

MONTHLY REPORT

December 2020



Health Access

Barriers for patients in the occupied Palestinian territory

 **7,202**

referrals issued to access health facilities outside the Palestinian MoH

1,492 Gaza

5,609 West Bank

 **71%**

of Gaza patient permit applications approved

44%

of Gaza companion permit applications approved



Access data for West Bank patient and companion permit applications awaited from the Civil Affairs Office
1,064 permits approved for patients to Augusta Victoria Hospital
1,113 permits approved for patients to St. John Hospital

 **4**

Gaza patients called for security interrogation

IN FOCUS

Health attacks persist in the oPt during COVID19- pandemic

Part 1 Referrals


December Referrals by the Ministry of Health


In December, the Palestinian Ministry of Health (MoH) issued 7,202 referrals to health care services delivered by non-MoH providers. West Bank referrals comprised 78% (5,609) of all MoH referrals (the West Bank population comprises approximately 60% of the population in the oPt), including 853 referrals for patients from East Jerusalem. Gaza referrals accounted for 21% (1,492), while Gaza's population comprises approximately 40% of the oPt. The origin of 99 (1% of) referrals was not reported and two patients were referred from Jordan.

After an almost 40% reduction in West Bank referrals from March to April 2020, by June 2020 West Bank referrals had recovered to the pre-COVID-19 level. In December, there were 5,609 referrals compared to a monthly average of 5,133 referrals for the first quarter of 2020. By contrast, in the Gaza Strip the substantial 58% reduction in the monthly number of referrals from March to April 2020 has not fully recovered, though there has been a sustained increase in referrals since a low of 783 in September 2020. In December, there were 1,492 referrals, compared to a monthly average of 2,492 in the first quarter of the year.

The proportion of all Palestinian MoH referrals destined for hospitals in the West Bank, outside East Jerusalem, increased from 40% in the first quarter of 2020 to 49% by December. The proportion of referrals within the Gaza Strip decreased from 7% to 4%, in line with the overall decrease in the proportion of Gaza referrals. Referrals to East Jerusalem hospitals were similar at 41%; to Israeli hospitals decreased from 5% to 3%; and to Egypt decreased from 6% to 3%. Referrals to Jordan comprised 0.3% of the total in December.

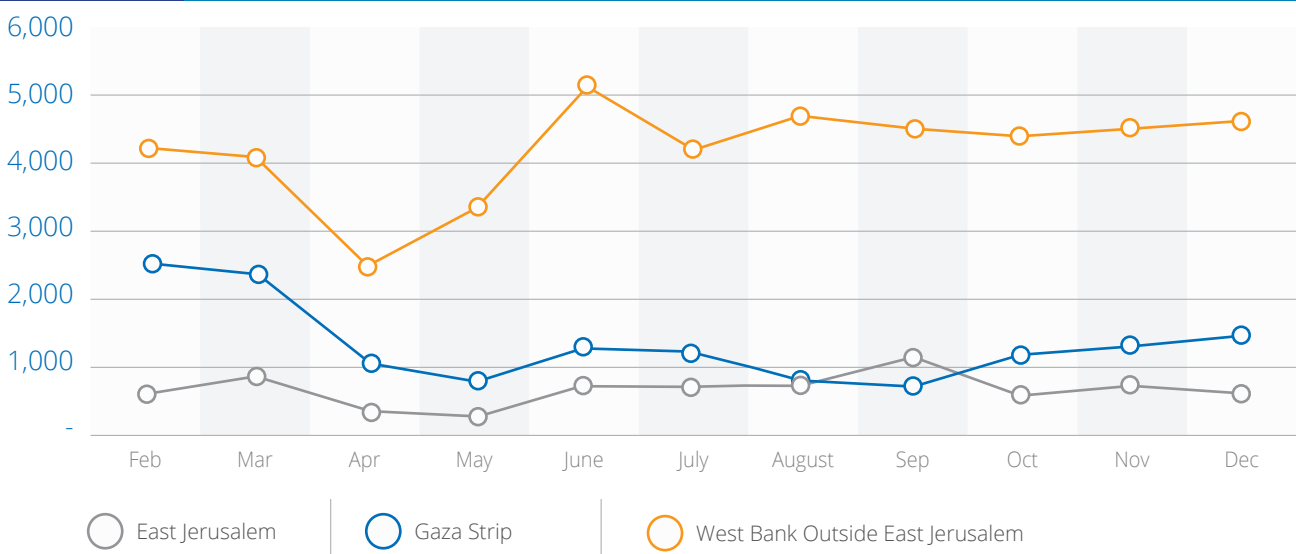
The top needed specialties for referrals were oncology (31%); urology (8%); cardiac catheterization (7%); cardiology (6%); ophthalmology (6%); medical imaging (4%); and radiotherapy (3%). Referrals for patients under 18 years of age comprised 20% (1,470) of the total, while 29% (2,056) were for those aged 60 years or older. Referrals for female patients comprised 47% of the total.

