

MONTHLY REPORT

January 2021



Photo credit: WHO/Nashwa Skalk

Health Access

Barriers for patients in the occupied Palestinian territory

 **7,363**

referrals issued to access health facilities outside the Palestinian MoH

1,602 Gaza

5,675 West Bank

 **76%**

of Gaza patient permit applications approved

47%

of Gaza companion permit applications approved

 **85%**

of Gaza patient permit applications approved

78%

of Gaza companion permit applications approved

 **5**

Gaza patients called for security interrogation

IN FOCUS

Ali's life could have been saved with peritoneal dialysis

Part 1 Referrals

January Referrals by the Ministry of Health


In January, the Palestinian Ministry of Health (MoH) issued 7,363 referrals to health care services delivered by non-MoH providers. West Bank referrals comprised 77% (5,675) of all MoH referrals (the West Bank population comprises approximately 60% of the population in the oPt), including 911 referrals for patients from East Jerusalem. Gaza referrals accounted for 22% (1,602), while Gaza's population comprises approximately 40% of the oPt. The origin of 85 (1% of) referrals was not reported and one patient was 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 January, there were 5,675 referrals compared to a monthly average of 5,056 referrals for 2020. By contrast, in the Gaza Strip the reduction by more than half (58%) in the monthly number of referrals from March to April persisted for most of 2020, though there has been a sustained increase in referrals since a low of 783 in September 2020. In January, there were 1,602 referrals, representing a more than doubling since September 2020 but a 36% reduction from the first quarter of 2020.

Palestinian MoH referrals to hospitals in the West Bank, outside East Jerusalem, comprised nearly half (48%) of all referrals in January. Referrals to East Jerusalem hospitals comprised two-fifths (40%) of the total, with 4% (a decrease from 8% in 2020) of referrals within the Gaza Strip; 4% to Israeli hospitals; 3% to Egypt and 0.3% to Jordan.

The top needed specialties for referrals were oncology (27%); urology & nephrology (10%); cardiac catheterization (7%); cardiology (6%); ophthalmology (6%); and 3% each for radiotherapy, haematology, paediatrics and medical imaging.

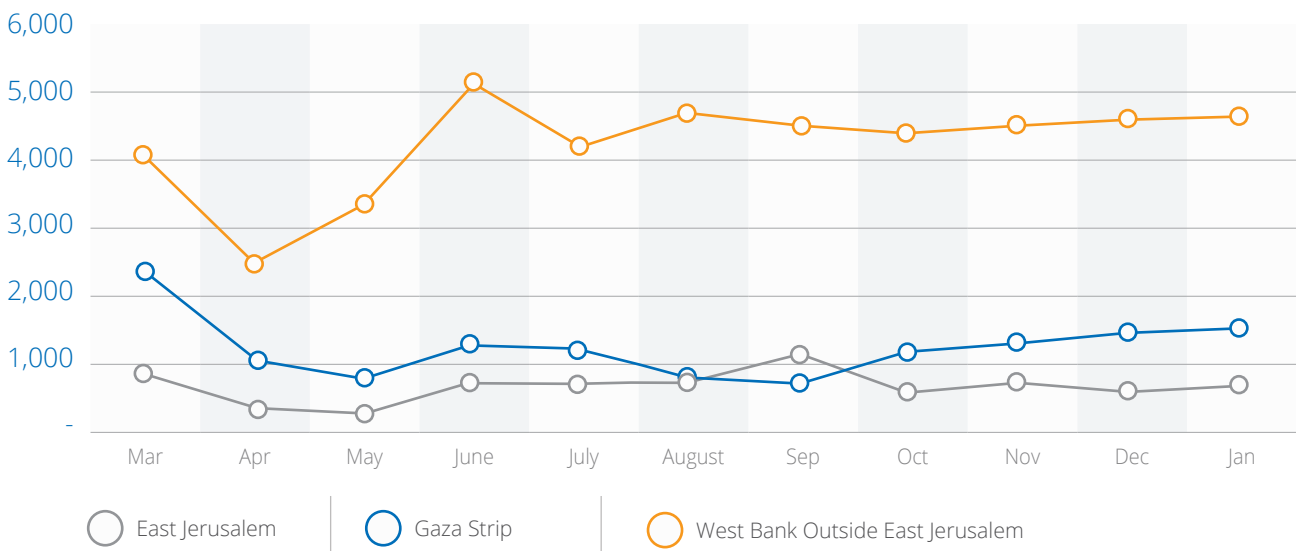
Referrals for patients under 18 years of age comprised 19% (1,422) of the total, while 29% (2,150) were for those aged 60 years or older. Referrals for female patients comprised 45% of the total.

 **1,602**
Gaza Strip

 **5,675**
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, March 2020 to January 2021



Part 2 Access

The Gaza Strip

On 24 November 2020, 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 the temporary interventions that had been in place after the end to coordination on 19 May 2020. In January 2021, all patient permit applications were submitted through the HLO.

