications, 24% (55 applications) were for children under the age of 18, while 13% (30) were for patients over 60 years old.

Most delayed applications (202 or 89%) were classified as ‘under study’ at the time of the patient’s hospital appointment.

Interrogation

In March, 37 (M: 29; F: 8) patients from the Gaza Strip were requested for interrogation as a prerequisite to their permit applications. 16 were aged 18 to 40 years, 20 were aged 41 to 60 years, and one was over 60 years old. Of these patients, 12 had appointments for cancer care (oncology); 5 each for ophthalmology and cardiology; 4 for general surgery; 3 for haematology; 2 each for orthopaedics and ENT; and 1 each for neurosurgery, internal medicine, urology, and neurology. 19 of the patients had applied for permits to access hospitals in East Jerusalem and 18 for hospitals in the West Bank. More than a quarter of patients (27%, or 10 of 37) had submitted their permit applications more than 30 days before the hospital appointment. Of the 37, 2 were approved, 4 were denied and 31 remained pending, awaiting a response from the Israeli authorities by the end of the month.

Arrests

Al Mezan Center for Human Rights documented the arrest and detention of a patient and patient-companion in separate incidents at Beit Hanoun (Erez) checkpoint in March. Both were detained in Israeli prisons.

Ahmed Abu-Awwad is a 53-year-old man with a form of bone cancer, from Gaza City. He was arrested at Beit Hanoun (Erez) checkpoint around 13:30 on Tuesday 21 March, while returning by ambulance with his wife from an appointment at Augusta Victoria Hospital (AVH), for which he had exited on 15 March. After his arrest, Ahmed’s wife returned to Gaza. Al Mezan Center for Human



37

Gaza patients

called for security interrogation



2

1 patient and 1 companion

arrested

Rights assigned a lawyer to follow the case. After an initial extension of his detention, Ahmed was released without indictment or trial on 2 April.


Naeim Al Sharif, 64 years old from Rafah in the south of the Gaza Strip, was arrested at Beit Hanoun (Erez) checkpoint by Israeli authorities on 5 March at around 14:00. Naeim was accompanying his daughter in law, Kifah, as a companion to Istishari Hospital in Ramallah, where she had an appointment for cancer care. Following his arrest, Kifah returned to Gaza without reaching her medical appointment. Naeim remains in prison at the time of reporting.

Patient companions


The Health Liaison Office submitted 2,201 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, 1,107 companion permit applications (50% of the total) were approved, 454 applications (21%) were denied, and the remaining 640 (29%) were delayed, receiving no definitive response by the time of the patient's hospital appointment.

Patients and companions crossing Beit Hanoun/Erez


The Palestinian General Authority of Civil Affairs reported that 1,654 patients and 1,319 companions exited through Beit Hanoun/Erez checkpoint in March to access hospitals outside the Gaza Strip. **A fifth, or 20% (335), of patients** therefore crossed Beit Hanoun/Erez checkpoint without a companion. Of the 1,654 patients, 66 were transferred by back-to-back ambulance with 66 companions. The number of patients exiting via Beit Hanoun/Erez in the month was 25% higher than the monthly average for the last year (1,320). The bodies of 18 deceased patients were returned to Gaza across Beit Hanoun/Erez in March. During the month, the checkpoint was open for 27 days for daytime working hours and closed on 4 days (4 Saturdays).