 **1,492**
Gaza Strip

 **5,609**
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, February 2020 to December 2020



Part 2 Access

The Gaza Strip

On 24 November, the Palestinian Authority re-established functioning its Health Liaison Office (HLO) in the Gaza Strip to coordinate permit applications on behalf of patients and companions. Other organizations including the WHO discontinued their temporary intervention that started after the Palestinian Authority had stopped coordination with Israel on 19 May 2020. In December, all patient permit applications were submitted through the HLO.

There were 930 (Male: 467; Female: 463) patient permit applications to the Israeli Authorities in December 2020. A quarter (23%) were for children under 18 and a fifth (19%) were for patients aged 60 years or older. 50% were for female patients, while 90% were funded by the Palestinian MoH. About two-thirds (65%) of applications to cross Beit Hanoun/Erez were for appointments in East Jerusalem hospitals, close to a quarter (23%) for West Bank hospitals outside East Jerusalem, and 11% for Israeli hospitals. Three-fifths (60%) of applications were for appointments at Augusta Victoria Hospital (46%) or Makassed Hospital (14%), both in East Jerusalem. The top five specialties accounted for 78% of permit applications: oncology (50%); haematology (9%); ophthalmology (7%); cardiology (7%); and paediatrics (5%). The remaining 22% of applications were for 23 other specialties.

Approved permit applications: 661 or 71% of the 930 patient applications to cross Beit Hanoun/Erez in December 2020 were approved, a slight increase compared to the approval rate of 67% for the period from January to May 2020. 51% of the approved applications were female; a fifth (22%) were for children under 18; and a fifth (22%) for patients aged 60 years or older.

Denied care: 15 (M: 9; F: 6) patients, or 1.6% of the total, were denied permits to cross Erez to reach healthcare in December. Two were children under 18 and 13 were persons aged 18-60 years. Four had appointments for ophthalmology, three for cancer care (oncology), two for haematology and one each for internal medicine, nuclear medicine, urology, cardiology, ENT, and rehabilitation. Ten of the denied patients had appointments at hospitals in East Jerusalem, while five were for hospitals in the West Bank outside East Jerusalem.

Delayed care: 254 (M: 137; F: 117) patient applications, or 27% of the total, were delayed access to care, receiving no definitive response to their application by the date of their hospital appointment. 27% (69 applications) were for children under the age of 18; 59% (151 applications) for patients aged 18-60 years and 13% (34 applications) for patients over 60 years of old.

Two-fifths (40%) of those delayed had appointments for cancer care (oncology); 9% each for ophthalmology, cardiology, and haematology; and 6% for paediatrics. The remaining 27% were for 17 other specialties. 58% (147) of delayed applications were for appointments in East Jerusalem hospitals, 28% for the West Bank and 13% for Israeli hospitals. Most delayed applications (191 or 75%) were 'under study' at the time of appointment. 57% of the delayed applications were submitted more than 7 days prior to the date of appointment.



930 patients applications

to Israeli authorities to cross Erez/ Beit Hanoun to access healthcare



71%

approved



2%

denied



27%

delayed

Security interrogation

In December, 4 (2 male; 2 female) patients between the age of 18-60 were requested for security interrogation by Israeli services as a prerequisite to processing their permit applications.