There were 950 (M: 509; F: 441) patient permit applications to the Israeli authorities in January 2021. A quarter (23%) were for children under 18 and a fifth (19%) were for patients aged 60 years or older. 46% were for female patients, while 88% were for referrals funded by the Palestinian MoH. More than three-fifths (63%) of applications to cross Beit Hanoun/Erez were for appointments in East Jerusalem hospitals, a quarter (25%) for West Bank hospitals outside East Jerusalem, and 12% for Israeli hospitals.

More than half (55%) of applications were for appointments at either Augusta Victoria Hospital (39%) or Makassed Hospital (16%), both in East Jerusalem. The top five specialties accounted for 76% of permit applications: oncology (48%); haematology (9%); ophthalmology (8%); cardiology (7%); and neurosurgery (4%). The remaining 24% of applications were for 20 other specialties.

Approved permit applications: 720 (M: 369; F: 351) or 76% of the 950 patient applications to cross Beit Hanoun/Erez in January 2021 were approved, an 8% increase compared to the approval rate of 68% for 2020. 49% of the approved applications were female patients; a fifth (22%) were for children under 18; and a fifth (22%) for patients aged 60 years or older.

Denied care: 3 male patients, or 0.3% of the total, were denied permits to cross Erez to reach healthcare in January. One child aged 16 years with hematologic disease had an appointment in Istishari Hospital in Ramallah and two adults 40-60 years with cancer had appointments in Augusta Victoria Hospital in Jerusalem.

Delayed care: 227 (M: 137; F: 90) patient applications, or 24% of the total, were delayed access to care, receiving no definitive response to their application by the date of their hospital appointment. 23% (52 applications) were for children under the age of 18; 69% (156 applications) for patients aged 18-60 years and 8% (19 applications) for patients over 60 years of old.

A third (34%) of those delayed had appointments for cancer care (oncology); 15% for ophthalmology; 11% for haematology; 7% for cardiology, and 4% for orthopaedics. The remaining 29% were for 16 other specialties. 52% (118) of delayed applications were for appointments in East Jerusalem hospitals, 32% for the West Bank and 15% for Israeli hospitals. Most delayed applications (187 or 82%) were 'under study' at the time of appointment. 85% of the delayed applications were submitted more than 7 days prior to the date of appointment.



950

patients applications

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



76%

approved



0.3%

denied



24%

delayed

Security interrogation

In January, 5 (4 male; 1 female) patients between the age of 40-60 were requested for security interrogation by Israeli services as a prerequisite to processing their permit applications. Two patients had appointments in oncology, one for hematology, one for general surgery, and one for ophthalmology. By the end of January, one patient was approved, one was denied, and three remained pending.

Patient companions

The Health Liaison Office submitted 1,149 companion permit applications to Israeli authorities to accompany patients in January. 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 January, 536 companion permit applications (47% of the total) were approved, 24 applications (2%) were denied and the remaining 589 (51%) were delayed, receiving no definitive response by the time of the patient's appointment. The companion permit approval rate in January (47%) was similar to the monthly average in 2020.

Patients and companions crossing Beit Hanoun/Erez

The Palestinian General Authority of Civil Affairs reported that 771 Gaza patients and 596 companions exited through Beit Hanoun/Erez checkpoint in January to access hospitals outside the Gaza Strip. Of the 771 patients, 69 patients were transferred by back-to-back ambulance with 69 companions. These numbers shows that close to a quarter (23%) of patients crossed Beit Hanoun/Erez checkpoint in January without a companion. During the month, Beit Hanoun/Erez checkpoint was open for 26 days for daytime working hours and closed on 5 days (5 Saturdays).



5

Gaza patients
called for Security
interrogation



1,149

companion applications

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



47%

approved



2%

denied



51%

delayed



771

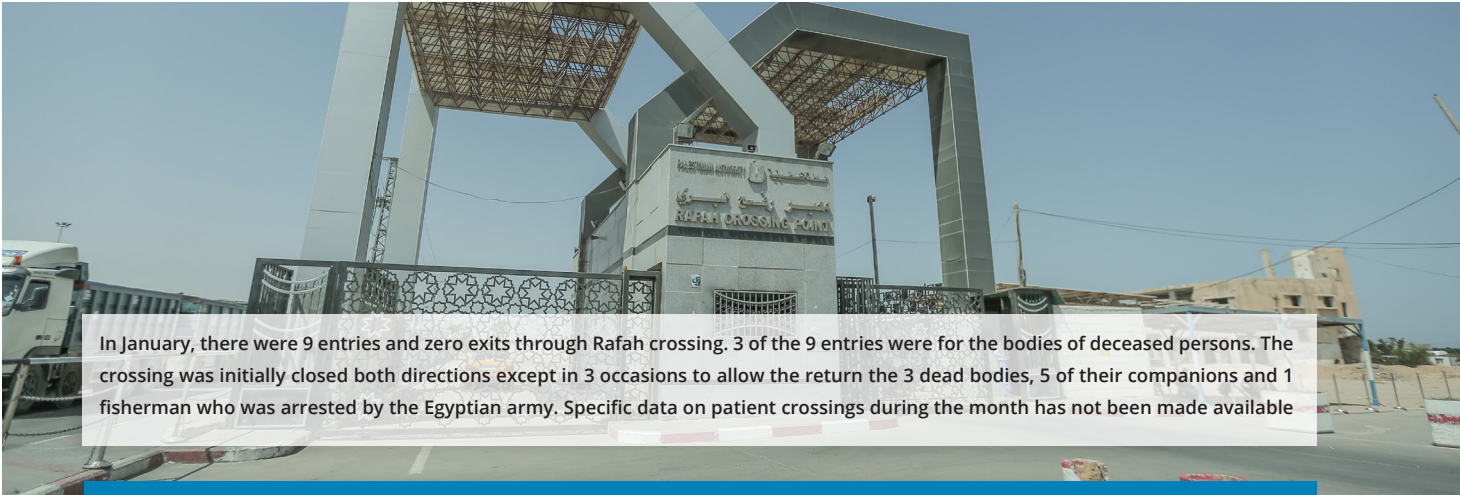
patients
exited through Beit
Hanoun/Erez