 **2,201**
companion applications


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

 **50% approved**

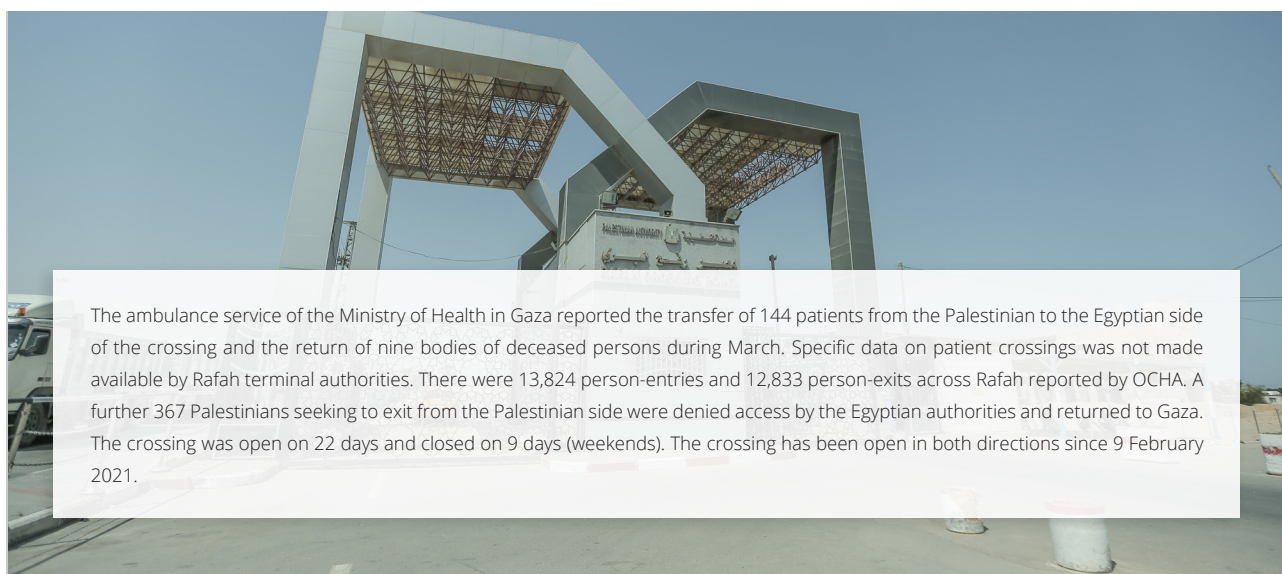
 **21% denied**

 **29% delayed**

 **1,654**
patients
exited through Beit Hanoun/Erez

 **1,319**
companions
exits through Beit Hanoun/Erez

Rafah crossing - Egypt



The ambulance service of the Ministry of Health in Gaza reported the transfer of 144 patients from the Palestinian to the Egyptian side of the crossing and the return of nine bodies of deceased persons during March. Specific data on patient crossings was not made available by Rafah terminal authorities. There were 13,824 person-entries and 12,833 person-exits across Rafah reported by OCHA. A further 367 Palestinians seeking to exit from the Palestinian side were denied access by the Egyptian authorities and returned to Gaza. The crossing was open on 22 days and closed on 9 days (weekends). The crossing has been open in both directions since 9 February 2021.

The West Bank

Most Palestinian patients from the West Bank outside of East Jerusalem are required to obtain permits to reach hospitals in East Jerusalem or Israel. Most women older than 50 years of age and men older than 55 years of age are exempted from the requirement, though a proportion of these are also restricted on purported security grounds.

Patients: There were 8,804 permit applications by patients from the West Bank outside East Jerusalem in March. Of patient permit applications, 4,184 (48%) were for female patients, 1,684 (19%) were for children under the age of 18 years, and 716 (8%) were for patients over 60 years. Close to two-thirds (63%) were for appointments at hospitals in East Jerusalem, while close to two-fifths (37%) were for Israeli hospitals or clinics.

Of the 8,804 West Bank patient applications in March, 6,639 (75%) were approved, 7% lower than the average approval rate of the last year (82%). 1,887 (21%) were unsuccessful (denied) and 278 (3%) were pending reply at the time of monthly reporting.


The approval rate of patient permits varies by location. In March, governorates with an approval rate of 75% or higher included Abu-Dis (91%), Arram (87%), Jericho (84%), Tulkarem (81%), Ramallah (79%), and Bethlehem (78%). Governorates with an approval rate lower than the average of 75% included Qalqilya (74%); Salfit (69%); Jenin, Tubas, Al-Khalil (Hebron) (67% each); and Nablus (63%).