Patient companions

The Health Liaison Office submitted 1,098 companion permit applications to Israeli authorities to accompany patients in December. These applications include parents or other companions applying to accompany children. Patients are eligible to apply to Israeli authorities for one companion to accompany them for health care outside the Gaza Strip. In December, 487 companion permit applications (44% of the total) were approved, 53 applications (5%) were denied and the remaining 558 (51%) were delayed, receiving no definitive response by the time of the patient's appointment. The companion permit approval rate in December had declined to 44% compared to 49% in the first five months of the year.

Patients and companions crossing Beit Hanoun/Erez

The Palestinian General Authority of Civil Affairs reported that 685 Gaza patients and 521 companions exited through Beit Hanoun/Erez checkpoint in December to access hospitals outside the Gaza Strip. Of the 685 patients, 56 patients were transferred by back-to-back ambulance with 56 companions.

These numbers shows that close to a quarter (24%) of patients crossed Beit Hanoun/Erez checkpoint in December without a companion. During the month, Beit Hanoun/Erez checkpoint was open for 27 days for daytime working hours and closed on 4 days (4 Saturdays).



4

Gaza patients
called for Security
interrogation



1,098

companion applications

to Israeli authorities to cross Erez/
Beit Hanoun to access healthcare



44%

approved



5%

denied



51%

delayed



685

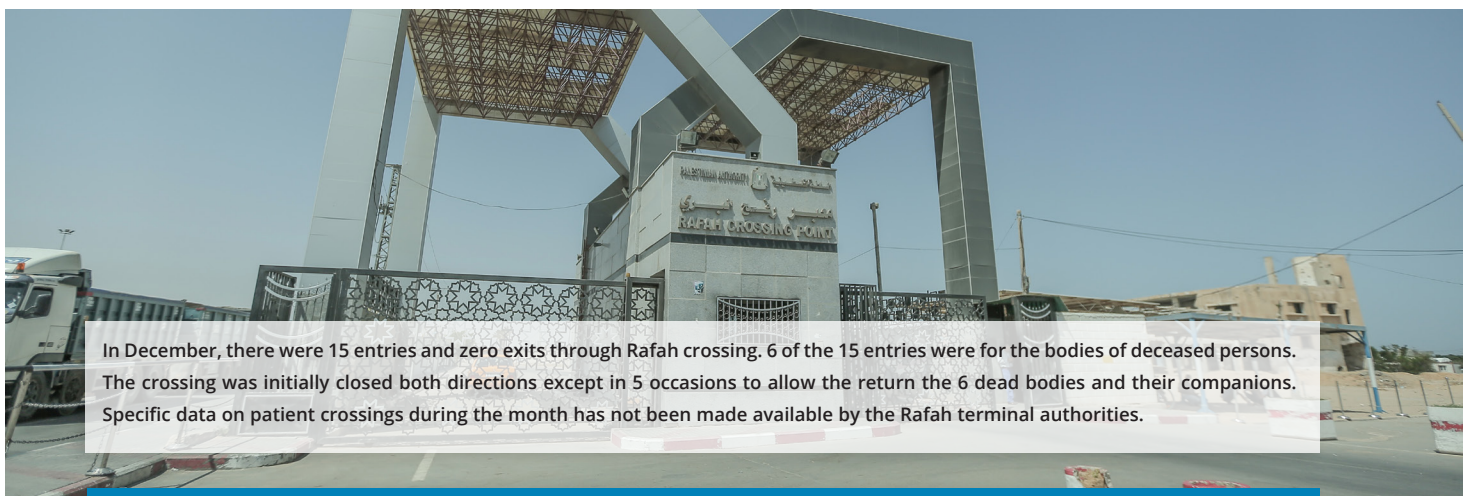
patients
crossed Beit Hanoun/
Erez for healthcare



521

patient companions
patient companions
crossed Beit Hanoun/
Erez

Rafah crossing - Egypt



In December, there were 15 entries and zero exits through Rafah crossing. 6 of the 15 entries were for the bodies of deceased persons. The crossing was initially closed both directions except in 5 occasions to allow the return the 6 dead bodies and their companions. Specific data on patient crossings during the month has not been made available by the Rafah terminal authorities.