596

patient companions
exited through Beit
Hanoun/Erez

Rafah crossing - Egypt



In January, there were 9 entries and zero exits through Rafah crossing. 3 of the 9 entries were for the bodies of deceased persons. The crossing was initially closed both directions except in 3 occasions to allow the return the 3 dead bodies, 5 of their companions and 1 fisherman who was arrested by the Egyptian army. Specific data on patient crossings during the month has not been made available

The West Bank

The Civil Affairs Office resumed its work on 24 November 2020, including for patient and companion permit applications from the West Bank, after its closure on 19 May 2020. In January 2021, there were 5,369 applications by West Bank patients to Israeli authorities to access health care 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. Lockdown restriction have further affected accessibility from the West Bank to East Jerusalem and Israel since the outbreak of COVID-19.

Of 5,369 West Bank patient applications, 4,541 (85%) were approved, 673 (13%) were unsuccessful (denied) and 155 (3%) were pending reply at the time of monthly reporting. Of the 5,626 West Bank companion applications, 4,372 (78%) were approved, 1,045 (19%) were unsuccessful and 209 (4%) were pending reply at the time of monthly reporting.

 **5,369**

patient permit applications
for Israeli permits to access
healthcare in East Jerusalem and
Israel

 **85%**
approved

 **13%**
denied

 **3%**
pending at the time
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 **5,626**

patient companion applications
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 **78%**
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In Focus

Ali's life could have been saved with peritoneal dialysis



Ali Radwan, a 12-year-old boy from Jabalia in the Gaza Strip, had been receiving lifesaving dialysis since the age of four or five due to a congenital kidney problem.

Dialysis is a procedure where a machine undertakes the functions of the kidneys by removing waste, salt, and extra fluid from a person's body, ensuring the right balance of electrolytes and chemicals, and controlling a person's blood pressure. Dialysis works by taking fluids from the body – usually blood (haemodialysis) – and returning that fluid once the right balance has been achieved. Dialysis can also use fluids from the abdomen, a procedure known as peritoneal dialysis. This procedure is commonly used in children, where it can be difficult to establish and maintain blood access.

Ali had a catheter in his shoulder for nurses to provide him with regular blood dialysis, which he was receiving three times a week. While at home, the catheter was accidentally pulled out and Ali was rushed to hospital with bleeding on 11 February 2021. The medical team at the hospital stopped his bleeding, but were unable to insert a new blood catheter, despite repeated attempts.

Ali needed dialysis urgently before his condition would deteriorate. The team treating him at the paediatric dialysis unit in Rantisi Hospital were unable to insert a catheter for blood dialysis, and neither the equipment nor the expertise was available in Gaza to provide abdominal (peritoneal) dialysis. Ali needed an urgent referral.

On 15 February, the paediatric dialysis team referred Ali to the vascular surgery department at the Indonesian Hospital in North Gaza, to try to insert a catheter under x-ray guidance (fluoroscopy). Again, it was unsuccessful. The team tried to make a lifesaving referral out of the Gaza Strip, but faced bureaucratic obstacles due to lack of capacity of hospitals in the West Bank.

Ali's father said, "We submitted a lifesaving referral application for Ali to the SPU, but we were told that we would need to wait for financial coverage. Why should a lifesaving referral wait for financial coverage?! Doctors and nurses in the hemodialysis unit did their best and they were very nice to us and to Ali, but they couldn't solve the problem."

A member of the paediatric dialysis team stated, "We do not have peritoneal dialysis in this unit as an alternative. We could have saved Ali's life if we had peritoneal dialysis. It is very critical for our unit here. Children with renal failure badly need this service, particularly when we cannot access a major blood vessel to insert a dialysis catheter."

Faced with further delays, the team tried to insert a blood catheter for Ali in the morning of 16 February. During the procedure, however, Ali's heart stopped beating. Despite the best efforts of the medical team, Ali died at around noon on 16 February.

Now, bringing the equipment and training for peritoneal dialysis to Gaza is a priority for the Ministry of Health. Paediatric nephrologist and former director of Rantisi Hospital, Dr Mustafa Al-Eila, stated, "Bringing peritoneal dialysis to the Gaza Strip is now a priority for the Ministry of Health, and we are looking for support to introduce this service."