Companions: There were 9,478 companion permit applications to Israeli authorities from the West Bank outside East Jerusalem in March, to access health care in East Jerusalem and Israel. 4,682 (49%) were for female companions, while 88% of applications were for companions aged from 18-59 years.


Of the 9,478 West Bank companion applications, 7,206 (76%) were approved, similar to the average approval rate of last year. 1,838 (19%) were unsuccessful and 434 (5%) were pending reply at the time of monthly reporting.

 **8,804**
patient permit
applications

for Israeli permits to access
healthcare in East Jerusalem
and Israel


 **75% approved**


 **21% unsuccessful**


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

 **9,478**
patient companion
applications

to access healthcare in East
Jerusalem and Israel

 **76% approved**

 **19% unsuccessful**

 **5% pending**
at the time of monthly
reporting

In Focus

Khalid, a patient with kidney failure, repeatedly denied access to reach hospital in East Jerusalem

Khalid, 36 years old from Gaza city, has end stage kidney failure. For 16 years, he has been dependent on weekly haemodialysis (a procedure to remove waste and water from the blood, to perform the function of healthy kidneys).

In late 2022, Khalid required referral out of Gaza for vascular surgery so that he would be able to keep having lifesaving haemodialysis. Despite repeated surgeries in Gaza, doctors were unable to establish the vascular access needed for the procedure. At Makassed Hospital in east Jerusalem, Khalid was to receive an artificial blood vessel graft.



In total, Khalid made six permit applications to Israeli authorities. He was never approved a permit to reach Makassed Hospital but was instructed to change the destination and arrange a hospital appointment in Jordan after several appeals through human rights organizations and advocacy by the UN and partners. As of April 2023, Khalid was awaiting financial coverage from the Palestinian Ministry of Health for an appointment at a hospital in Jordan.

Table 2

Khalid's hospital appointments, intended hospital destination, and permit outcomes

Appointment date	Hospital destination	Permit outcome
25/12/2022	Makassed Hospital	Denied
5/1/2023	Makassed Hospital	Delayed ("under study") Requested for interrogation at Erez 15/1/2023
17/1/2023	Makassed Hospital	Denied
27/2/2023	Makassed Hospital	Denied (appealed through Palestinian Center for Human Rights)
20/3/2023	Makassed Hospital	Denied (appealed through Al Mezan Center for Human Rights)
27/3/2023	Makassed Hospital	Denied (appealed through Al Mezan Center for Human Rights)

Israeli authorities gave several reasons for denying Khalid a permit to travel to Makassed Hospital. Riham, Khalid's wife, commented: "After the first application for 25 December we were told that treatment is available locally in Gaza, but it is not! We placed another permit application for the 5 January 2023, but the Israeli Authorities told us Khalid's application was under study pending his interrogation."

During his interrogation on 15 January, Khalid was asked to take his clothes off to show the central line currently being used for his haemodialysis. Riham discussed: "The interrogation officer tried to get information from Khalid which he doesn't have. He got very cold and exhausted. When he was returned to me he was dizzy and shivering."

When he received an appointment for 27 February, Khalid appealed for approval of his permit through the Palestinian Center for Human Rights. However, he was denied again "on security grounds," according to the official Israeli response to his application. For the next appointment, on 20 March, Khalid appealed through Al Mezan Center for Human Rights, who appealed to the Israeli prosecution. He was again denied on purported security grounds.

"He is a patient and has the same right as any person who wants to get treatment", said Riham.

Khalid appealed to the international community for assistance: "I appeal to international and human rights organizations to help me reach Makassed Hospital in Jerusalem, to have the operation and return safely to my family."

Following discussions of UN representatives with Israeli officials, Khalid was advised to change the destination of his application for a hospital appointment in Jordan. On 25 April, Khalid received financial coverage from the Palestinian Ministry of Health for a hospital appointment in Jordan. He is due to make a further permit application.