The West Bank

At the time of publication, access data for December for patients and companion permit applications from the West Bank was still outstanding. 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. Lockdown restriction have further affected accessibility from the West Bank to East Jerusalem and Israel since the outbreak of COVID-19.

Of health service providers, August Victoria Hospital reported the approval of 1,064 permit applications for patients living in the West Bank to reach its services during December.

St John Hospital reported receiving 1,113 patients residing in the West Bank in December. Of appointments accessed by West Bank patients at the hospital, 174 were for inpatients and 939 for outpatients.



Access data for West Bank patient and companion permit applications awaited from the Civil Affairs Office, which resumed the work in 24 November 2020



1,064

West Bank patient permits were approved to Augusta Victoria Hospital



1,113

West Bank patient permits were approved to St. John Hospital

In Focus

Health attacks persist in the oPt during COVID-19 pandemic

In 2020, WHO recorded 59 attacks against health care in the occupied Palestinian territory. Of these, 42 per cent (25) involved obstruction to the delivery of health care services, including 12 incidents of obstructing access for ambulances to reach persons who had been fatally wounded. Meanwhile, 61% of incidents (36) involved physical violence against health workers, ambulances, and health facilities, and six incidents involved the detention of health care workers, ambulances, patients, and patient companions.



Physical attacks against health care from October to December 2020

During the last three months of 2020, WHO recorded 15 health attacks in the occupied Palestinian territory. Of these, seven involved physical attacks against health workers, ambulances, and health facilities, and nine involved obstructions to health care delivery, including five incidents of obstruction of access for health teams to persons fatally injured.

24 November: PRCS paramedic team physically attacked with attempt to board an ambulance.

On 24 November, a Palestine Red Crescent Society (PRCS) paramedic team was near Tayaseer checkpoint in the northern Aghwar – Tubas area in the West Bank, providing first aid to people injured during confrontations. The PRCS team was physically attacked as they attempted to provide first aid to a person who sustained an abdominal wound from injury with a rubber-coated bullet. Several Israeli soldiers attempted to board the ambulance and to arrest the wounded person by force, unaccompanied by medical personnel. In addition to this, tear gas canisters were fired at the ambulance during the confrontations, while the PRCS team was providing emergency medical services to injured persons inside the ambulance.

11 December: PMRS paramedic beaten and PRCS volunteers physically attacked while providing first aid.

On 11 December, a paramedic working with the Palestinian Medical Relief Society (PMRS) was beaten with the butt of a gun and kicked while providing first aid to persons injured in confrontations during a demonstration held to protest the expansion of a settlement and confiscation of land near Kufr Malek village in the West Bank. The paramedic reported that Israeli soldiers sprayed pepper spray in his face and he suffered gas inhalation during the incident. The paramedic was taken to the Palestinian Medical Complex Hospital in Ramallah after losing consciousness, was hospitalized there, returning to work from sick leave after more than a week.

During the same confrontations, two PRCS volunteers were injured after they were physically attacked while providing first aid to persons injured, sustaining several bruises.

4 November: PRCS ambulance prevented from reaching fatally injured individual.

29-year-old Bilal Adnan Ayed was shot by Israeli forces while driving his car towards a checkpoint near A'warta village, north east of Nablus district in the West Bank. Israeli forces alleged an attempted ramming. Following the incident, the soldiers closed the road and prevented a PRCS ambulance from reaching the injured man. An Israeli Magen David Adom ambulance later arrived, with the announcement of Bilal's death after the transfer of his body.

Protection of health care

Vulnerability to attacks against health care in the occupied Palestinian territory has persisted in 2020, despite a reduction in recorded attacks during the COVID-19 pandemic and following the end of the Great March of Return in the Gaza Strip. WHO is working to enhance monitoring and support systems for health care workers and to strengthen the voices of those affected. WHO calls for the protection of health care and an end to attacks.